

DATA CONFIDENTIALITY

INTRODUCTION

This article discusses the treatment of confidential data in this publication. It explains why some detailed international merchandise trade statistics are suppressed for confidentiality reasons and describes the relevant legislation under which the data are protected. The ways in which data items may be suppressed and the impact on analyses of the statistics presented, are also discussed.

More information about confidentiality and its impact on other types of output can be found in the December 1999 issue of the Information Paper *International Merchandise Trade Statistics, Australia: Data Confidentiality* (Cat. no. 5487.0) which is available on the ABS website (www.abs.gov.au, see statistics, ABS papers and classifications, information papers) or by telephoning the ABS Subscription Management Section on 1300 366 323.

CONFIDENTIALITY RESTRICTIONS

Potentially, international merchandise trade statistics are available in great detail but not all the possible cross-classifications are released. Restrictions are placed on the release of statistics where the data relating to an individual or an organisation is likely to enable the identification of that individual or organisation, and that entity has requested that the data be suppressed. In practice, the way that a restriction is achieved is to conceal the sensitive information by combining it with other data.

Regardless of the reason for requesting confidentiality, if an individual or organisation has shown that release of certain statistics would be likely to enable the identification of the trade by that individual or organisation, then the ABS is legally required not to disclose the information. The relevant ABS legislation which makes provision for the protection of confidential International Trade data is:

- the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*, Subsection 12(2), and Subsection 13(1); and
- Clause 2 of the Statistics Determination under Section 13 of the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*.

TYPES OF RESTRICTIONS

The ABS recognises that detailed commodity statistics of imported and exported goods play an important part in the analysis of Australia's trading patterns. However, this need for information has to be balanced with an individual's or organisation's entitlement to data confidentiality. Where the restriction of statistics is necessary to preserve confidentiality, the ABS negotiates with the individual or organisation on a form of restriction which protects their interests while still allowing as much useful statistical information as possible to be released.

A variety of restrictions, or embargoes, is available to protect the confidentiality of an individual's or organisation's data. Each type of restriction is designed to protect a particular aspect of the data and, at the same time, allow the ABS to release the maximum amount of detailed statistics. Restrictions are placed at the commodity level, and the information is restricted for all trade in the particular commodity, not just that relating to the individual or organisation which requested the restriction. These restrictions relate to specific commodities and do not affect total Australian trade, nor do they affect total trade by country or by State except in the particular case of exports of aluminium oxide (alumina) which is discussed below.

The range of confidentiality restrictions applied to data together with their impact on international merchandise trade statistics is set out in the following table.

TYPE OF RESTRICTION	DESCRIPTION
No Commodity Details	Under this restriction, the most comprehensive applied, no data relating to a particular commodity are released. Instead, in statistics classified by commodity, the data are included in a dummy commodity code (titled <i>combined confidential items of trade and commodities n.e.s.</i>) together with data for all other commodities that are similarly restricted. A dummy code of this nature is often referred to as a dump item.
Broad Commodity Details	Like the <i>No Commodity Details</i> restriction above, the <i>Broad Commodity Details</i> restriction also prevents the release of commodity detail, but it allows data to be released at the broad commodity level without it being impacted by confidentiality. Under this restriction, data for a group of confidential commodities in the same area of the classification (e.g. organic chemicals) are combined and presented in a dump item within the relevant area (chapter) of the classification.
No Country Details	Under this restriction, no details of the country of origin (for imports) or the country of final destination (for exports) are made available for a particular commodity. Where information relating to a country is suppressed, information relating to ports in that country is also suppressed.
Selected Country Details	This restriction suppresses details of trade in a commodity with specific countries. Instead of combining the details with data for all other countries having a similar restriction (as the <i>No Country Details</i> restriction does) this restriction suppresses details for a group of countries but presents full details for other countries.
No State Details	Under this restriction, commodity statistics classified by Australian State are not made available. Information relating to Australian ports is also not available. This restriction does not affect any of the tables in this publication.
Selected State Details	This restriction suppresses commodity details that are confidential for one Australian State by combining details for that State with details for one or more other States. Details for the remaining States are made available in the normal way. This restriction does not affect any of the tables in this publication.
No State by Country Details	This restriction suppresses only trade between the countries and States covered by the restriction. <i>No State by Country Details</i> restrictions can be used to cover all States and specified countries, all countries and specified States and specified countries and specified States.
No Quantity Details	Under this restriction the value of trade in the commodity is available, but quantity and gross weight are suppressed. This restriction does not affect any of the tables in this publication.
No Value Details	For commodities subject to this restriction the value is suppressed.
No Value Details by Country	This restriction suppresses value details by country for the particular commodity to which it applies.
No Duty Details	This restriction is only relevant to import clearances and can only be used in conjunction with a country restriction. The <i>No Duty Details</i> restriction results in the suppression of all duty details (rate of duty, nature of tariff, treatment code, preference code and duty paid) on records where country has been suppressed. This restriction does not affect any of the tables in this publication.
Port Restriction	All of the restrictions discussed so far are applied at the commodity level. There is currently one confidentiality restriction which is not commodity based. This relates to imports into, and exports from, the Northern Territory ports of Gove and Groote Eylandt. There is not sufficient diversity of trade to allow release of data for these ports, so details of all exports from and imports to these two ports are suppressed and are shown against a 'confidential ports—NT' code. This permits accurate totals by State to be released. This restriction does not affect any of the tables included in this publication.

