

GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

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AUSTRALIAN IMPORT RESTRICTIONS

Statement by the Minister for Trade, The Rt. Hon. J. McEwen

The following Press statement, dated 30 March 1958, has been received from the Government of Australia, and is circulated for the information of contracting parties:

There will be no reduction in the present total ceiling for imports fixed at approximately £800 million per annum, the Rt. Hon. J. McEwen, Minister for Trade announced today.

Within this ceiling, the Government had introduced several measures to simplify the administration of import licensing. It was proposed to exempt certain basic raw materials from licensing, the Minister said. The licensing procedures applied to certain dollar area goods were also being simplified and it was proposed to license more goods without discrimination against dollar area sources of supply.

From August last year imports of petroleum products were exempted from import licensing. It was now proposed to extend similar treatment to a number of basic raw materials. These goods were already being licensed to full requirements because of their importance to the economy. Importers would be asked to supply information concerning their usages to enable imports to be forecast but there would no longer be any need for importers to obtain import licences for these goods.

It was also proposed to exempt books of non-dollar area origin from licensing and to place books from the dollar area, except fiction, on the "N.Q.R." list, i.e. licences would be freely issued for dollar books, except fiction.

Mr. McEwen said that certain other dollar area goods now being licensed within the Administrative Budget would in future be handled directly by Collectors. There would be no change in the level of licensing applied to these items but the change in procedures would do away with the need for importers to approach the Department of Trade before obtaining their licences from the Collector of Customs.

A decision had also been taken to extend the area of non-discrimination against dollar goods, the Minister said. In October 1955 a system of "World" licensing was introduced whereby certain goods were licensed without differentiation between dollar and non-dollar sources of supply. This action had been taken to give local industry access to the most economic sources of supply and to maintain good trade relations with our dollar trading partners. The system had been extended to additional goods since that time and it was proposed from April to add more items to it. Thus the dollar area discrimination will be removed from all these goods and administrative procedures will be simplified for some of them by removing the need for importers to approach the Department of Trade before obtaining licences from the Collector of Customs.

The Minister explained that the changes were consistent with the Government's long-term aim of removing controls altogether. Until this is possible, Mr. McEwen said, every effort will be made to reduce to a minimum the administrative requirements which importers are asked to carry out.

Licensing instructions setting out the details of these changes would be issued by the Collectors of Customs in the next few days.

The Minister said that these actions were being taken within the framework of a general decision by the Government not to vary the import level for the present.

Mr. McEwen said the Government had taken the decision to maintain the import ceiling at the present level after a careful examination of export prospects for the coming year and the overall balance-of-payments prospects and in the light of views expressed by industry organizations and by the Import Consultative Committee.

The Government had been conscious of the need to minimize the disruptive effects of frequent changes in the level of import licensing. The decision to maintain imports at the same ceiling had therefore been taken to retain the benefits of stability which had been achieved by the import licensing relaxations made during 1957. The position would be kept under close and continuous review during the year.

Mr. McEwen said that it was important to understand, however, that this decision could require the Department of Trade to look more closely at import requirements for the next financial year because of the increasing pressures being exerted in the economy for additional imports.

Rising population and national income created a larger demand for import goods of all kinds, Mr. McEwen said. Increased import requirements were necessary for some local industries and importers may find, therefore, that there were some reductions in some licensing allocations.

CHANGES IN IMPORT LICENSING

Goods to be exempted from import licensing

Nickel ingots and shot; narcotic drugs; books of non-dollar origin; rock phosphate; some manures, mainly muriate and sulphate of potash; ferrous alloys; industrial diamonds; abrasives; mercury; razorite; cryolite; vermiculite ore.

Goods to be licensed by the Department of Trade without Dollar discrimination

Nickel anodes; pine oil; boric acid; boron salts; petroleum jelly for industrial uses; manilla hemp fibres; corkwood and cork waste; diatomaceous earth; medicinal paraffin; unexposed film for T.V. production; thermit, and other welding compounds.

Goods to be handled directly by Collectors of Customs without Dollar discrimination

Card clothing for textile working machines; graphite and plumbago; castor oil; palm oil, magnesite, dead burned; asphalt mastic; fullers earth in bulk; fluorspar; vanilla beans; felspar; kapok fibre, raw silk, earths and clays other than bentonite.

Goods to be licensed on a replacement basis without Dollar discrimination

Titanium dioxide; bronzing and metal powders; paper shavings and waste; granulated cork.

Goods to be licensed freely from the Dollar Area

Books and printed matter (excluding fiction, and magazines such as comics, westerns, etc.).