# Argus Chlor-Alkali Outlook

21 May 2025





### **About this report sample**

The Argus Chlor-Alkali Outlook service gives you a comprehensive global view of the industry, including regional dynamics and feedstock insights, in a single service.

The service includes a 24-month rolling price forecast and forward-looking analysis of global chlor-alkali supply and demand, trade flows and market dynamics.

Subscribers receive access to a live interactive workspace, a monthly PowerPoint PDF written by our experts, plus the accompanying Excel data files.

To find out more, click here to get in touch.



## Designed to support the entire value chain

**Chlor-Alkali Consuming Segments Upstream Suppliers** Caustic Soda Chlor-Alkali Producers Chlorine Energy Salt Distributors/Traders **PVC Producers** Pulp & Paper Producers Alumina Producers Isocyanates Propylene Oxide Food **Chlorinated Methanes** Textiles Soaps/Detergents CFCs/FCs Water Treatment Titanium dioxide



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- 2. Regional Review: Americas, Europe, Asia-Pacific
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## Outlook executive summary

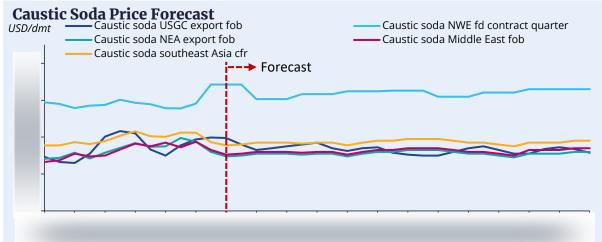
### US and Europe operating rates improve while Asia declines.

#### What's changed

- Opec+ is looking to gain market share, and this has begun to drive down oil prices and has reduced the cash cost gap between naphtha-based ethylene and ethane-based ethylene.
- The US tariff situation continues to evolve with tariffs between the US and China temporarily reduced for 90 days. This has opened a window to imports and potentially a 4–6-week window for increased production of goods for export from China, ultimately lifting demand for chloralkali derivatives.

Price Forecasts (USD/dmt)	May 25	June 25	July 25	Aug 25	Sept 25
US Gulf fob					
Northeast Asia fob					
Northwest Europe domestic contract					

<sup>\*</sup>Forecasts for monthly or quarterly contracts that are under active negotiation at the time of publication are redacted from publication to avoid influencing discussions.

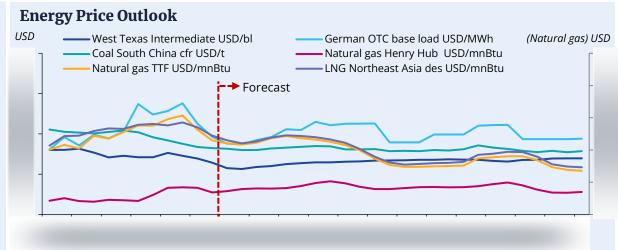


#### Short-term view, quarter ahead

- Caustic soda derivatives continue to close in the US and Europe, one pulp mill in the southeast US announced closure this month while an oil refinery and a bio-diesel plant closed in Europe.
   Additional assets in each of these markets is anticipated to close while China continues to increase their market share.
  - The arbitrage window between the Pacific basin and the Atlantic basin is expected to close in the next few weeks as supply improves in the Atlantic basin and demand in Asia increases.