TYPES OF RESTRICTIONS *continued*

In addition, because the value of Australia's total exports to particular countries are dominated by the trade in alumina, even this total is considered to be confidential and is therefore not released separately. For some countries, data for alumina would account for nearly all of the confidential item. The alumina component has therefore been removed from the confidential items for these countries and combined and released separately as a single aggregate *Country Confidential Alumina*. The countries currently affected are Bahrain, Egypt and Iceland. The consequence of this is that Australia's published total exports to those countries excludes exports of alumina. This restriction also suppresses the State, Australian port and overseas port for alumina exports to these countries.

CONFIDENTIAL COMMODITIES LIST

The Confidential Commodities List (CCL) contains information on all commodity based restrictions. The CCL is updated monthly and shows, for each commodity subject to restriction:

- the commodity classification codes (HS, Standard International Trade Classification (SITC) and the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC));
- a description of the commodity;
- the restrictions that are applied;
- the date of effect; and
- for those items subject to a *Selected Country Details*, a *Selected State Details* or a *No State by Country Details* restriction, the countries or States which are restricted.

Copies of the current CCL, in electronic or paper format, can be obtained by contacting the Confidentiality Manager. The most up to date CCL is also included on the ABS Website (www.abs.gov.au).

IMPACT OF RESTRICTIONS

The following tables in this publication are affected by confidentiality restrictions. For details of the commodities affected by confidentiality, the type of restriction and the period to which the restriction applies, refer to the CCL.

Each restriction only affects data for the period during which it is operative. When there is a change to a restriction during the year or quarter, the data presented for a particular commodity will be the sum of data released each month. For example, if export statistics for a particular commodity were unrestricted for the first two months of a quarter, but subject to a *No Commodity Details* restriction for the third month, then the data published for the quarter would represent only the first 2 months of the quarter.

The following examples all refer to the December Quarter 1999 issue of *International Merchandise Trade* (5422.0).

TABLE 7 The confidentiality restriction which applies to exports of alumina affects this table. Therefore, exports of alumina to Bahrain, Egypt and Iceland are excluded from the totals for those countries. In this table *Country Confidential Alumina* is included in the total for *No Country Details*.



TABLE 9 To ensure confidentiality, data for commodities which are subject to either a *No Commodity Details* or a *Broad Commodity Details* restriction are not shown against the relevant commodity. For example, exports of rice (SITC 042) and plastics (SITC 57 and 58) are affected by *No Commodity Details* restrictions. Similarly, exports of rutile, beneficiated ilmenite and zirconium ores and concentrates (SITC 287.83 and 287.84) are suppressed through the application of a *Broad Commodity Details* restriction and therefore excluded from the commodity total for *ores and concentrates of molybdenum etc* (SITC 287.81-85). In this table the value of the confidential commodities is included with all other exports in *Total trade*.

There are currently no major export commodities to which a *No Value Details* restriction applies. Were this type of restriction applied to one of the major commodities listed, the statistics would be excluded from the relevant SITC and included under *Total trade*.

TABLE 10 In this table only major commodities with a *No Commodity Details* restriction are removed from the relevant SITC and included in the value for *Total trade*. For example, from September 1999 data some imports of colour photographic paper are excluded from *photographic and cinematographic supplies* (SITC 882) because a *No Commodity Details* restriction is in place.

In this table the *Broad Commodity Details* restriction which applies to a group of confidential commodities classified to *organic chemicals* (SITC 51) allows data to be released at the SITC 2 digit level without being impacted by confidentiality.

