



In this Bulletin: Imports of goods

This Bulletin includes new estimates of the value of goods imported to St Helena during the 2020/21 financial year. As a small, remote island, St Helena's economy depends heavily on imports of both goods and services from abroad. A wide range of goods are imported, including food, alcohol and tobacco, fuel, machinery, and other manufactured products, mostly from South Africa and the United Kingdom.

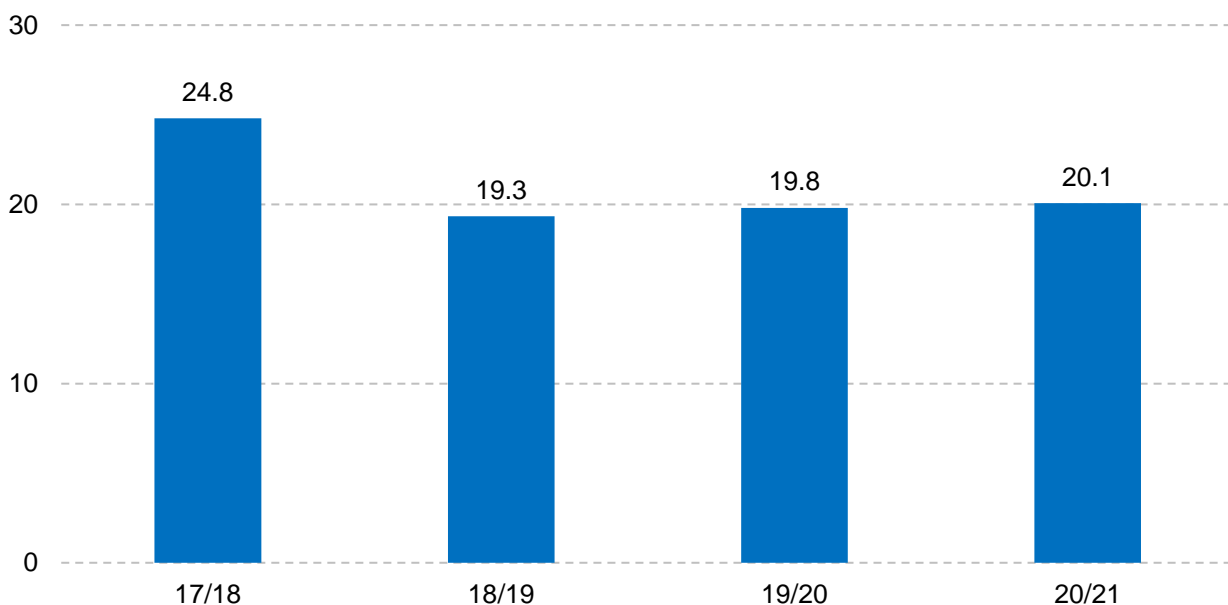
The data released in this Bulletin can be downloaded from the St Helena Statistics website in the 'Trade.xls' file at: www.sainthelena.gov.sh/statistics; this file also includes estimates of coffee and fish exports, the two main commodities that St Helena sells abroad, including estimates for 2020/21.

This Bulletin focuses on the imports of goods, but it should be noted that St Helena's trade with other countries also includes imports and exports of services, as well as goods. Imports of services include medical treatment and training programmes abroad, communications services, and services delivered by persons visiting the Island but who do not live on St Helena. St Helena's service exports include spending on St Helena by tourists and short-term visitors; estimates of this non-resident spending on St Helena are available from Statistical Bulletin 5 of 2021 on Arrivals and Departures.

Value of goods imported

Chart 1 shows the total value of goods imports to St Helena for the last four years. The value of imports in 2017/18 was higher than more recent years due to the construction associated with St Helena's new airport. Over the last three years, the value of imports has increased slightly, by just under 4%, although it is unlikely that this represents an increase in the quantity of goods imported, since prices have increased in both South Africa (by roughly 8-10%) and the United Kingdom (by roughly 2%) in the same period.

