



# NAB CASHLESS RETAIL SALES INDEX MARCH 2021

NAB Group Economics

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Our data mapping points to further moderation in ABS retail sales growth in March – up just 0.1% m/m in our estimation. The ABS measure has experienced a slowdown in recent months, culminating in a negative print last month (well below our estimates at the time).
- While our forecast for March remains positive, it is important to note that our forecasts have outperformed ABS prints recently, suggesting that there may be some underlying downside not captured by our mapping equations at present. With much of life in Australia now returning to something resembling “normal”, consumption patterns are changing too. This points to some downside risk as the pandemic-induced retail boom in sectors like household goods subsides.
- The March NAB Monthly Business Survey reported very strong retail conditions, but weaker confidence. This may point to a moderation in retail sector conditions as consumer spending patterns normalise.

## COMMENTS FROM NAB GROUP CHIEF ECONOMIST ALAN OSTER

2021 is already showing signs that the retail sector is returning to something resembling “normal”, which is likely to see lower retail spending in areas like household goods, electronics and similar sectors. The latest NAB Monthly Business Survey is already showing signs that retailers can see this transition coming, with confidence lower than current conditions.

Our mapping equations for ABS retail sales for March suggest that while this moderation is underway, headline retail sales remain positive. However, there are some signs that our mapping equations may be over-estimating the ABS measure at present. Other NAB data indicators are already pointing to some softness in parts of the retail sector.

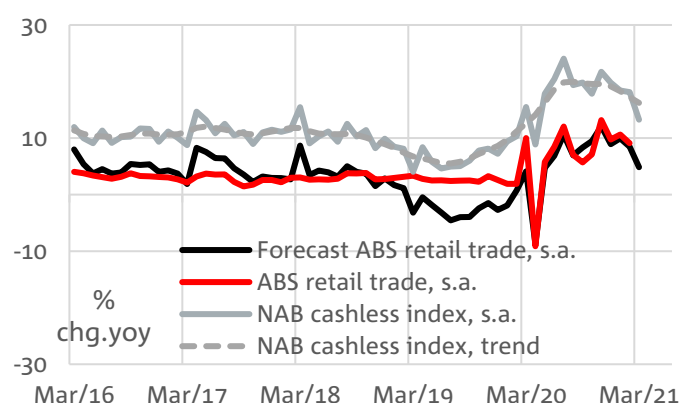
Overall, the Australian economy is recovering strongly and has out-performed many forecasters’ expectations. Unemployment has fallen quickly, although wage growth remains very subdued. Ultimately, wage growth will need to pick up from here if we are to see a sustained recovery in retail beyond the pandemic-induced surge.

|                               | Year-on-year growth (% s.a.) |        |        |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|--------|--------|
|                               | Jan-21                       | Feb-21 | Mar-21 |
| NAB Cashless Index*           | 18.4                         | 18.1   | 13.3   |
| ABS Retail Trade              | 10.6                         | 9.1    | --     |
| NAB ABS Retail Trade forecast | 10.0                         | 8.5    | 4.9    |

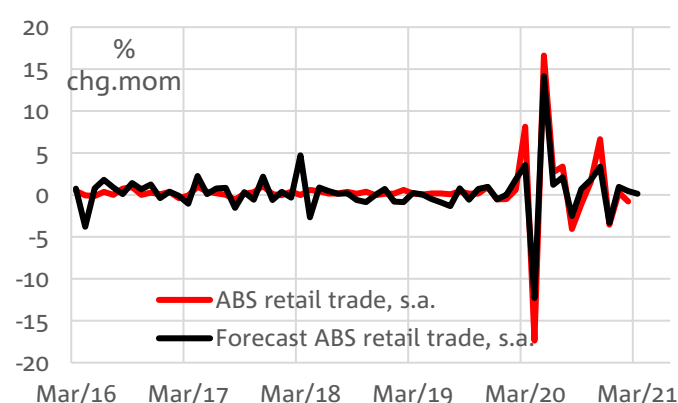
|                               | Month-on-month growth (% s.a.) |        |        |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------|--------|
|                               | Jan-21                         | Feb-21 | Mar-21 |
| NAB Cashless Index*           | 0.9                            | 1.2    | -0.5   |
| ABS retail Trade              | 0.3                            | -0.8   | --     |
| NAB ABS Retail Trade forecast | 1.0                            | 0.5    | 0.1    |