Currently, no major import commodities are suppressed as a result of either a *Broad Commodity Details* or a *No Value Details* restriction. If either of these restriction types were applied to a major commodity, the data would be excluded from the relevant SITC in this table.

TABLES 11 AND 12 The statistics in these tables are affected by both *No Commodity Details* and *No Value Details* confidentiality restrictions. The data for the export and import commodities affected by confidentiality restrictions are included in *combined confidential items of trade* (SITC 98).

The export commodities affected by *No Commodity Details* restrictions are: SITC 04, 05, 06, 08, 21, 26, 27, 28, 41, 42, 51, 52, 54, 57, 63, 66, 67, 74, 77 and 85. *Inorganic chemicals* (SITC 52) is the only export commodity affected by a *No Value Details* restriction. The *No Commodity Details* restriction which impacts upon SITC 41 in Table 12 applies to exports of bulk edible beef tallow. As this restriction was applied for the months from August 1997 to July 1998 it only suppresses the data in Table 12 for the period January 1998 to July 1998.

The following import commodities are affected by *No Commodity Details* restrictions: SITC 27, 33, 51, 52, 57, 62, 64, 68, 69, 77 and 88. The only import commodity affected by a *No Value Details* restriction is pitch, which is excluded from *petroleum, petroleum products and related materials* (SITC 33).



TABLES 11 AND 12 *continued* The impact of these restrictions on the data in these tables varies for each commodity and it is important to refer to the CCL to obtain complete details of each restriction, and the period for which it applies. To illustrate, exports of some wool tops are currently the only goods excluded from SITC 26. Also, as the restriction did not take effect until September 1999, exports which occurred in earlier months are not excluded from SITC 26. By contrast, exports of dried, shelled lentils and fresh or dried shelled almonds are both excluded from SITC 05. Lentils are excluded for the period November 1995 to June 1999 and almonds are excluded for the period July 1996 to May 1999.

As Tables 11 and 12 present broad level (2 digit SITC) statistics, the *Broad Commodity Details* restrictions which apply to a group of confidential commodities for exports (classified to SITC 28) and imports (classified to SITC 51), allow that data to be released without being impacted by confidentiality.

TABLES 13 TO 20 As these tables contain both commodity and country information, the *No Commodity Details*, *Broad Commodity Details*, *No Country Details*, *Selected Country Details*, *No State by Country*, *No Value Details*, and the *No Value Details by Country* confidentiality restrictions all impact upon the statistics. Commodities affected by any of these restrictions are excluded from the relevant commodity and included in *combined confidential items of trade* (SITC 98).

Some examples of export and import commodities subject to confidentiality restrictions are used in the following text to explain the impact of these restriction types upon data in these tables. More information about the commodities and the restrictions which affect the statistics may be found in the CCL.

No Commodity Details

Exports of bulk sugar are excluded from *sugars, sugar preparations and honey* (SITC 06) as a consequence of a *No Commodity Details* restriction. As this restriction has been in place since January 1998 the data for all periods in this issue are suppressed and included in SITC 98. However, analysts interested in exports of bulk sugar should note that a special report is available on a quarterly basis after a 6 month lag, June quarter 1999 being the latest period for which data are available. For more details telephone ABS Subscription Management Section on 1300 366 323. The *No Value Details by Country* restriction below also affected exports of bulk sugar statistics for earlier periods. See the CCL for details.

A *No Commodity Details* restriction has also applied to imports of *natural micaceous iron oxides* since August 1993. As a result all imports of these goods are excluded from *crude fertilizers* (SITC 27) in these tables and included with other confidential commodities in SITC 98.

As *No Commodity Details* restrictions apply to all countries the treatment of this type of restriction is identical in each table.



TABLES 13 TO 20 continued *Broad Commodity Details*

The *Broad Commodity Details* restriction allows similar commodities which are severely affected by confidentiality to be presented at the broad commodity level. However, as country and State are still confidential, the commodities affected by this restriction, which include exports of manganese and aluminium ores and imports of benzene cyclic hydrocarbons, are excluded from the relevant SITC and included with other confidential commodities in SITC 98 in these tables. Analysts should particularly note that the commodities included in the *Broad Commodity Details* restriction may have changed over time. The CCL shows details of these changes.

No Country Details

Like the *No Commodity Details*, *Broad Commodity Details* and *No Value Details* restrictions, the *No Country Details* restriction affects all countries so the impact of this type of restriction is the same for all the country by commodity tables in this publication.