#### Long-term view, 24 months ahead







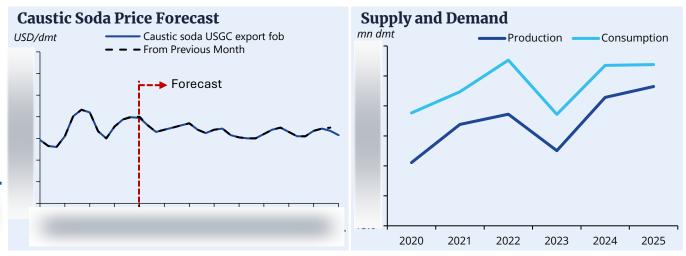
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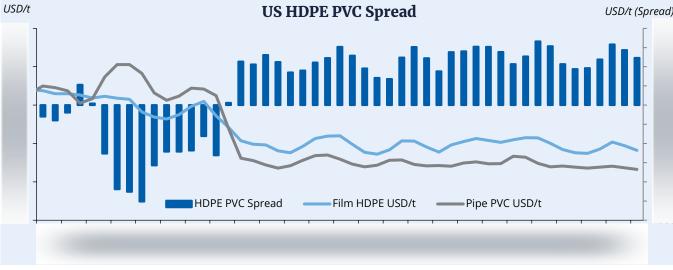


#### **Americas review**

#### Unplanned outages limit caustic soda supply.

- ▶ Planned and unplanned maintenance outages have impacted the availability of caustic soda from the US Gulf coast. This has led to one parcel of Asian material heading to the US to meet contractual obligations.
- Tariffs on US PVC by India and Europe have reduced PVC production in the US and led to an increase in EDC exports as US producers attempt to meet caustic soda contractual obligations.
- Seasonal increases in chlorine offtake into refrigerants, isocyanates, PVC, and water treatment will increase caustic soda supply, but not as much as some producers were planning, as the US GDP shrank in the first quarter and restrictive interest rates keep construction expectations below forecast.
- The manufacturing sector in the US continues to show weakness with demand reductions in the high single digits.
- Latin America continues to show resilient caustic soda demand, especially into the alumina sector. The pulp and paper sector is mixed as demand, owing to new pulp mills ramping up operating rates from last year, is showing strong growth, while existing mills are stable to weaker.
- ▶ Tariffs remain a major concern as the current US regime has implemented multiple tariffs against all of the US trading partners. The temporary delay in the application of some tariffs is adding uncertainty to the market. Some market participants have taken the tariff pause as an opportunity to restock inventories.
- ▶ The US GDP contracted in the first quarter of 2025, and concerns over a recession are looming over the market as participants are hesitant to run production assets until they have definitive orders.
- The slow conclusion of the spring maintenance season is coming to a close, although there remain a couple of plants experiencing operating issues throughout the chloralkali value chain. This has the potential to reduce the availability of caustic soda.





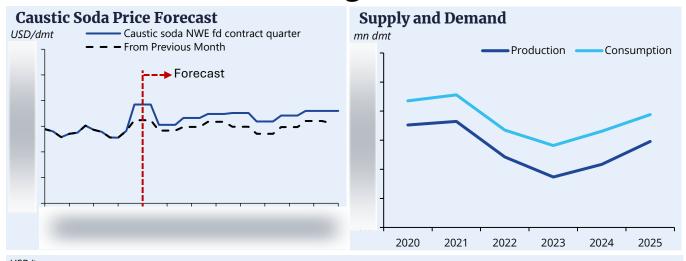
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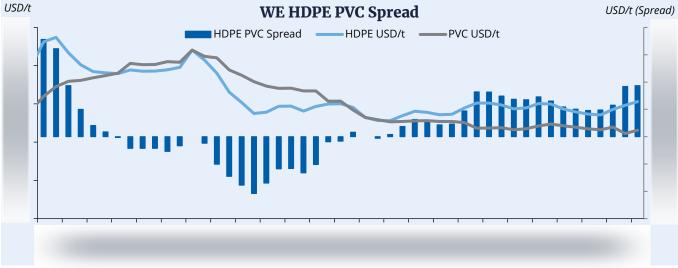
## EMAND

