

CUMMINGS ECONOMICS

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15 September 2025

CE Ref-J3552

NORTHERN AUSTRALIA - A MAJOR ROLE IN WORLD SHIPPING

GENERAL

The massive tonnages of mineral and primary product exports to be lifted out of the North's ports underpin a massive global scale shipping challenge, especially bulk cargo shipping. Tonnages out of Australia's northern ports in 2024 totalled 1.3 billion tonnes, 82% of all of Australia's export cargo and, with northern port imports a total of 77% of Australia's export and import cargo tonnages (see Tables). On the world scene, the North's export and import tonnages exceed many countries and rank above Brazil, Russia and Japan (see Chart).

VITAL TO ECONOMY

Few Australians recognise how important Australia's tropical north is to the national economy and their standard of living. Seaports north of a line from Gladstone in the east to Dampier in the west in 2024 accounted for the majority of the value of Australia's merchandise exports by sea (63%) composed mainly of mineral exports of iron ore and gas from the Northwest and Northern Territory; bauxite from Gove and Weipa; silica sand from Cape York; copper, lead and zinc from the Mt Isa region; coal, beef, sugar and grains from central and northern Queensland.

Without this massive export income of \$292 billion in 2024, the Australian dollar would plummet and Australia's position as one of the highest in the world in per capita incomes would slide. While the Australian economy was described once as 'riding on the sheep's back' with pastoral exports mainly wool accounting for over 50% of merchandise export income in the 1950s, today the Australian economy can be claimed to be riding on the back of its mineral exports, and that means riding on the North's back.

MAJOR COASTAL SHIPPING OPERATIONS

But the North's importance in Australia's shipping scene is not confined to exports. The North also plays an important role in Australia's coastal shipping. Major operations in the North are led by "Sea Swift", based in Cairns and operating services especially out of Cairns and Darwin.

LARGE PASSENGER OPERATIONS

But the North's importance in shipping in Australia has a further dimension - importance in passenger services. Northern ports figure strongly in cruise ship calls especially to Cairns, Darwin and Whitsundays that each register over 100 cruise ship visits a year.

On top of this, the Reef Fleet carries out of Cairns and Port Douglas over one million passengers a year.

NAVAL ACTIVITY

On top of this again, are the operations of naval vessels with two of the four Australian Operational Navy Bases strategically located in the North at Cairns and Darwin.

PROPOSED SLIPYARD EXPANSION

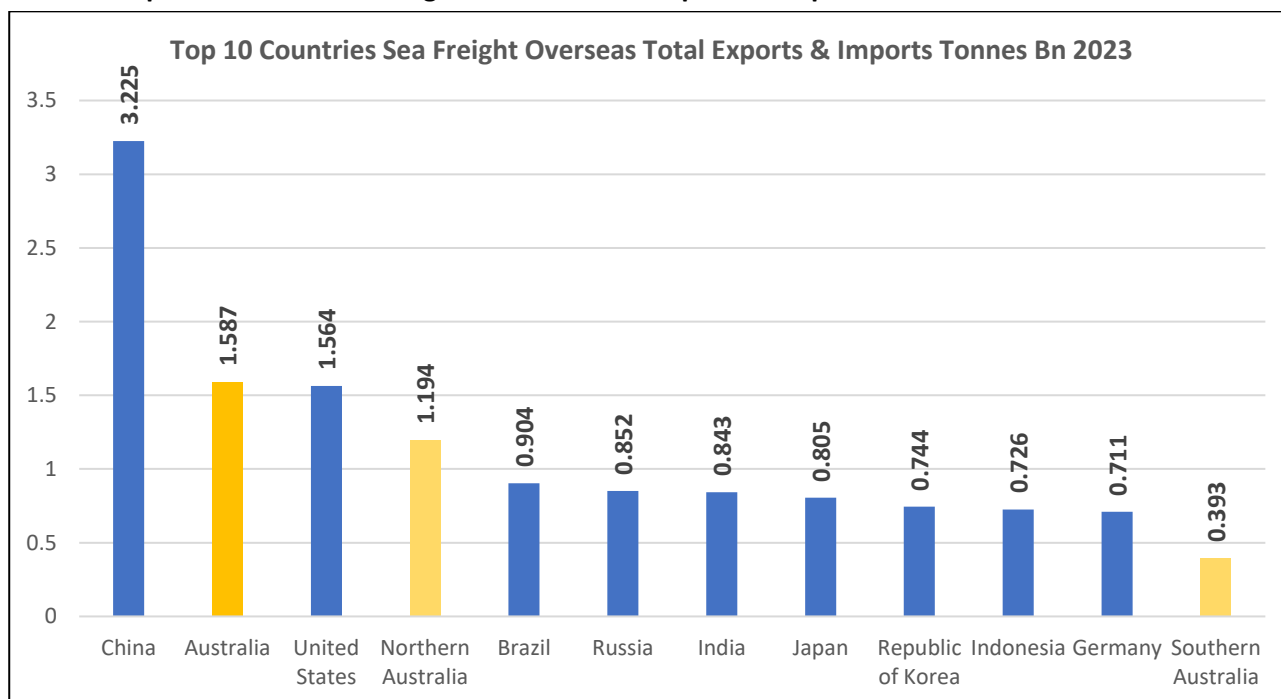
Expanding naval presence and other ships based in the North and South West Pacific area is leading to proposals to expand ship maintenance and repair services with a \$300M plus proposal in Cairns that will see a Common User Facility developed that will lift capacity to vessels of 5,000 tonnes and length of 120 meters to complement and expand the capacity of the port’s current three slipyards.