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**

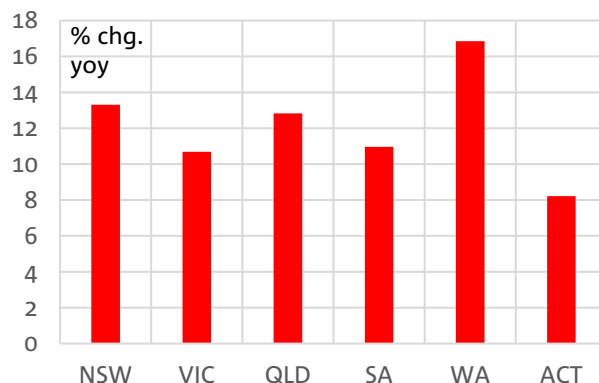


## DETAILED CHARTS

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



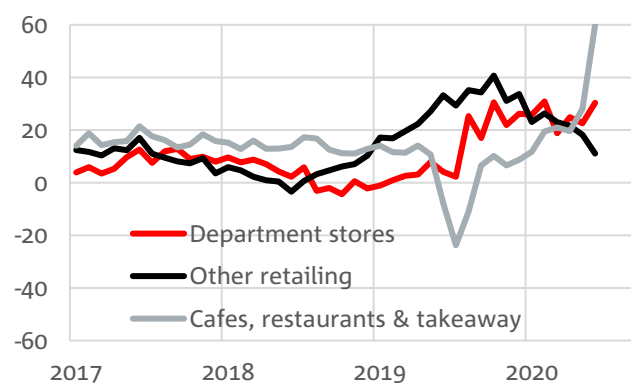
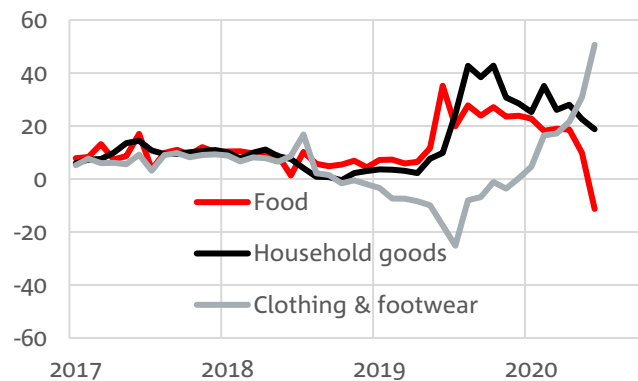
Chart 4: Cashless retail sales by state, s.a.



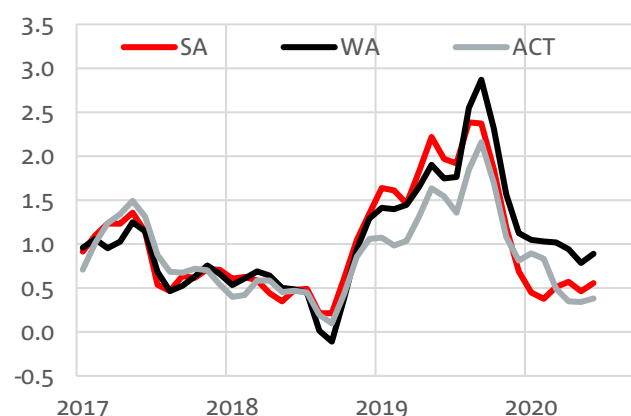
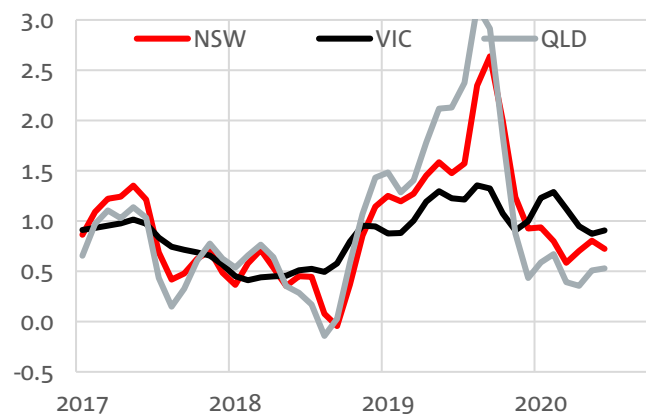
Charts 5&6: Cashless retail sales by sub-industry, s.a.



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



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.

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, hastened this year by the decline in the use of cash.

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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.