Chart 1. Total imports of goods to St Helena, 2017/18 to 2020/21, £ millions (current prices)



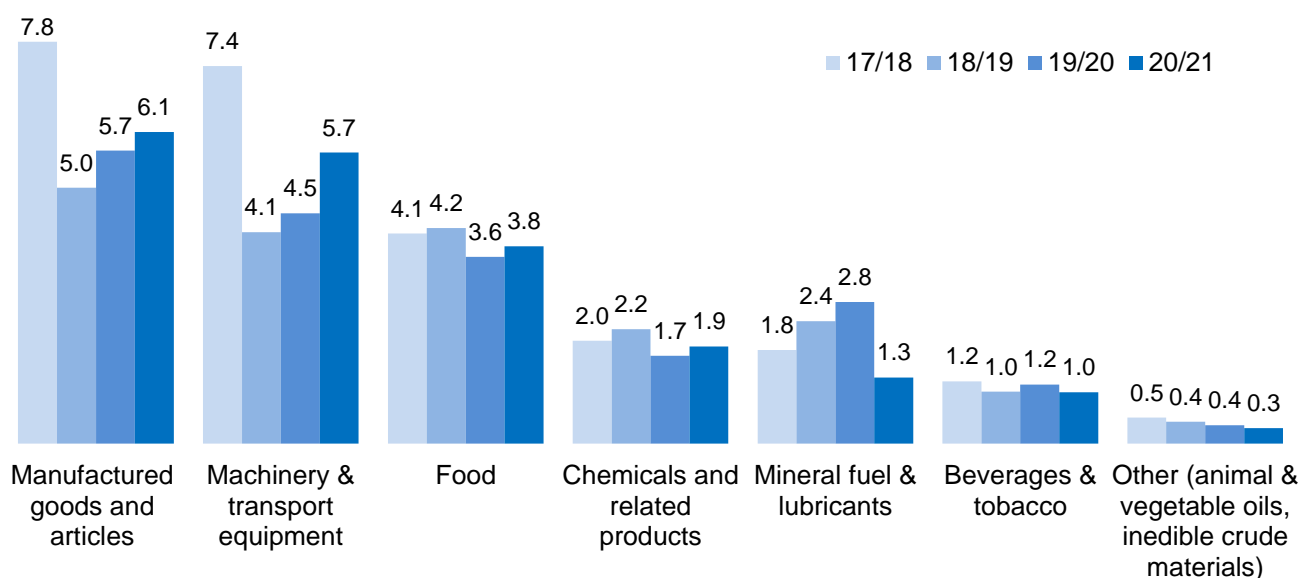
Type of goods imported

When goods are imported into St Helena, importers make a declaration to the Customs authorities which details the commodities being imported using a tariff code. This is primarily used to determine the amount of import taxes payable, but it is also used to categorise goods imported into the type of commodity.

Chart 2 shows imports for the last four financial years, classified into broad commodity groups. A large proportion of St Helena's imports are manufactured goods and machinery and transport equipment, together accounting for well over half of the total for each year. Within these two groups, the categories with the highest value of imports was 'Road Vehicles', which was £1.5m in 2020/21 and £1.4m in 2019/20; this category includes passenger cars and trucks, buses, commercial vehicles, and parts and spares for road vehicles.

Imports in these two groups tends to vary from year to year and can be affected by large-scale infrastructure projects. For instance, in 2017/18, some of these imports were related to construction work related to the Airport, and so the value for that year in this category is correspondingly higher. The increase in the grouping 'Machinery and Transport Equipment' in 2020/21 (£5.7m compared to £4.5m the year before) is due in part to imports of electrical machinery for the new undersea telecommunications cable.

Chart 2. Imports of goods to St Helena by broad commodity group, 2017/18 to 2020/21, £ millions (current prices)



Note: Some categories in this chart are combinations of the standard groupings.

Food is the third largest group of imported goods, with a value of £3.8m in 2020/21, and it is also relatively stable – consumption of food is related to the number of people living on the Island, which has not changed significantly in recent years.

Some commodities are imported infrequently in bulk; the most significant is mineral fuel, which is imported via a fuel tanker arriving roughly once every three months, or four times a year, plus smaller quantities of aviation fuel imported on St Helena's cargo ship, the MV *Helena*. Although consumption of fuel is usually quite steady – it is used to generate electricity, and for air, road and sea transport – the annual total value can vary depending on the timing of the fuel tanker, as well as the price paid. For instance, there were five tanker arrivals in 2019/20, but only four tanker arrivals in 20/21, which contributed to the large drop in the value of imported fuel of around £1.5m. But the biggest contributor to this drop in 2020/21 was due to the fall in demand for aviation fuel caused by the COVID-19 pandemic: in 2019/20 there were around 100 passenger plane arrivals at St Helena Airport, but in 2020/21 there were only 31, and many of these were smaller aircraft used for medical emergencies.

