Assessment of waste exports from Australia in October 2018

*13 December 2018 Jenny Trinh and Joe Pickin*

Blue Environment is commissioned by the Department of the Environment and Energy to provide a monthly analysis of waste export data to June 2019. The data is provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, which provides monthly data covering the previous six months, including any updates.

Summary

In October 2018, Australia exported around 353,400 tonnes of waste with a value of $A562 million. This represents decrease of 6% in the quantity and an increase of 3% in value of waste exports compared with September 2018.

Comparison by destination

The top six countries receiving waste exports from Australia in October 2018 accounted for 79% of all that was exported. These countries were, in order, Indonesia, Vietnam, China (including Hong Kong and Macau), India, Malaysia and Belgium. Other than Belgium[[1]](#footnote-1), these countries were also in the top six receivers of waste in September 2018, with Indonesia again as the top receiver, Vietnam and China switched places in rankings and India moved from fifth to fourth place. Belgium’s ranking jumped from 16th to 6th place in the rankings, and Thailand dropped out of the top six from fourth to eighth place.

In October 2018, most of the top six received more waste their monthly 2017-18 average except for China (8,500 or 3% less). Belgium received an additional 18,600 tonnes (1151%) and Malaysia 6,800 tonnes (36%). Table 1 compares the top six receiving countries in October 2018 with their September 2018 volumes and 2017-18 monthly average.

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

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Export destination by monthly rank | October 18 | September 18 |  | 2017-18 monthly avg | % change |
| **Tonnes** | **% of total** | **Rank** | **Tonnes** | **% change** |
| 1 | Indonesia | 79,100 | 22% | 1 | 69,000 | 15% | 60,600 | 31% |
| 2 | Vietnam | 61,800 | 17% | 3 | 59,800 | 3% | 50,300 | 23% |
| 3 | China  | 54,900 | 16% | 2 | 63,400 | -13% | 62,100 | -12% |
| 4 | India | 38,300 | 11% | 5 | 31,000 | 23% | 42,400 | -10% |
| 5 | Malaysia | 25,800 | 7% | 6 | 19,000 | 36% | 31,200 | -17% |
| 6 | Belgium | 20,200 | 6% | 16 | 1,600 | 1151% | 3,900 | 417% |
| Top 6 total | 280,100 | 79% |  | 243,900 | 15% |  |
| **Monthly total** | **353,400** | **-** | **374,900** | **-6%** |

Figure 1 (overleaf) presents the monthly trend in exports of waste from Australia to the top six receiving countries and the other destinations (by total quantity) between July 2017 and October 2018. Examined over this timeframe, the top six includes Thailand but not Belgium. 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 – October 2018



Comparison by material

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

*Month to month –* October 2018 saw decreased exports of metals (-1%), plastics (-9%), paper and cardboard (-9%) and hazardous waste (-53%) compared with September. Exports of ‘other’ increased by 10%. The large reduction 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 and plastics exported in October 2018 was greater than the monthly average for 2017-18 but paper and cardboard, hazardous waste and ‘other’ were below their 2017-18 average. Overall, October 2018 total exports of waste were slightly lower (-4%) than the monthly average for 2017-18.

*Year to date –* The total year-to-date waste exported in October 2017 was around 1,548,300 tonnes compared to 1,435,600 tonnes in October 2018 (7% less).

Table 2 Comparison of waste export volume by material

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Material category | Month | % change | Monthly avg 2017-18 |  % change | Year to date (Jul-Oct) | % change |
| **Sep 18** | **Oct 18** | **2017-18** | **2018-19** |
| Metals | 220,800 | 217,600 | -1% | 203,800 | 7% | 827,700 | 858,400 | 4% |
| Plastics | 21,700 | 19,800 | -9% | 18,300 | 8% | 67,800 | 75,500 | 11% |
| Paper & cardboard | 98,600 | 90,000 | -9% | 109,800 | -18% | 483,000 | 365,700 | -24% |
| Other | 16,200 | 17,900 | 10% | 23,800 | -25% | 103,600 | 74,300 | -28% |
| Hazardous | 17,600 | 8,200 | -53% | 12,900 | -36% | 66,300 | 61,700 | -7% |
| **Total** | **374,900** | **353,400** | **-6%** | **368,500** | **-4%** | **1,548,300** | **1,435,600** | **-7%** |

Figure 2 (overleaf) presents the monthly trend in exports of waste from Australia by material type between July 2017 and October 2018. Overall, export quantities have been relatively steady since autumn.

Figure 2 Monthly exports of waste from Australia by material type, July 2017 – October 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. 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 | Impact and uncertainties |
| **Material** | **2017-18** | **Oct 18** |
| 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) | 54,900 | Impact evident. Uncertainty whether newer announcements override older ones. |
| Malaysia | Import permits revoked from 114 factories that process imported plastic waste2.  | 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 20213, 4,5. Looking to ban imports of e‑waste within 2 years3. | Both ann. Aug-18, plastic imp. Aug-18, e-waste within 2 years. | Plastic | 26,900 (2,200/mth) | 1,100 | 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 materials6. **NEW THIS MONTH:**Under the new national standard QCVN 32: 2019/BTNMT, e-waste plastics such as cases of TVs, computers, office equipment would not be allowed to be imported7. | Ann. in Aug-18, appears to be implemented. | Plastic, paper, metals | 603,000 (50,300/mth) | 61,800 | No impact apparent. Unable to find environmental standards used to determine when shipments are acceptable or when the ban on e-waste plastic imports would take effect. 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:

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6. Vietnam Briefing (2018) *Vietnam to Restrict Surging Scrap Imports*, available from: <http://www.vietnam-briefing.com/news/vietnam-to-restrict-surging-scrap-imports.html/>

7. Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (2018) *Vietnam to ban imports of plastic from used* electronics, available from: http://www9.monre.gov.vn/wps/portal/news/!ut/p/c5/dclJDoIwFADQE5n\_RYawbJAZFWgh2A0hJJpCw6AVlNPrBcxbPuDwMzSLuDdKjEMjoQJu1o5PAt1KEP2SmEgozS6hFWnoI1yBW38\_1oFBhXpNOxxfCZ3ijS5v1uLDrljebZl2VlkgJl54M5tzPeafmzSignihK4-OduoIKrv09mva9lxU0phZvxaHUHVuELqZk-6eooepb8gXeJcnsw!!/

1. In last month’s report Malaysia was not included in the top 6 receiving countries in September 2018 but in this most recent analysis it is included. The difference is due to revisions to the ABS data or the classification changes listed in the introduction to this report, or both. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)