Table 1: Sea Freight Overseas Exports & Imports Tonnes Bn 2023

Country	Tonnes - Bn
China	3.225
Australia	1.587
United States	1.564
Northern Australia	1.194
Brazil	0.904
Russia	0.852
India	0.843
Japan	0.805
Republic of Korea	0.744
Indonesia	0.726
Germany	0.711
Southern Australia	0.393

Source: <https://unctadstat.unctad.org/insights/theme/109>.

Chart 1: Top 10 Countries Sea Freight Overseas Total Exports & Imports Tonnes BN 2023



Source: <https://unctadstat.unctad.org/insights/theme/109>.



Table 2: Sea Freight Total Exports plus Imports 2024

	Tonnes No.	Australia %	Value \$	Australia %
Northern Australia	1,354,134,789	77.72%	311,445,577,530	38.51%
Southern Australia	388,120,040	22.28%	497,274,156,000	61.49%
Australia	1,742,254,829	100.00%	808,719,733,530	100.00%

Source: <https://datahub.freightaustralia.gov.au/explore/interactives/Imports%20and%20Exports>.

Table 3: Sea Freight Overseas Exports 2024

Northern Australia	Tonnes	Aus %	State %	Region %	Value \$	Aus %	State %	Region %
Thursday Island	461,100	0.03%	0.1%	0.2%	11,280,000	0.00%	0.0%	0.0%
Weipa	31,390,000	1.93%	10.2%	10.8%	1,510,000,000	0.32%	1.2%	1.5%
Karumba	258,380	0.02%	0.1%	0.1%	302,130,000	0.06%	0.2%	0.3%
Cairns	64,110	0.00%	0.0%	0.0%	112,560,000	0.02%	0.1%	0.1%
Innisfail	80,550	0.00%	0.0%	0.0%	19,840,000	0.00%	0.0%	0.0%
Other	5,850,000	0.36%	1.9%	2.0%	542,340,000	0.11%	0.4%	0.5%
TNQ Total	38,104,140	2.34%	12.4%	13.2%	2,498,150,000	0.53%	2.1%	2.5%
Townsville	2,720,000	0.17%	0.9%	0.9%	8,280,000,000	1.75%	6.8%	8.4%
North Total	2,720,000	0.17%	0.9%	0.9%	8,280,000,000	1.75%	6.8%	8.4%
Hay Point	108,470,000	6.65%	35.3%	37.5%	33,740,000,000	7.13%	27.8%	34.2%
Abbot Point	38,720,000	2.38%	12.6%	13.4%	7,530,000,000	1.59%	6.2%	7.6%
Mackay	745,950	0.05%	0.2%	0.3%	440,940,000	0.09%	0.4%	0.4%
Mackay Total	147,935,950	9.08%	48.1%	51.1%	41,710,940,000	8.82%	34.4%	42.3%
Gladstone	100,600,000	6.17%	32.7%	34.8%	46,150,000,000	9.76%	38.1%	46.8%
Central Total	100,600,000	6.17%	32.7%	34.8%	46,150,000,000	9.76%	38.1%	46.8%
NTHN QLD TOTAL	289,360,090	17.75%	94.1%	100.0%	98,639,090,000	20.85%	81.4%	100.0%
NT TOTAL	27,290,000	1.67%	100.0%		17,110,000,000	3.62%	100.0%	
Yampi Sound	3,020,000	0.19%	0.3%	0.3%	423,330,000	0.09%	0.2%	0.2%
Wyndham	426,390	0.03%	0.0%	0.0%	92,700,000	0.02%	0.0%	0.1%
Broome	570,490	0.03%	0.1%	0.1%	942,300,000	0.20%	0.4%	0.5%
Port Headland	616,860,000	37.84%	57.8%	60.3%	81,860,000,000	17.30%	38.3%	46.5%
Port Walcott	187,040,000	11.47%	17.5%	18.3%	24,980,000,000	5.28%	11.7%	14.2%
Dampier	187,350,000	11.49%	17.6%	18.3%	44,550,000,000	9.42%	20.9%	25.3%
Offshore	28,370,000	1.74%	2.7%	2.8%	23,180,000,000	4.90%	10.9%	13.2%
NTHN WA TOTAL	1,023,636,880	62.80%	95.9%	100.0%	176,028,330,000	37.21%	82.4%	100.0%
Southern Australia	Tonnes	Aus %	State %	Region %	Value \$	Aus %	State %	Region %
Southern QLD	12,327,210	0.76%	4.0%		22,014,840,000	4.65%	18.2%	
Southern WA	43,653,870	2.68%	4.1%		37,606,680,000	7.95%	17.6%	
NSW	182,880,000	11.22%	100.0%		63,430,000,000	13.41%	100.0%	
Victoria	23,670,000	1.45%	100.0%		39,430,000,000	8.33%	100.0%	
South Australia	20,930,000	1.28%	100.0%		16,950,000,000	3.58%	100.0%	
Tasmania	6,370,000	0.39%	100.0%		1,880,000,000	0.40%	100.0%	
ACT	-	0.00%	100.0%		16,000	0.00%	100.0%	
TOTALS	Tonnes	Aus %			Value \$	Aus %		
Northern Australia	1,340,286,970	82.22%			291,777,420,000	61.67%		
Southern Australia	289,831,080	17.78%			181,311,536,000	38.33%		
Australia	1,630,118,050	100.00%			473,088,956,000	100.00%		

