



NAB CASHLESS RETAIL SALES INDEX MARCH 2019

NAB Group Economics

HIGHLIGHTS

- We forecast that ABS retail trade for March will grow moderately, up 0.3% on a month on month basis. While Christmas and January were weak, the February ABS print was very strong – up 0.8%. This exceeded our forecast at the time, which was 0.3% (now revised to 0.5%). The strong ABS print was underlined by a particularly strong result for department stores and food, which, on our data, did not continue in March.
- The NAB cashless retail sales index previously grew faster than the ABS series, reflecting a shift from cash to cards. However the trend has substantially changed in recent months. On a year on year basis, the NAB series was up only 4.3% in March, compared to 8.3% as recently as January. This stark change is shown in chart 1 below. We will be further investigating why the trend has changed. One possible cause is that cashless technology is reaching saturation point and is now no longer outpacing overall transactions.

COMMENTS FROM NAB GROUP CHIEF ECONOMIST ALAN OSTER

The strong ABS print in February exceeded our expectations and indeed those of the market. It's fair to say that we are sceptical whether such strong growth will continue. Our model forecasts a somewhat more modest 0.3% gain in March, although if it turns out that the February ABS print overshoot, there is something of a downside risk. Other NAB data, such as the *Monthly Business Survey*, continue to show challenging conditions for the retail sector. The March Business Survey found that retail remained the weakest industry in the survey, although retail prices did strengthen slightly.

Our outlook for the Australian economy ultimately sees the consumer still struggling with their cash-flow and hence with any discretionary spending. Also house price falls will see construction activity fall another 20% over the next two years. In our latest outlook, we now expect Sydney house prices to decline by around 20% from peak to trough, while Melbourne is expected to fall around 15%. That said infrastructure spending, NDIS spending in public consumption and LNG exports will support the economy.

Year-on-year growth (% s.a.)			
	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19
NAB Cashless Index*	8.3	7.2	4.3
ABS Retail Trade	2.7	3.2	--
NAB ABS Retail Trade forecast	2.3	2.3	2.6

Month-on-month growth (% s.a.)			
	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19
NAB Cashless Index*	0.6	0.5	-0.4
ABS retail Trade	0.1	0.8	--
NAB ABS Retail Trade forecast	0.4	0.5	0.3

Sources: NAB, Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). *Data seasonally adjusted (s.a.) using TRAMO/SEATS with a trading-day and Easter adjustment.

Chart 1: Cashless and total retail sales

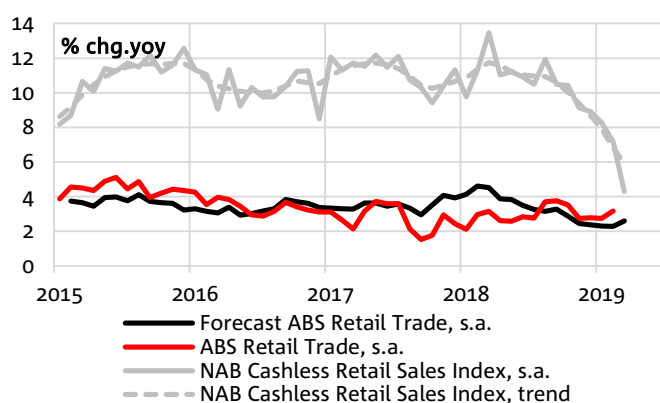
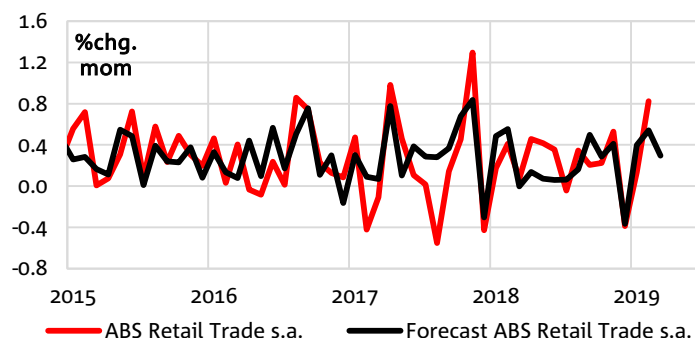


Chart 2: ABS and forecast ABS retail trade data, s.a

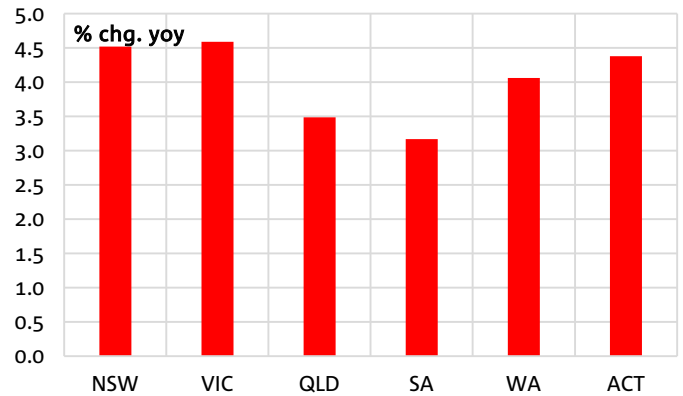


DETAILED CHARTS

Chart 3: Cashless retail sales by industry, s.a.