Imports of food, beverages and tobacco

Within the broad food grouping, imports of cereals and meat products had the highest value in 2020/21 of around £670 thousand each (Table 1). Vegetables and fruit, and dairy products and eggs, were third and fourth in the table, with £530 thousand and £429 thousand respectively.

Table 1. Imports of food, beverages and tobacco, 2017/18 to 2020/21, £ thousands (current prices)

	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21
Food and non-alcoholic beverages				
Cereals & cereal preparations	502	635	532	670
Meat & meat preparations	688	925	775	670
Vegetables & fruit	783	646	554	530
Dairy products & eggs	444	488	480	429
Non-alcoholic beverages	399	395	386	335
Coffee, tea, cocoa, spices	352	371	271	289
Animal feed	302	320	343	277
Sugars & sugar preparations	144	169	122	118
Fish, crustaceans, molluscs	64	59	59	49
Other food products	811	586	502	811
Alcohol & tobacco				
Alcoholic beverages	630	421	580	494
Tobacco & tobacco products	184	196	185	171

The value of alcoholic beverages imported in 2020/21 was £494 thousand, a decrease compared to 2019/20 but an increase on the value imported in 2018/19. The value of tobacco imports in 2020/21 was £171 thousand, lower than in any of the previous three years. Similarly the value of non-alcoholic beverages imported in 2020/21 was also lower than any of the previous three years, at £335 thousand.

Country of purchase of imported goods

Almost all goods imported to St Helena are purchased in the United Kingdom or South Africa, reflecting the route of St Helena's main cargo ship (the MV *Helena*) between Cape Town in South Africa and Jamestown. Very broadly, St Helena spends roughly the same in the UK and South Africa on imported goods (see Chart 3), although there are slightly different trends. Most of the goods imported from other countries is mineral fuel (i.e. petrol and diesel), which is purchased from a supplier in the Netherlands.

Some of the trends in Chart 3 are caused by price inflation and by the change in the value of the Rand compared to the Pound: goods from South Africa must be purchased in Rand, the South African currency, and so the value of goods imported from there may reflect the value of the Rand compared to the St Helena Pound at the time. When the Rand is weak compared to the Pound, the value of a fixed amount of goods purchased in South Africa may fall when valued in St Helena Pounds, if the price of those goods in Rand remains unchanged (though, in practice, a weakening currency is likely itself to result in price increases.) The large value of imports from South Africa in 2017/18 is related to the Airport construction project.

Chart 3. Imports of goods to St Helena by recorded country of purchase, 2017/18 to 2020/21, £ millions (current prices)

