

Ultimately the irritations, delays and the cost of maintaining inland Customs border posts between the colonies became a crucial element in the Federation debate. It was also argued that border duties between the colonies interfered with trade and disrupted travellers.

The abolishing of inter-colonial customs duties between the colonies and the establishment of a Customs union common to all Australia was to be enshrined in the Federal Constitution of 1901.

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Australian trade statistics among 'best in the world'

Due to a good working relationship between the Australian Customs Service and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), trade statistics available from the ABS are now 'among the best in the world'.

Mr George Stockham, Director of Customs Planning and Performance Analysis Unit, says the statistics in ABS publications such as *International Merchandise Trade* are compiled by the ABS from information submitted to Customs by exporters, importers or their agents.

"Every night, Customs sends the ABS the full descriptions of all import and export consignments collected from Customs clearance declarations that day," Mr Stockham said.

"This information has already been vetted by Customs for accuracy, but the Bureau further cross-checks the information with other sources unavailable to Customs. Additionally, Customs has its own audit program

to cater for errors not detected at the time of initial reporting. The final result is a set of statistics more accurate than those derived from the initial reports of importers and exporters.

The ABS uses Customs information for many of its trade publications and offers consultancies on exports and imports, including:

- commodity information;
- value of goods—customs value;
- country of origin for imports;
- country of final destination for exports;
- nature of entry details;
- import duty rates; and
- amount of duty paid on goods cleared.

"Data collected by Customs is used to compile essential information about Australia's trade role at an international level," Mr Stockham said.

"These statistics assist businesses competing in international trade, assist the Federal Government to formulate and monitor policy initiatives, and act as a guide for international trade negotiations.

"Internationally, many other Customs administrations produce and publish trade figures and then supply them to their national statistical bureaus. However, studies by ABS have concluded that Australian statistics are amongst the best in the world."