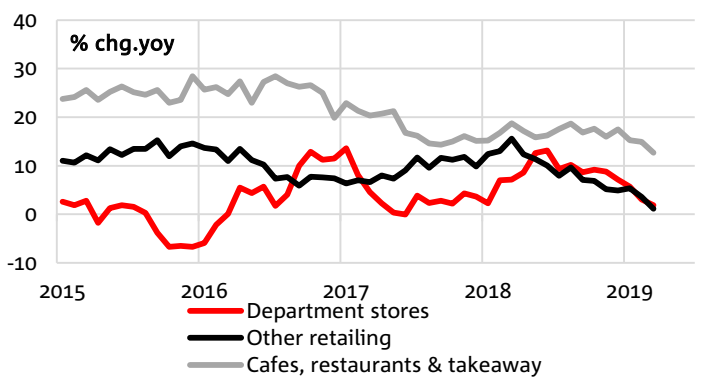
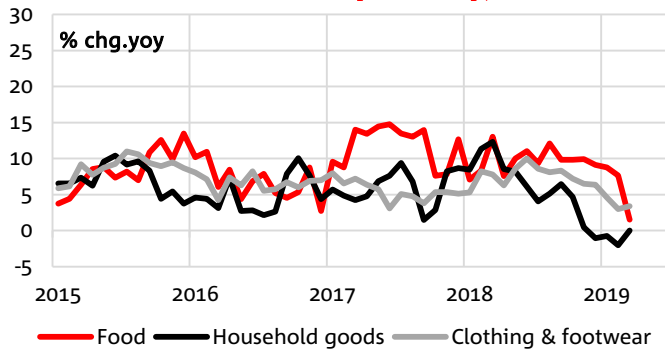
Chart 4: Cashless retail sales by state, s.a.



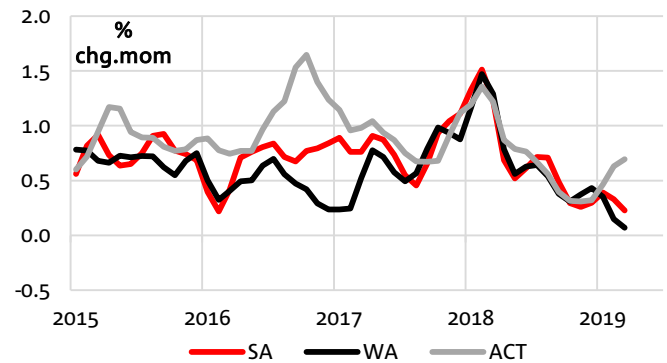
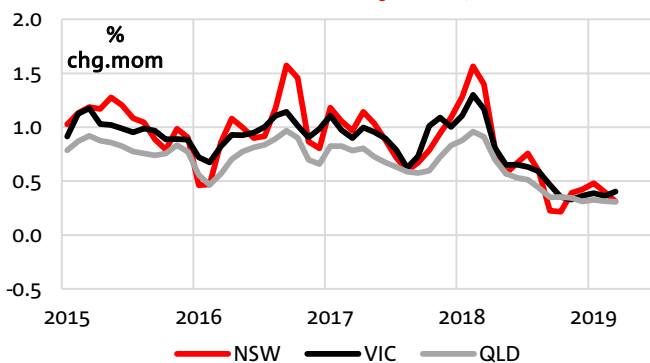
Charts 5&6: Cashless retail sales by sub-industry, s.a.



Charts 7&8: Cashless sales by industry, s.a



Charts 9&10: Cashless sales by state, trend



ABOUT THE INDEX

The NAB Cashless Retail Index is broader than the NAB Online Retail Index and measures all cashless retail spending by consumers using debit and credit cards (both in person and online), BPAY and Paypal. The index is derived from personal transaction data from NAB platforms (around 2 million transactions per day) and offers a 2-3 week lead on ABS retail trade data. Likely reflecting the increasing popularity of online and contactless payments, the NAB Cashless Retail Index has continued to outpace the ABS measure of retail sales (7.9% y/y versus 2.5% y/y in February 2019).