## **Northwest Europe review**

#### Caustic soda supply to improve as operations recover from outages.

- Caustic soda supply has begun to recover from its lower output levels in April and the early part of May. Most producers have either completed scheduled maintenance or are about to ramp up production, and we expect availability to relax within the constraints of chlorine consumption.
- Chlorine offtake is elevated during the construction season in spring, but it remains well behind historical norms, and the possibility of a particularly weak summer may limit progress with caustic soda availability. At the very least, caustic soda may return to a balanced position, but some supply length may also return if chlorine offtake does not fall below recent norms.
- Operational stability will be higher in the third quarter as no significant maintenance will take place, but the risk of more producers entering financial distress and this suddenly affecting operations is still high.
- Chlor-alkali offtake remains subdued. With some months stronger than others, demand is inconsistent at best and does not follow much logic.
- Sentiment across Europe is still muted and rather pessimistic, and we forecast a limited, if any, rise in chlorine or caustic soda offtake for 2025. The market is beginning to realize that Europe has probably achieved a "full recovery" in demand for this business cycle as the large number of insolvencies across a range of businesses in Europe will impact demand for both chlorine and caustic soda going forwards.
- As before, businesses focus on moving through the energy transition and on managing the associated costs, while positioning more sustainably produced products in the domestic and export markets.
- ▶ The ongoing trade dispute between the US and the EU is primarily interesting for the Nordic region and southern Europe, which have the most exposure to US imports, and a shift in trade patterns could affect their pricing mechanism. The flood of imports from Asia is also having an impact on demand for both chlorine and caustic derivatives.
- The European Commission has now set out a public consultation on countermeasures to US-imposed tariffs, and the list of goods that could be subject to possible import duties includes liquid caustic soda.
- The EU countermeasures may come into effect if the ongoing EU-US trade negotiations do not result in a mutually beneficial outcome and the removal of recently introduced US tariffs. They were set at 20pc for the EU, although a 10pc level was set for 90 days starting from 9 April, while negotiations take place.

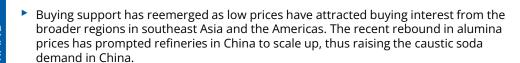




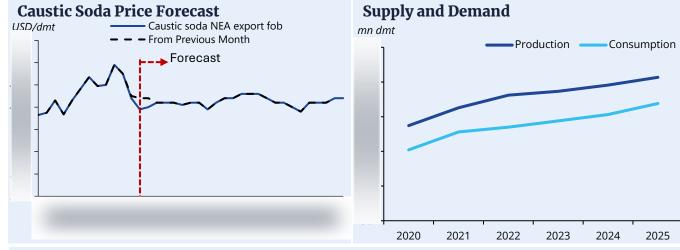
### **Northeast Asia review**

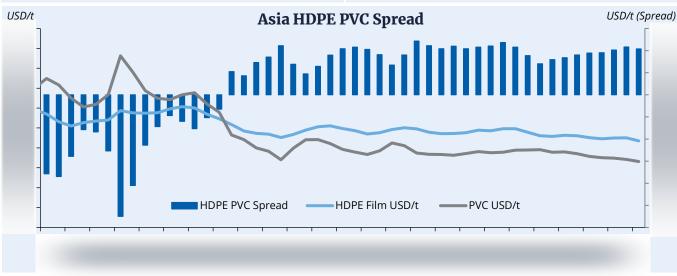
#### Export prices rebound on renewed buying support.

- Overall run rates in China have dropped by 2pc to around 82pc with more facilities shutting down for scheduled maintenance, especially toward the second half of the month, resulting in tighter availability. Many industries have slowed their demand in the face of the tariff uncertainty between China and the US.
- Outside China, several major production sites have also scaled back their operating rates due to falling chlorine netbacks to around 75-80pc.
- Furthermore, Japan has entered their maintenance season. Two major production sites are shutting down for scheduled maintenance. Supply positions in northeast Asia have turned into a tighter balance temporarily.
- Overall supply positions in northeast Asia are expected to balance in the near term and lengthen after the maintenance season ends.



- Northeast Asia remains the largest caustic soda exporting region globally, especially from China, which provides a steady supply base to the export market. However, exporting countries outside China also contributed significantly to the export market.
- Any price fluctuations in the market can affect the overall position of the region. The impact of export prices from India, the Middle East and southeast Asia was nominal, as producers use northeast Asia fob prices to benchmark their selling decisions.
- Ongoing uncertainty surrounding the US import duties could significantly alter forward-looking views, especially if the US enters into a recession later this year.



