

SARS Media Release – Inclusion of new data in South Africa’s Trade Statistics

Pretoria, 14 NOVEMBER 2013 – The Minister of Finance has approved that South Africa’s trade statistics will in future include data in respect of trade with Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland (BLNS countries).

BLNS country-trade statistics have previously not been included in the trade statistics. This arose historically because of the free flow of trade from a customs duty point of view within the Southern African Customs Union (SACU).

BLNS merchandise trade however, has a material impact on South Africa’s trade balance. South Africa exported R103.8bn to and imported R21.5bn from BLNS countries. In the last full year (2012) this resulted in a positive trade balance of R82.3bn for trade with BLNS countries.

South Africa’s total trade deficit for 2012 was R116.9bn. Had the BLNS trade data been included, the deficit would have been R34.6bn.

The view is therefore that direct trade within the BLNS countries should be included in the calculation of the monthly trade statistics to provide a more accurate reflection of South Africa’s trade.

Furthermore, SARS’s customs modernisation programme has resulted in its systems moving to new technologically enhanced platforms that enabled better electronic capturing of trade data that was previously done manually. The modernised system greatly improves the accuracy of trade data and allows the reporting and analysis of trade data to be done in real-time.

SARS worked very closely with the National Treasury (NT) and the South Africa Reserve Bank (SARB) in preparing the trade statistics that includes trade with the BLNS countries.

The SARB has welcomed the revision of the trade statistics “as valuable additions to building block data used to compile South Africa’s balance of payments.”

“While the Bank has always included estimates of the trade between South Africa and this group of countries in its compilation of South Africa’s overall imports and exports, the new building block data will be incorporated in the balance of payments, leading to improved measurement. Previously published statistics will also be revised. The revised balance of payments data for South Africa will be finalised in the next few weeks and published in the Bank’s Quarterly Bulletin, due to be released on 3 December 2013,” the SARB said in a statement.

Although SARS is confident as to the accuracy of the BLNS trade numbers, it is SARS’s intention to approach the United Nations to review the treatment of South Africa’s trade data that will now include BLNS trade numbers.

In addition to the inclusion of the BLNS trade figures, SARS is also contemplating certain other revisions to improve the reporting of trade statistics in the future. Some of these include the following:

- publishing of imports on both a Free On Board (FOB) and a Cost Insurance Freight (CIF) basis to align it with UN principles,
- compiling statistics on the date when the goods are actually released into or from South Africa's economy, rather than using the date on which the goods entered the customs' system for ultimate release from or into the SA economy, and
- publishing gold exports as recorded on the SARS system reflecting the physical export movement of gold as opposed to the current practice of reporting the SARB gold export data on the IMF change of ownership basis.

These changes will however, only be finalised and implemented after consultation with international experts and other relevant stakeholders.

The preliminary numbers following the inclusion of the BLNS trade, are summarised in the following tables for—

- The month of September 2013
- The nine months to September 2013
- The calendar years from 2010 to 2012

Month of September 2013	EXPORTS		IMPORTS		TRADE BALANCE
Previously Published	R	66 528 752 930	R	85 469 782 004	R -18 941 029 074
BLNS	R	9 326 258 736	R	2 335 442 577	R 6 990 816 159
Restated	R	75 855 011 666	R	87 805 224 581	R -11 950 212 915

9 Months to September 2013	EXPORTS		IMPORTS		TRADE BALANCE
Previously Published	R	595 793 294 503	R	722 162 512 206	R -126 369 217 703
BLNS	R	81 600 314 722	R	19 690 872 288	R 61 909 442 434
Restated	R	677 393 609 225	R	741 853 384 494	R -64 459 775 269

2012	EXPORTS		IMPORTS		TRADE BALANCE
Previously Published	R	714 166 256 568	R	831 069 902 124	R -116 903 645 556
BLNS	R	103 636 176 637	R	21 362 414 161	R 82 273 762 476
Restated	R	817 802 433 205	R	852 432 316 285	R -34 629 883 080

2011	EXPORTS		IMPORTS		TRADE BALANCE
Previously Published	R	701 198 215 884	R	725 764 259 923	R -24 566 044 039
BLNS	R	87 326 069 841	R	18 725 125 617	R 68 600 944 224
Restated	R	788 524 285 725	R	744 489 385 540	R 44 034 900 185

2010	EXPORTS		IMPORTS		TRADE BALANCE
Previously Published	R	584 317 975 449	R	587 203 653 878	R -2 885 678 429
BLNS	R	80 724 703 848	R	17 718 378 130	R 63 006 325 718
Restated	R	665 042 679 297	R	604 922 032 008	R 60 120 647 289

ENDS.

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