RBA research suggests 18% of the value of retail trade occurred via cash in 2016. We use mapping equations to forecast the official ABS measure of retail trade. Over time, the growth rates of the two series are likely to come together.

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APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY AND COMPARISON WITH ABS RETAIL TRADE

The NAB Cashless Retail Sales Index is derived from NAB transactions data that have been assigned from particular merchant codes to retail industries by state. NAB electronic transactions data are based on an average 2 million transactions per day. The data are collected in real time at event record level, which allows significant flexibility to segment the data by time, location and merchant type. Transactions data may include EFTPOS, Credit Card, BPAY, Bank Transfers, Direct Debits and Paypal services where available, and include transactions with Australian and international merchants. Spending includes both online and offline transactions. The data excludes cash withdrawals made during a purchase and purchases made offline in an overseas location.

The data only capture electronic retail transactions (and not those through cash payments), hence it is subject to the changing nature and take-up rate of electronic payment methods relative to cash. Any growth in the overall transaction value may be attributable to either an increased preference towards card-based payments by consumers (such as near-field payment “PayWave”), or a higher level of spending across the economy by consumers, i.e. a pick-up in nominal sales. However, it is currently not possible to differentiate between these effects. Customer spending is based on where the customer lives, which may or may not be where the actual spending activity occurs. Customers without an Australian residential address are excluded.

These estimates are aggregated into national industries by applying to them the state shares of each industry from the ABS retail trade publication. State estimates are aggregated by applying the industry shares of each state from the same source. These adjustments are intended to correct for differences between the incidence of NAB transactions across industries and states when compared with the official ABS data.

The industry and state data have been seasonally adjusted using Tramo-SEATS with a trading day and Easter adjustment. Given the relatively short time frame for the data, this seasonal adjustment process should be regarded as provisional: estimates are likely to change as a longer run of data becomes available, and can be revised from month-to-month given the concurrent process. The trends have been extracted from the same process.

Our aim is to have a data series that is as reflective as possible of retail spend. As such each month we will revise previous data to take into account changes in payment processing such as chargebacks and delayed payments. Given these attributes, typically, larger revisions occur to the most recent months, and diminish as the data ages.