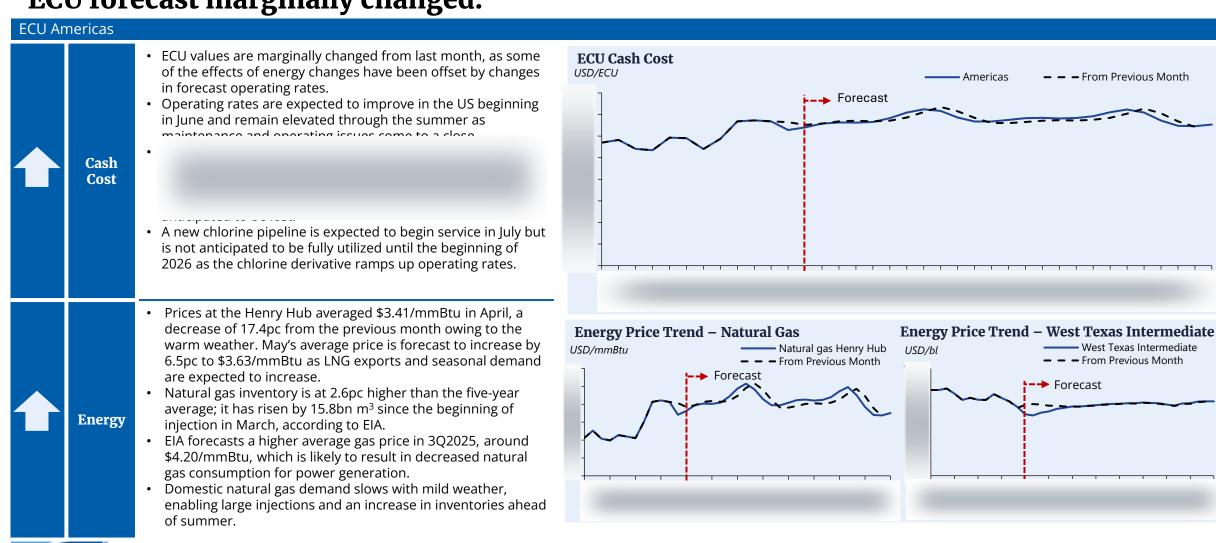


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## America cash cost analysis

ECU forecast marginally changed.