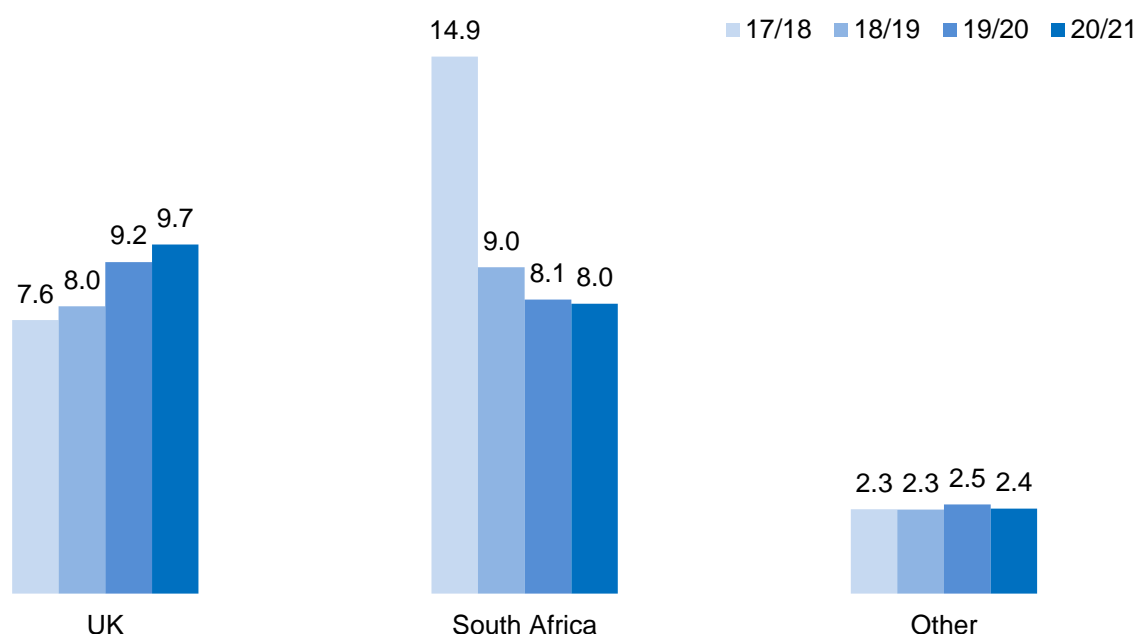
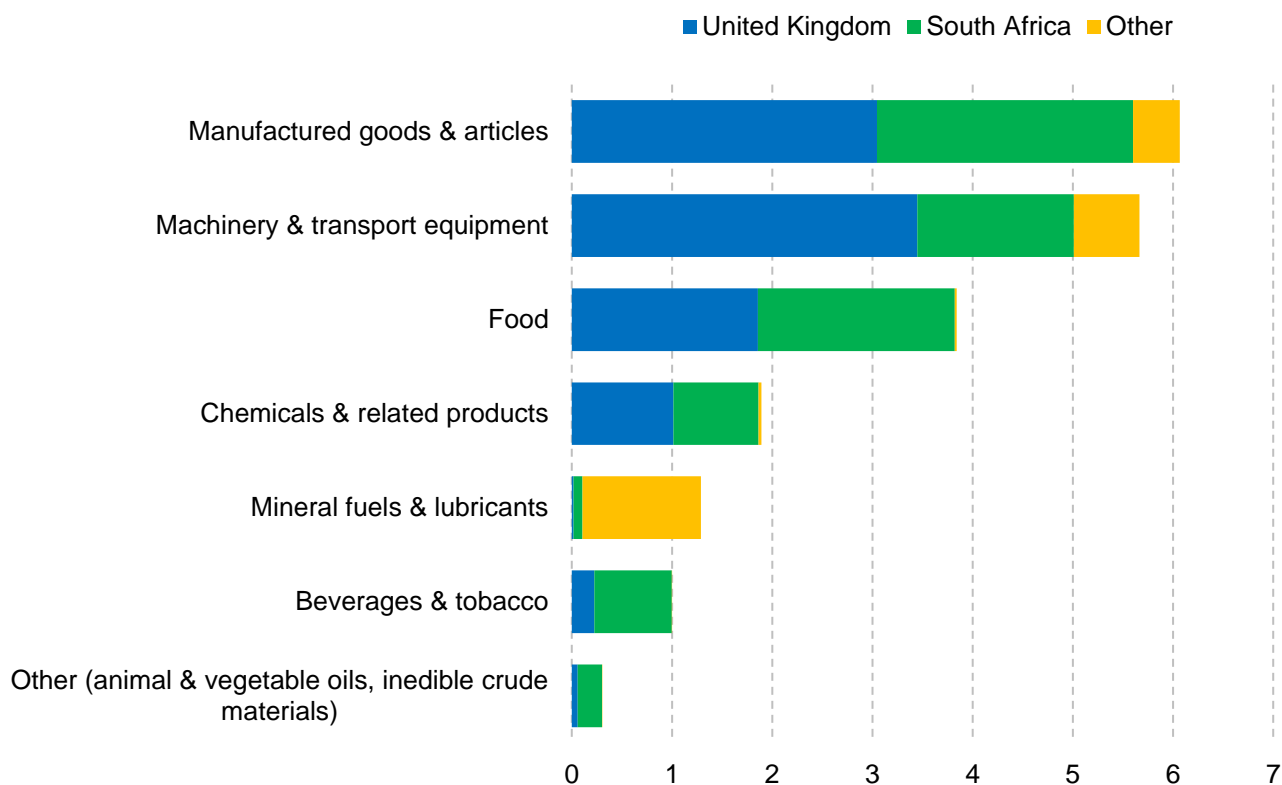


Table 2 shows the breakdown of goods imported in 2020/21 by broad commodity grouping. In 2020/21 roughly half of all food imports were purchased in the United Kingdom, and the other half in South Africa. In the same year, more than half of all machinery and transport equipment was bought from United Kingdom suppliers, and most mineral fuel was purchased from suppliers in other countries, notably Netherlands for petrol and diesel. Almost 80% of beverages and tobacco products were imported from South Africa.

