

## Shipping: A secret industry?

It's a fact: more than **99%** of Australia's imports and exports from Australia occur by ship.

Everyday, every Australian will eat, use, wear and come into contact with items that have arrived in Australia by ship. The shipping industry is vast and important, but also largely hidden. Most people will only ever turn their minds to ferries and cruise vessels, and maybe will make use of container ships for work, or privately. However, the 4,568 container ship arrivals in 2017 amount to only 16% of vessel arrivals in Australia in the year. The majority of vessel arrivals are bulk carrier vessels, which number at 14,324 and make up more than 50% of all vessel stops in Australia.

To put this in perspective, in 2017 there were only 706 cruise vessel visits. It's a sure bet that you can remember the last time you saw a cruise ship much more clearly than the last time you saw a container ship or bulk carrier (if you ever have!). Think about the cruise ships you have seen, maybe one was docked in Sydney Harbour, or passing through the

Whitsundays. For each cruise ship visiting Australia there are 6 container ships, and 20 bulk carriers!

**For each cruise ship there are 6 container ships and 20 bulk carriers**

### What are bulk carriers and where do you find them?

Ranging from 100 to 470 metres in length, if you do manage to get within sight of a bulk carrier they are hard to miss. This is between one and four football fields end to end.

The largest bulk carriers visiting Australia are comparable with the largest cruise liner, Royal Caribbean's Ovation of the Seas. Ovation of the Seas is 348 metres in length, has a crew of 1500 and capacity for 5000 guests. A similar sized bulk carrier trades with a fraction of the number of crew, as

low as 20 crew can operate a such a vessel.

Every day of the year, every two hours, three bulk carriers trade through Australian ports. What is on the ships? Victoria and New South Wales farm a lot of sheep, so maybe we export a lot of wool? What about agriculture? Maybe it is grain or sugar? Coal is a very public and political export at this time. The truth is that coal is a big export product, amounting to one third of the mass tonnes of exports from Australia in 2017. But in fact, more than 50% of all Australian exports by ship are iron ore. Grain amounts to 2% of all exports, sugar is 0.34% of exports, and steel only 0.12%.

### Shipping, it is everywhere;

- The computer, tablet or phone that you are looking at,
- The shoes you are wearing,
- The chair that you sit on,
- The carpet under your feet,
- The mug you drink your coffee from,
- The coffee inside that mug,
- The machine you used to make the coffee,
- Most cars you saw on your way to work,
- The clothes you are wearing,
- Any fruit or vegetable not in season in Australia right now,

**all of these arrived in Australia by ship.**



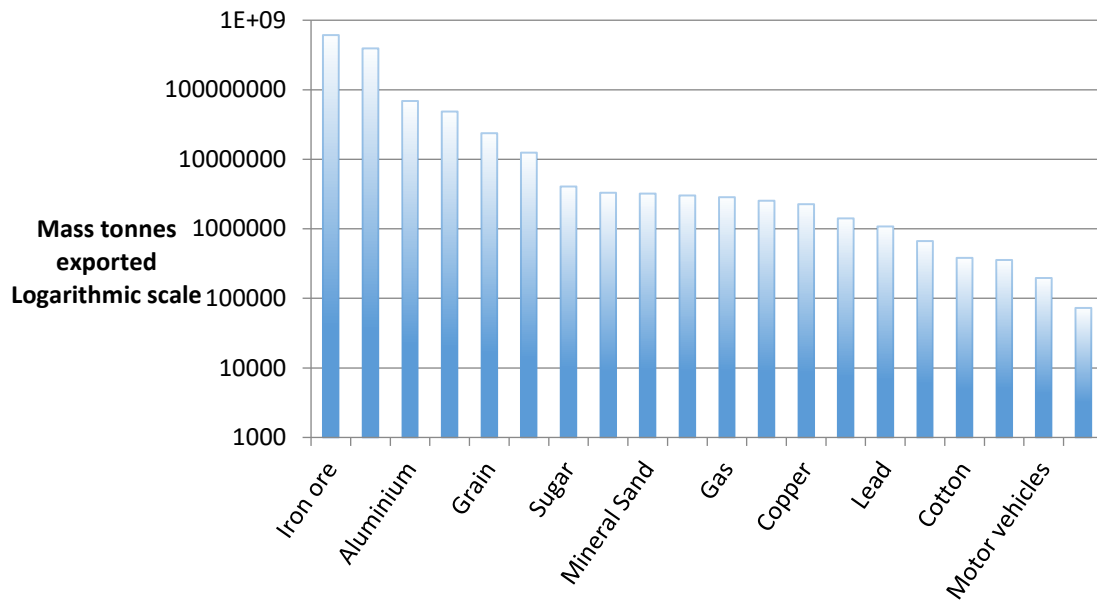
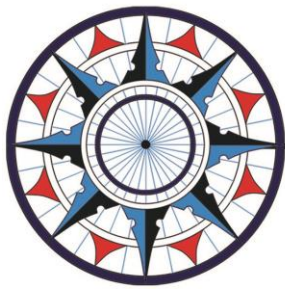


Figure 1 Amount of each bulk material exported from Australia on a logarithmic scale in mass tonnes.

These vessels are trading around the Australian coastline, in every state. The port most visited by cruise ships is Sydney, without comparison. And Sydney is a busy commercial port also, with 3,806,076 tonnes of bulk material including iron ore, grain, coal etc. In fact the State of New South Wales moves 194,348,222 tonnes of bulk material through its ports each year. So why don't we see the thousands of bulk carriers around our coastlines?

**Because, the small town of Port Headland, population only 18,000 people exports more than twice as much bulk material, as the entire state of New South Wales, population 7.88 million people.**

The business of the bulk carrier is mostly in regional Western Australia, Queensland, and Newcastle. So, it is not your fault if you haven't seen a bulk carrier on your morning commute to work.

### Where is Port Headland?

1700km North of Perth

### What is being exported?

Iron ore

### How much?

444,697,045 tonnes

Advice: visit in the winter for whale watching, or the summer for turtle nesting



### Written by:

Kendall Messer  
Pacific Maritime Lawyers  
Trainee Solicitor