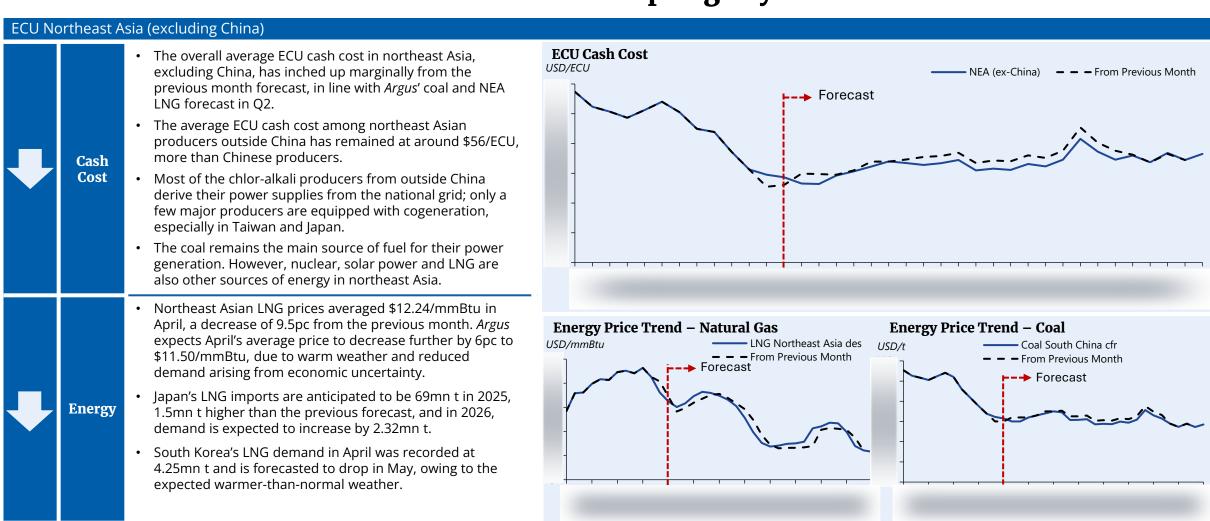
## Northwest Europe cash cost analysis

Cash costs decline on seasonally lower power prices, but a higher baseline will persist.

#### **ECU Northwest Europe** • Europe's cash cost position in the spring and early summer **ECU Cash Cost** seasonally eases as mild weather reduces energy demand and USD/ECU - - From Previous Month Northwest Europe increased power generation from renewable. Forecast • We forecast the German OTC to average \$80/MWh in May and June and then \$90/MWh in July and August, which is lower than the \$100+/MWh rates seen in winter. They will keep cash costs around \$500/ECU throughout May-August, bringing producers some relief from squeezed margins. Cash Cost • Cash costs in the low to mid \$500s/ECU are forecast for most of the 24-month forecast period, while caustic soda prices will also remain in the €600/dmt fd. • Germany is once again discussing the introduction of an electricity price for industry in support of energy-intensive production processes, but proposals are unspecific without a timeline, and it is unclear if it will ever come into effect or if it is a legal price support under international trade regulations. Prices at the Dutch TTF averaged \$11.48/mmBtu in March, a **Energy Price Trend - Natural Gas Energy Price Trend – Electricity** decrease of 12.6pc from the previous month's average. Argus USD/mmBtu Natural gas TTF German OTC base load USD/MWh forecasts prices to decrease by 4pc in May to \$11.03/mmBtu - From Previous Month ─ ─ From Previous Month due to unusually warm weather and subdued demand. Forecast Forecast Residential and commercial demand reduced by 90mn m<sup>3</sup>/d in April compared to the previous forecast, owing to warmer-Energy than-normal weather. The forecast for residential demand in May has been adjusted to 635mn m<sup>3</sup>/d. Storage injection across Europe averaged 185mn m<sup>3</sup>/d in April, driven by warm weather, the impact of US tariffs and confirmation of storage flexibility and is expected to increase to 395mn m<sup>3</sup>/d in May.

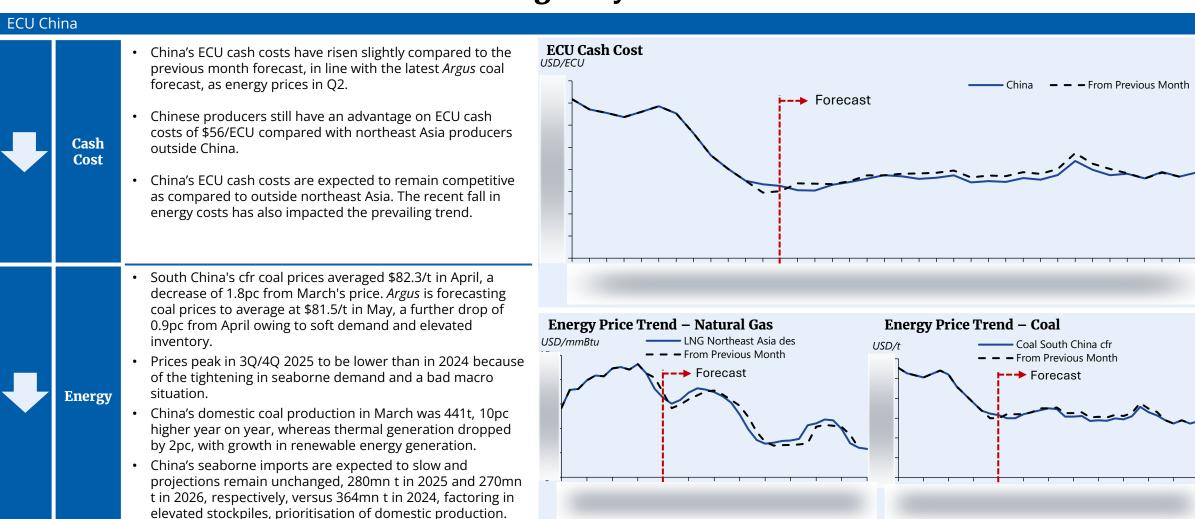
## Northeast Asia (excluding China) cash cost analysis

Northeast Asia's ECU cash costs have inched up slightly.



