

Assessment of waste exports from Australia in September 2018

12 November 2018 Joe Pickin and Jenny Trinh

In September 2018, Australia exported around 381,900 tonnes of waste with a value of \$A548 million. This represents an increase of 10% in both the quantity and value of waste exports compared with August 2018.

Comparison by destination

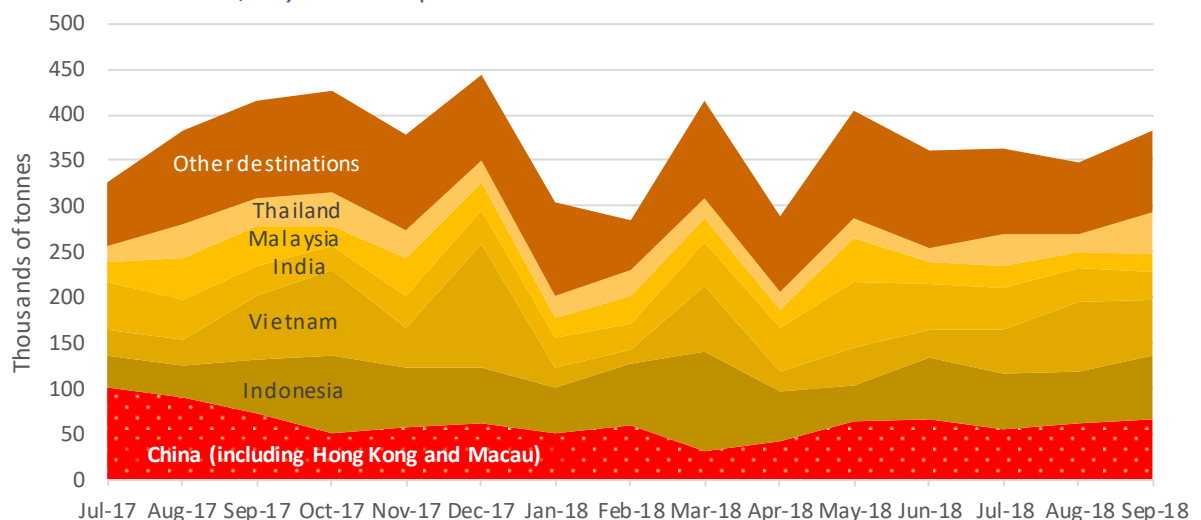
The top six countries receiving waste exports from Australia in September 2018 accounted for 77% of all that was exported. These countries were, in order, Indonesia, China (including Hong Kong and Macau), Vietnam, Thailand, India and New Zealand. Other than New Zealand, these countries were also in the top six receivers of waste in August 2018, with Vietnam and Indonesia, and Thailand and India switching places in rankings. New Zealand's ranking jumped from tenth to sixth place in the rankings, bumping Malaysia to seventh. In September 2018, Thailand received an additional 24,300 tonnes (120%) and Indonesia 13,600 tonnes (24%) compared with August 2018. Indonesia, China, Vietnam, Thailand and New Zealand all received more waste than their monthly 2017-18 average. Table 1 compares the top six receiving countries in September 2018 with their August 2018 volumes and 2017-18 monthly average.

Table 1 Comparison of month-to-month waste export volume by destination

Export destination by monthly rank		September 18		August 18			2017-18 monthly avg	% change
		Tonnes	% of total	Rank	Tonnes	% change		
1	Indonesia	71,100	19%	3	57,500	24%	60,600	17%
2	China	65,700	17%	2	60,700	8%	62,100	6%
3	Vietnam	60,700	16%	1	76,700	-21%	50,300	21%
4	Thailand	44,500	12%	5	20,200	120%	25,700	73%
5	India	31,100	8%	4	37,800	-18%	42,400	-27%
6	New Zealand	20,200	5%	10	7,400	172%	10,700	88%
Top 6 total		293,300	77%		260,400	13%		
Monthly total		381,900	-		347,500	10%		

Figure 1 presents the monthly trend in exports of waste from Australia to the top six receiving countries and the other destinations between July 2017 and September 2018. Examined over this timeframe, the top six includes Malaysia but not New Zealand. Exports to China have remained relatively stable since May 2018. Exports to the top six overall rose by 6% in this timeframe.

Figure 1 Monthly exports of waste from Australia by destination, ranked by total quantity received, July 2017 – September 2018



Comparison by material

Table 2 presents a comparison of waste export volumes between August 2018 with September 2018 and the monthly average from 2017-18 as well as the year to date volumes.

Month to month – September 2018 saw increased exports of metals (6%), plastics (43%), paper and cardboard (12%) and hazardous waste (89%) compared with August. Exports of ‘other’ decreased by 17%. The large increase in exports of hazardous waste is representative of a trend which experiences sharp spikes (as seen in July and May 2018 data), probably due to the removal of waste from stockpiles for export.

2017-18 monthly average – The quantity of metals exported in September 2018 was greater than the monthly average for 2017-18 but plastics, paper and cardboard, hazardous waste and other were below their 2017-18 average. Overall, September 2018 total exports of waste were slightly higher (3%) than the monthly average for 2017-18.