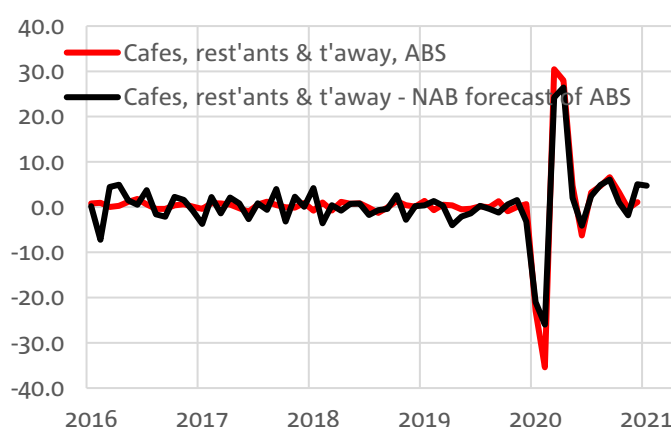
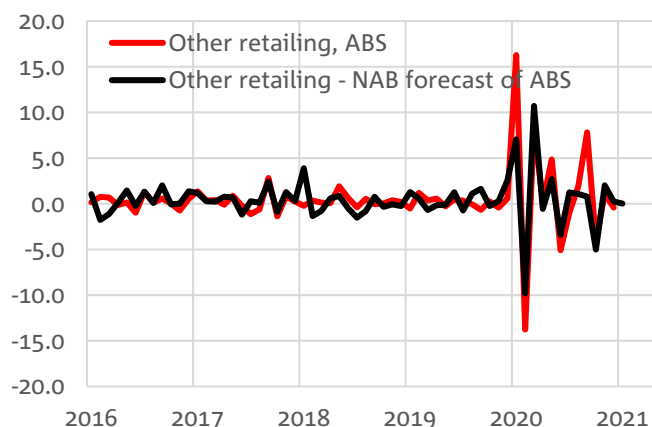
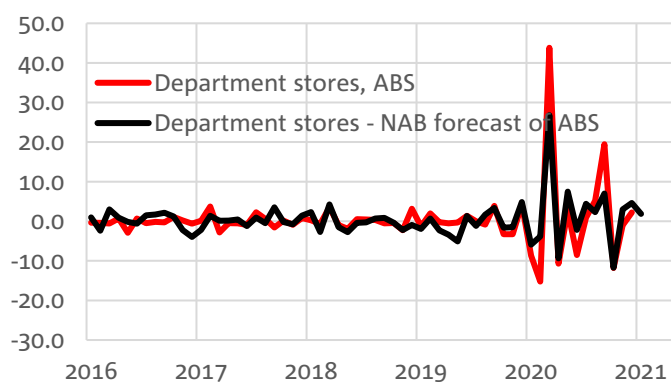
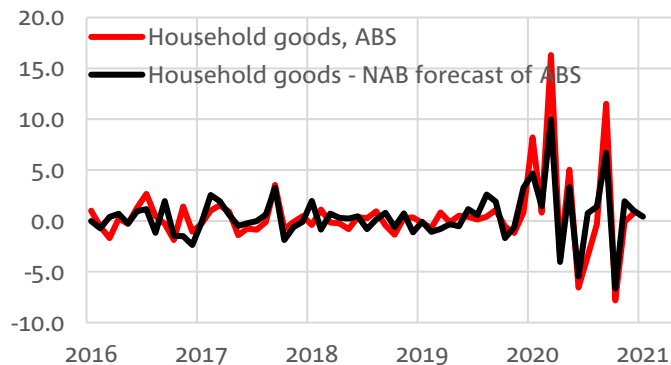
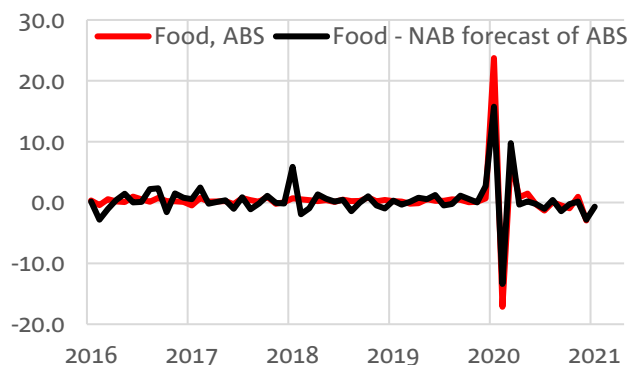
After appropriate weighting and seasonal adjustment, the components of NAB’s cashless retail index (food, household goods, clothing & footwear, department stores, other retailing and cafes, restaurants & takeaway) can generate predictions of the corresponding ABS retail trade series. Aggregating these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