## China cash cost analysis

### China's ECU cash costs have risen marginally.

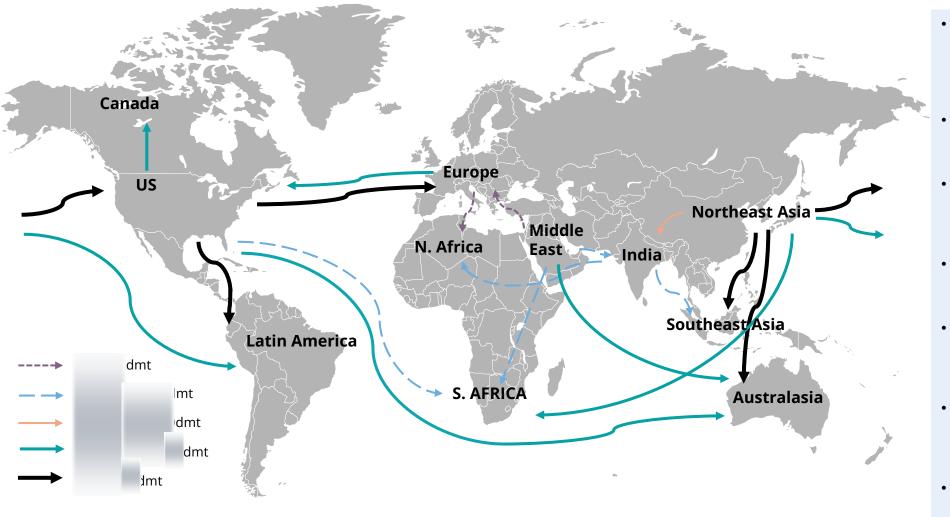


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### **Global trade flows**

Temporary pause of US tariffs increase trade, but uncertainties loom.



• The Trump administration has paused

- The unsettled nature of the tariffs will
  - oundies.
- Europe has been inundated with
- Offtake for both chlorine and caustic.
- European import tariffs against US and
- Furone is mulling additional tariffs as
- need for imports to the block.
- This subsidized energy could



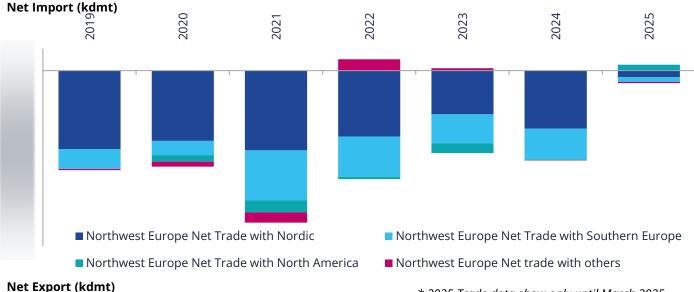
## Northwest European trade analysis

#### Export supplies still scarce, but recovery is imminent.



\*Largest production sites by capacity

- Export availability out of northwest Europe is still short, but supplies are expected to increase later in the second guarter once more producers have recovered stock after recent maintenance.
- Producers may then seek more outlets in the third quarter, when operational stability will not be restricted by many scheduled turnarounds. This would coincide with an expected recovery in US export volumes after recent outages, and a higher offering versus stable offtake may begin to push down export prices.
- EU exports to the US are now subject to a 10pc import tariff, which depresses export prices further below domestic prices, but has yet to be a deterrent to exports. Producers and traders may increase their focus on the freight advantaged northeast US or Canada to remain competitive, or they may divert more material to southern Europe if US east coast buying interest falls. Liquid caustic soda is now included in the EU's list of products that may become subject to countermeasures if trade negotiations with the US do not progress satisfactorily.