For example, a *No Country Details* restriction which applies to exports of barley for malting from July 1999, results in the exclusion of these goods from SITC 04 for the months from July 1999 in these tables. In addition, a *No Country Details* restriction on exports of bulk barley for malting affected the statistics included under SITC 04 for the period February 1999 to June 1999. The *No State Details* restriction which applies to barley for malting from February 1999 does not impact upon these tables because State statistics are not presented.

Imports of sodium dichromate have been subject to both *No State Details* and *No Country Details* restrictions since May 1990. The *No State Details* restriction does not affect these tables but the *No Country Details* restriction excludes these goods from SITC 52 and includes them with other confidential commodities in SITC 98.

Selected Country Details

The CCL lists the commodities and countries for which data are suppressed under each *Selected Country Details* restriction. Those commodities which are restricted for China, Germany, Japan, Republic of Korea, New Zealand, Taiwan, United Kingdom or the United States of America (USA) will affect the statistics included. As is the case with all confidentiality restrictions, commodities which are suppressed via a *Selected Country Details* restriction, are excluded from the relevant commodity and included in *combined confidential items of trade* (SITC 98).

An example relates to exports of semi-soft coking metallurgical coal from Italy, Pakistan, Republic of Korea and Taiwan. The restriction affects the statistics for *coal, coke and briquettes* (SITC 32) in the Republic of Korea country table (Table 16) and the country table for Taiwan (Table 18). The statistics in the other country tables in this publication are not affected. As the countries to which this restriction applies are included in some of the country groups, Tables 21, 23 and 24 are also affected.

A *Selected Country Details (France, Japan, Taiwan, USA)* restriction which applies to imports of some glass fibre strands (SITC 65) affects Tables 15, 18 and 20 and the country group Tables 21, 23 and 24. As this restriction was effective for the period June 1997 to June 1998 the data presented for the 12 months ended December 1998 will be the sum of data released each month (in this case for July 1998 to December 1998 only) and not the total for the 12 month period. Furthermore, data for the December quarter 1999 and the 12 months ended December 1999 are not affected by this restriction because it only applied up to and including June 1998.



TABLES 13 TO 20 continued *No State by Country Details*

This restriction suppresses the State and country information for the States and countries to which it applies. For example, from February 1998 to June 1999 a *No State by Country* (all States, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Taiwan) restriction was applied to exports of silica sand (SITC 27). The impact of this restriction upon the commodity by country tables in this publication is that statistics for all States for Japan, Republic of Korea and Taiwan are suppressed in Tables 15, 16 and 18. The periods affected are February 1998 to December 1998 in the 12 months to December 1998 totals and January 1999 to June 1999 for the 12 months ended December 1999. For other periods and for the December quarter 1999, exports of silica sand are included with *crude fertilizers* (SITC 27). This restriction also affects all States for the countries listed above in the APEC, ASEAN and Developing Countries country group tables.

The *No State by Country* restriction can also apply to specific States and countries. For example, for the period April 1998 to March 1999 imports of certain unrecorded magnetic tapes of a width not exceeding 4mm (SITC 89) are suppressed if the country is either Germany or Japan and the State is either NSW or Victoria. So for Tables 14 (Germany) and 15 (Japan) imports of these goods into NSW and Victoria are excluded from SITC 89 for the months where the restriction is effective and included in SITC 98. Imports into other Australian States from Germany and Japan are included in SITC 89. The APEC and European Union country group tables are affected in the same way.

No Value Details

The purpose of the *No Value Details* restriction is to allow the presentation of quantity or gross weight information for commodities which would otherwise be affected by the *No Commodity Details* restriction. The consequences of this for these tables (which include statistics on the value of imports and exports) is that data for the commodities affected by *No Value Details* restrictions (exports of sulphuric acid from August 1997 to July 1999 and imports of pitch from August 1997 onwards) is suppressed and included under SITC 98.

No Value Details by Country

This restriction is currently used in only one case: to suppress the value of exports of bulk and bagged wheat (SITC 04) in commodity by country tables. Therefore, exports of bulk and bagged wheat are excluded from SITC 04 and included with other confidential exports in SITC 98 in these tables.

TABLES 21 TO 24 The impact of confidentiality restrictions on these tables is identical to the other country by commodity tables in this publication. That is, the *No Commodity Details*, *Broad Commodity Details*, *No Country Details*, *Selected Country Details*, *No State by Country*, *No Value Details*, and the *No Value Details by Country* restrictions will affect the statistics at the commodity level. The *Selected Country Details* and *No State by Country* restrictions only suppress the data for the specific countries (and if applicable States) shown in the CCL. Data for the other countries included in the country groups are shown against the relevant commodity.