Table 2. Imports of goods to St Helena by broad commodity group and country of purchase, 2020/21, £ millions (current prices)

	United Kingdom	South Africa	Other	Total
Manufactured goods & articles	3.05	2.55	0.47	6.07
Machinery & transport equipment	3.45	1.56	0.66	5.67
Food	1.86	1.96	0.02	3.84
Chemicals & related products	1.01	0.85	0.03	1.89
Mineral fuels & lubricants	0.02	0.09	1.18	1.29
Beverages & tobacco	0.23	0.77	0.00	1.00
Other (animal & vegetable oils, inedible crude materials)	0.06	0.24	0.00	0.30

Chart 4. Imports of goods to St Helena by broad commodity group and country of purchase, 2020/21, £ millions (current prices)



Methodology

The compilation methodology for international trade statistics on St Helena uses the guidelines published by the United Nations Statistics Division. More details on the international concepts and definitions can be found here: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/trade/imts/methodology.asp>.

Data source

Statistics of imports of goods are derived primarily from the administrative records resulting from the Customs process, particularly the legal requirement for a declaration to be made to the Customs authorities whenever goods are imported or exported. These declarations are stored in a computer system called ASYCUDA, managed by the Customs Office; although the Statistics Office conducts a number of consistency checks to identify and correct valuation and classification errors, the data quality of import statistics depends on the quality of information entered into the ASYCUDA system by importers and by Customs officials.

Imports and exports

Generally, imports and exports are transactions involving the exchange of goods or services between residents and non-residents. For goods, imports and exports are usually recorded whenever a commodity crosses the boundary of an economy, typically a border entry point, or a 'bonded' warehouse (a place where goods liable to import taxes are stored).

Valuation

On St Helena, the value recorded by importers for the assessment of import taxes and duties is 'free-on-board' (or FOB), rather than 'cost, insurance and freight' (or CIF); import statistics are therefore also based on the FOB valuation of goods. In effect, this means that St Helena's import statistics are based on the invoice value paid by the importer in the country of purchase, and they do not include the costs of shipment, or any duties or taxes paid.

Goods are counted as imported when they enter the domestic economy; in this regard, goods imported into bonded warehouses are only counted when they are released from bond. Goods imported after being temporarily exported for repair are also not included. Similarly, machinery imported on a temporary basis, for example to support construction products, is not included.

Goods purchased with prices in foreign currency (such as the Rand) are valued in Pounds based on the exchange rate used for the Customs transaction; in some cases this can differ slightly from the recommended approach for the statistical valuation of trade, which is to use the exchange rate used by the importer when they purchased the goods.

Values are reported in 'current prices', that is, the value recorded at the time of the transaction, without any adjustment for the changes in prices of commodities over time (i.e., price inflation).

Volumes

The quality of the information collected by the Customs Office on the quantities of commodities imported does not currently allow the calculation of statistics of the volume or quantities imported.

Classification of commodities

Commodities are classified by importers using an eight digit tariff code, which is based on the international six digit 'Harmonised System' classification maintained by the World Customs Organisation. In this report, and for the presentation of St Helena's trade statistics generally, the Standard International Trade Classification is used; this was developed for analytical purposes by the United Nations Statistics Division, while the Harmonised System is primarily designed for the admiration of Customs systems. There are correspondence tables between these two classification systems, which enables St Helena's trade statistics to be analysed and presented using either classification.

Data frequency

The trade statistics in this Bulletin are presented by financial year, and the Statistics Office currently analyses the ASYCUDA database every year. However, data are computed by quarter, which can allow calculation of trade statistics by calendar year, or by quarter if required. Any analysis of quarterly import statistics should be made with care, however, since they can be affected by the timing of the MV *Helena* in particular.

Get the data

For tables of the main aggregates of trade statistics, please visit: <https://www.sainthelena.gov.sh/st-helena/statistics/> and download the 'trade' data file. For any questions or queries about the imports of specific commodities, please contact the staff of the Statistics Office (see below). Other datasets, bulletins and reports are also available on our website: <http://www.sainthelena.gov.sh/statistics>.

Have more questions or comments?

Please get in touch: we are Neil Fantom, Statistical Commissioner, Kelly Clingham and Justine Joshua, Senior Statistical Assistants, and Bertina Benjamin, Statistical Assistant. You can find us in person at the Statistics Office on the **first floor of the Castle**, Jamestown, at the back of the main courtyard. You can also contact us by telephone: our direct line is **22138** or via the Castle switchboard on 22470. If calling from overseas, the international dialling code for St Helena is +290. Our general office e-mail address is: statistics@sainthelena.gov.sh, or you can email team members directly (the format is firstname.lastname@sainthelena.gov.sh).