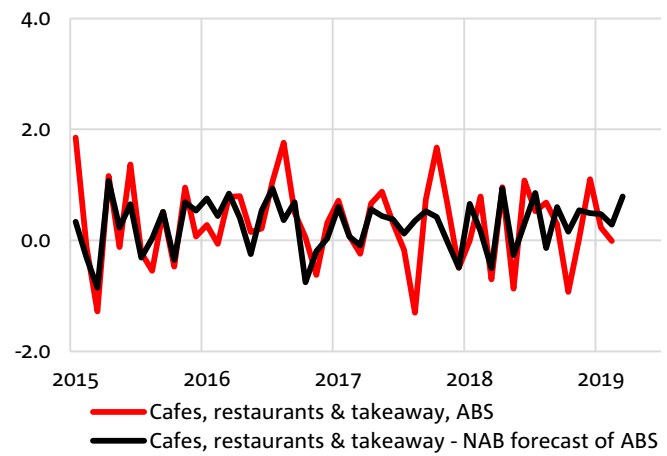
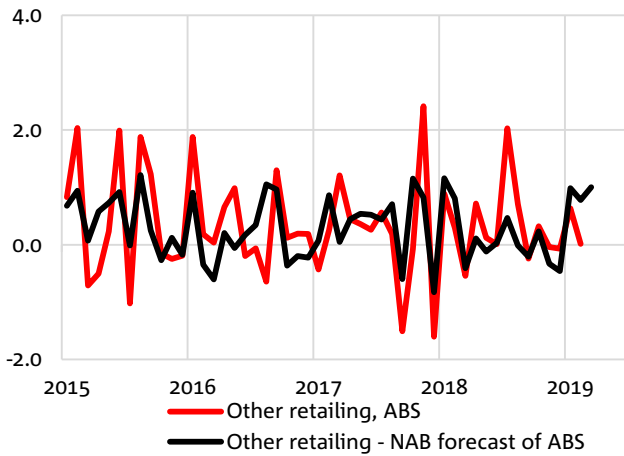
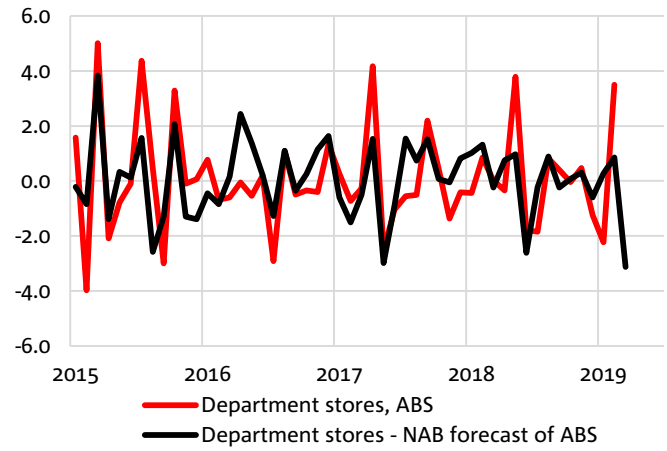
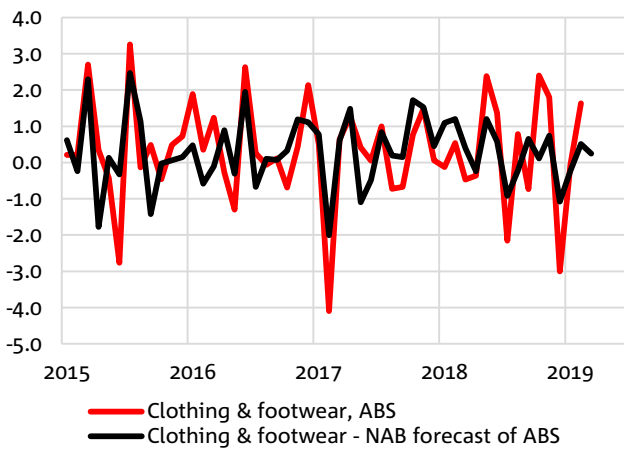
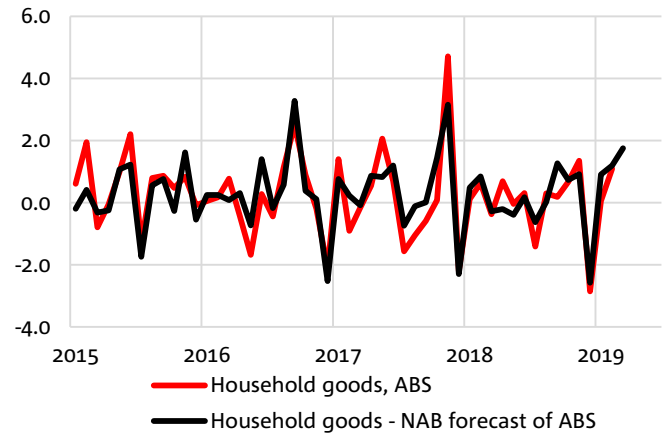
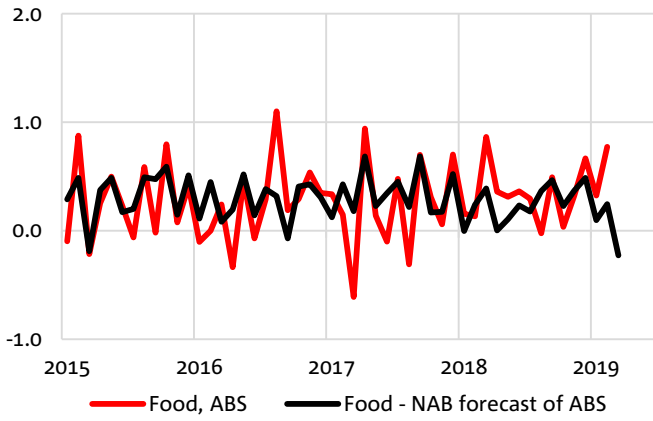
After appropriate weighting and seasonal adjustment, the components of NAB’s cashless retail index (food, household goods, clothing & footwear, department stores, other retailing and cafes, restaurants & takeaway) can generate predictions of the corresponding ABS retail trade series. Aggregating these provides a forecast of total ABS retail trade.

The charts in the appendix show the relationship between the ABS total and NAB Cashless retail sales measures mapped to the ABS using monthly seasonally adjusted data, for the main retail industry groups. The sources of difference between the two series are:

- The inclusion of cash transactions in the ABS measure and changes in their share of total transactions. This share may begin to stabilise as the penetration of contactless payment systems reaches a limit reflecting minimum spend requirements for cashless transactions and because of the existence of a proportion of merchants who deal only in cash.
- The NAB data include a larger share of online transactions (7%) than the ABS (3%).
- Changes in NAB’s market share of cashless transactions.
- Differences between the seasonality in the ABS and NAB series.

Therefore, the forecasts from the use of the NAB Cashless Retail Index should be used with caution.

Comparisons between mapped NAB series and ABS data by retail industry group, s.a. % change m/m



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