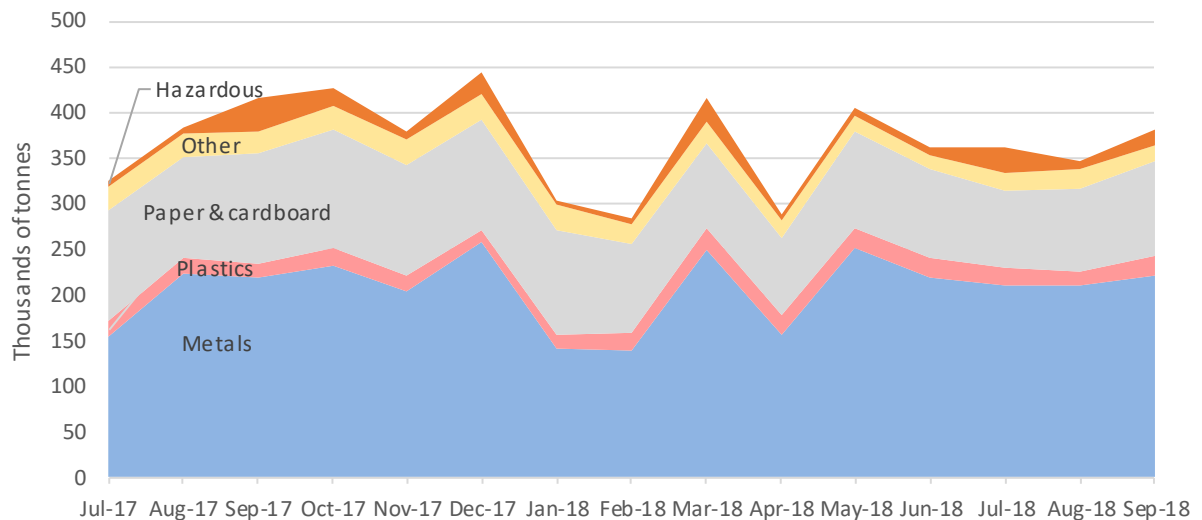
Year to date – The total year-to-date waste exported in September 2017 was around 1,123,600 tonnes compared to 1,091,400 tonnes in September 2018 (3% less).

Table 2 Comparison of waste export volume by material

Material category	Month		% change	Monthly avg 2017-18	% change	Year to date (Jul-Sep)		% change
	Aug 18	Sep 18				2017-18	2018-19	
Metals	209,200	221,400	6%	203,800	9%	595,500	641,700	8%
Plastics	15,300	21,800	43%	18,300	20%	49,200	55,900	14%
Paper & cardboard	92,400	103,000	12%	109,800	-6%	352,600	280,100	-21%
Other	21,100	17,400	-17%	23,800	-27%	76,900	57,700	-25%
Hazardous	9,600	18,200	89%	13,600	34%	49,400	56,100	14%
Total	347,500	381,900	10%	369,200	3%	1,123,600	1,091,400	-3%

Figure 2 presents the monthly trend in exports of waste from Australia by material type between July 2017 and September 2018. Overall, exports are experiencing a relatively steady trend following instability up to May 2018.

Figure 2 Monthly exports of waste from Australia by material type, July 2017 – September 2018



The current status of waste import restrictions

Table 3 presents our understanding of waste import restrictions which countries have implemented or are planning to implement. Note, this information has been compiled based on the best publicly available sources, sometimes translated from local languages. It therefore may not match the most up-to-date information available through official channels.

Table 3 Current status of waste import restrictions

Country	Scope of ban	Announced & implemented	Associated export volumes Material	2017-18	Sep-18	Impact and uncertainties
China	Restricted the import of certain materials covering specific commodity codes, mainly by specifying a threshold contamination rate of 0.5% ¹ .	Ann.: Jul & Nov-17, Apr-18. Imp.: Jan & Mar-18, end 2018.	Plastic, paper, metals, other	745,700 (62,100/mth) 16-17 = 1.26 Mt (105,300/mth)	65,600	Impact evident. Uncertainty whether newer announcements override older ones.
Malaysia	Import permits revoked from 114 factories that process imported plastic waste ² .	Jul-18.	Plastic	71,300 (5,900/mth)	4,900	No impact apparent. Full number of plastic processors in Malaysia and how ban impacts Australian exports.
Thailand	Revoked a broad plastic scrap import allowance, meaning plastic waste and scrap is banned from import by 2021 ^{3, 4, 5} . Looking to ban imports of e-waste within 2 years ³ .	Both ann. Aug-18, plastic imp. Aug-18, e-waste within 2 years.	Plastic	26,900 (2,200/mth)	700	Apparent impact evident. Government announcement available in Thai only.
Vietnam	Tighter controls over imports of plastic, paper and metals. Only accepted if importers can prove that their shipment meets the specified environmental standards and there is capacity in the country to process the materials ⁶ .	Ann. in Aug-18, appears to be implemented.	Plastic, paper, metals	603,000 (50,300/mth)	60,700	No impact apparent. Unable to find environmental standards used to determine when shipments are acceptable. Processing capacity of sector.

Sources:

1. Blue Environment (2018) *Data on exports of recyclables from Australia to China*, available from <https://blueenvironment.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Exports-of-recyclables-from-Aust-to-China-v2.pdf>
2. FMT News (2018) *Permits to import plastic waste for 114 factories revoked*, available from: <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2018/07/24/permits-to-import-plastic-waste-for-114-factories-revoked/>
3. The Nation (2018) *Import of plastic waste banned*, available from: <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/detail/national/30351792>
4. Government Gazette Thailand (2018), available from: <http://www.ratchakitcha.soc.go.th/DATA/PDF/2561/E/188/T15.PDF>
5. CIWM (2018) *Thailand set to ban plastic waste imports by 2021*, available from: <https://ciwm-journal.co.uk/thailand-set-to-ban-plastic-waste-imports-by-2021/>
6. Vietnam Briefing (2018) *Vietnam to Restrict Surging Scrap Imports*, available from: <http://www.vietnam-briefing.com/news/vietnam-to-restrict-surgin-scrap-imports.html/>