TABLE 25 Because this table shows only aggregate data for each State, only exports of alumina to Bahrain, Egypt and Iceland are affected by confidentiality. Statistics for these countries are included in the category *State not available for publication*.

TABLES 27 TO 30 The statistics in these tables are affected by both *No Commodity Details* and *No Value Details* confidentiality restrictions.

In Tables 27 and 28 the confidential data are excluded from the relevant ANZSIC subdivision and included in the subdivision *other industries*. Likewise the commodities affected by the confidentiality restrictions are excluded from the relevant BEC category in Tables 29 and 30 and included with other confidential data in the category *goods not elsewhere specified*. For example, imports of some rolled aluminium foil, which from July 1992 have been subject to a *No Commodity Details* restriction are excluded from *metal products* (ANZSIC 27) in Table 28 and the BEC category for *processed industrial supplies* in Table 30.

As these tables present broad level statistics, the *Broad Commodity Details* restrictions which apply to groups of confidential commodities for exports and imports, allow the data to be included within the relevant ANZSIC or BEC. For example, exports of certain metalliferous ores to which the *Broad Commodity Details* restriction applies are included in the BEC category *primary industrial supplies* and not the *goods not elsewhere specified* category.

TABLES 31 AND 32 The confidentiality restrictions which impact upon the data in these tables are *No Commodity Details* and *No Value Details*. Where commodities are subject to either of these restrictions they are excluded from the relevant SITC and included under *combined confidential items of trade* (SITC 98). As the tables include data on a financial year basis from July 1987 onwards analysts should take special care when interpreting the data if there has been a change in confidentiality restrictions during the year. The data presented for a particular item will be the sum of data released each month and will not necessarily be the total for that item. The following two examples demonstrate this point.

Exports of *dried, shelled lentils, not for cultivation* are subject to a *No Commodity Details* restriction from November 1995 to June 1999. Therefore, for financial year 1995-96 data for these lentils would be included in *vegetables and fruit* (SITC 05) for the period July 1995 to October 1995 only, and included in the *combined confidential items of trade* (SITC 98) for the remainder of the financial year. Likewise for the later years (1996-97 to 1998-99) data for these lentils are included in SITC 98.

Certain imports of *brass coated steel cordage for reinforcing rubber* are affected by a *No Commodity Details* restriction for the period April 1992 to October 1997. Therefore, for financial year 1991-92 data for the months April to June 1992 only are included in the confidential item (SITC 98) while the other months' data are included in *manufactures of metals, nes* (SITC 69). For the years 1992-93 to 1996-97 data for these goods are combined with that for other confidential commodities and included in SITC 98. For 1997-98 data, imports relevant to the months July to October 1997 are included in SITC 98 and imports from November 1997 to June 1998 are included in SITC 69.



REVIEW OF RESTRICTIONS

The application of a restriction for a particular commodity does not mean it will be applied to all future output for that commodity. Once a restriction is in place the data remains restricted in all output until the restriction is lifted or changed. Restrictions are reviewed periodically to see if they are still warranted in their current form. With changes in the pattern of trade a restriction may be dropped completely, amended to restrict less data or tightened to restrict more data. Reviews of commodities subject to confidentiality restrictions are carried out periodically by the ABS or at the request of a client (a fee is charged to cover the cost of this service).

CONCLUSION

This article describes the procedures the ABS adopts and the types of restrictions it uses in international merchandise trade statistics to protect the confidentiality of an individual's or organisation's data. It also describes the impact of the restrictions on the tables in this publication. Clients should be aware that confidentiality restrictions also affect data at finer levels of detail than that included in this publication.

Where confidentiality restrictions result in a loss of detail that users may need, there is a possibility that the suppressed data may be available from other sources. For example, if the data relate to trade with a particular country, the information may well be published in the partner country's statistics. In cases where commodity detail is suppressed, information that will allow users to estimate the suppressed data may be available from other organisations, such as marketing bodies, trade associations, or other government agencies. Another source may be international organisations, such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. These international organisations release a great deal of statistical information relating to international trade of their members classified by country and commodity.

For more information on the treatment of confidential data in international merchandise trade statistics, users should refer to the December 1999 issue of the Information Paper, *International Merchandise Trade Statistics, Australia: Data Confidentiality* (Cat. no. 5487.0), or contact the Confidentiality Manager, Canberra on telephone 02 6252 5409 or by email: international.trade@abs.gov.au.