Source: <https://datahub.freightaustralia.gov.au/explore/interactives/Imports%20and%20Exports>.



Table 4: Sea Freight Overseas Imports 2024

Northern Australia	Tonnes	Aus %	State %	Region %	Value \$	Aus %	State %	Region %
Thursday Island	476	0.00%	0.0%	0.0%	16,560,000	0.00%	0.0%	0.2%
Weipa	159,270	0.14%	0.6%	2.0%	194,450,000	0.06%	0.3%	2.1%
Karumba	-	0.00%	0.0%	0.0%	-	0.00%	0.0%	0.0%
Cairns	423,290	0.38%	1.7%	5.4%	549,280,000	0.16%	0.9%	6.1%
Innisfail	-	0.00%	0.0%	0.0%	-	0.00%	0.0%	0.0%
Other	710	0.00%	0.0%	0.0%	34,960,000	0.01%	0.1%	0.4%
TNQ Total	583,746	0.52%	2.3%	7.5%	795,250,000	0.24%	1.3%	8.8%
Townsville	1,790,000	1.60%	7.0%	23.0%	3,350,000,000	1.00%	5.5%	37.0%
North Total	1,790,000	1.60%	7.0%	23.0%	3,350,000,000	1.00%	5.5%	37.0%
Hay Point	793	0.00%	0.0%	0.0%	973,520	0.00%	0.0%	0.0%
Abbot Point	-	0.00%	0.0%	0.0%	-	0.00%	0.0%	0.0%
Mackay	1,820,000	1.62%	7.1%	23.4%	2,180,000,000	0.65%	3.6%	24.0%
Mackay Total	1,820,793	1.62%	7.1%	23.4%	2,180,973,520	0.65%	3.6%	24.1%
Gladstone	3,590,000	3.20%	14.1%	46.1%	2,740,000,000	0.82%	4.5%	30.2%
Central Total	3,590,000	3.20%	14.1%	46.1%	2,740,000,000	0.82%	4.5%	30.2%
NTHN QLD TOTAL	7,784,539	6.94%	30.5%	100.0%	9,066,223,520	2.70%	15.0%	100.0%
NT TOTAL	1,500,000	1.34%	100.0%		2,680,000,000	0.80%	100.0%	
Yampi Sound	-	0.00%	0.0%	0.0%	-	0.00%	0.0%	0.0%
Wyndham	28,850	0.03%	0.1%	0.6%	27,360,000	0.01%	0.1%	0.3%
Broome	88,340	0.08%	0.4%	1.9%	172,960,000	0.05%	0.4%	2.2%
Port Headland	2,210,000	1.97%	10.2%	48.4%	2,860,000,000	0.85%	6.7%	36.1%
Port Walcott	504,770	0.45%	2.3%	11.1%	424,010	0.00%	0.0%	0.0%
Dampier	1,730,000	1.54%	8.0%	37.9%	4,860,000,000	1.45%	11.4%	61.3%
Offshore	1,320	0.00%	0.0%	0.0%	1,190,000	0.00%	0.0%	0.0%
NTHN WA TOTAL	4,563,280	4.07%	21.1%	100.0%	7,921,934,010	2.36%	18.5%	100.0%
Southern Australia	Tonnes	Aus %	State %	Region %	Value \$	Aus %	State %	Region %
Southern QLD	17,701,190	15.79%	69.5%		51,495,090,000	15.34%	85.0%	
Southern WA	17,017,770	15.18%	78.9%		34,827,530,000	10.38%	81.5%	
NSW	28,890,000	25.76%	100.0%		109,420,000,000	32.60%	100.0%	
Victoria	27,470,000	24.50%	100.0%		106,760,000,000	31.81%	100.0%	
South Australia	6,120,000	5.46%	100.0%		12,260,000,000	3.65%	100.0%	
Tasmania	1,090,000	0.97%	100.0%		1,200,000,000	0.36%	100.0%	
ACT	-	0.00%	100.0%		-	0.00%	100.0%	
TOTALS	Tonnes	Aus %			Value \$	Aus %		
Northern Australia	13,847,819	12.35%			19,668,157,530	5.86%		
Southern Australia	98,288,960	87.65%			315,962,620,000	94.14%		
Australia	112,136,779	100.00%			335,630,777,530	100.00%		

Source: <https://datahub.freightaustralia.gov.au/explore/interactives/Imports%20and%20Exports>.

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