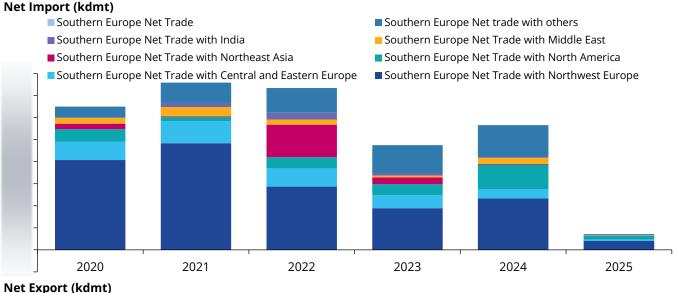
\* 2025 Trade data show only until March 2025

## Southern Europe trade analysis

#### Some tightness in May, but June looking to be more relaxed.



- Imports into southern Europe have just about been sufficient in recent weeks without major shortages. But supplies have been vulnerable to unexpected production losses, and this has led to more than usual requests for prompt loading.
- Normalisation of operations in all European markets may bring about a shift away from the tighter conditions to a better-supplied market in which importers regain some negotiating power.
- The consensus still is that import prices peaked in March/April and that it is only a matter of time until they ease again. Some price pressure is anticipated with the arrival of Asian product.
- Importers may also begin to enjoy access to a greater number of supply sources once US supplies relax, in addition to European origins, provided the US and the EU will be able to agree on a trade deal and new tariffs or countermeasures will not come into effect. But conclusions from Asia are not likely to repeat as the arbitrage is too close again, and the long lead times will deter new business in a potentially falling market.



\*Largest production sites by capacity

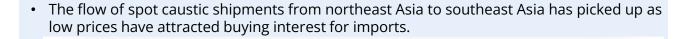


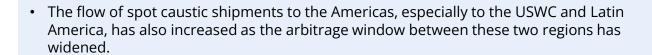
\* 2025 Trade data show only until February 2025

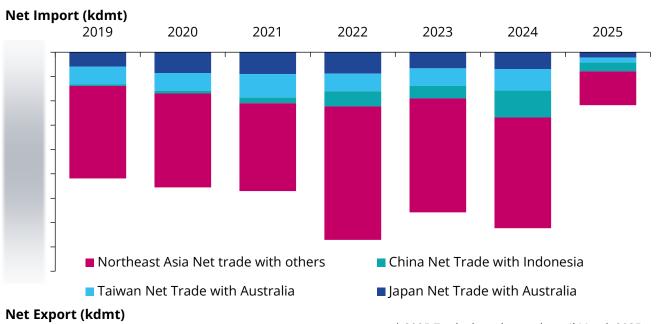
## Asia-Pacific trade analysis

#### Flows of caustic shipments from northeast Asia picked up.





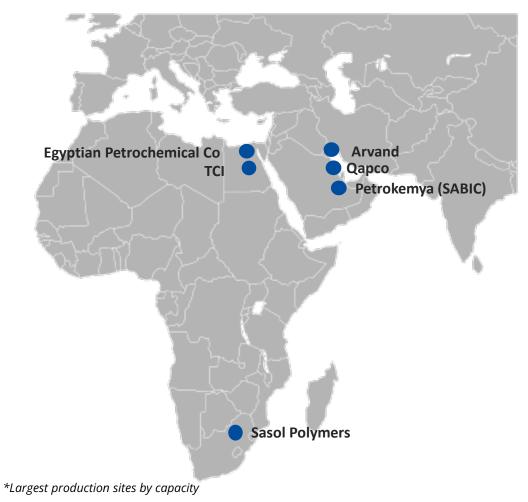




\* 2025 Trade data show only until March 2025

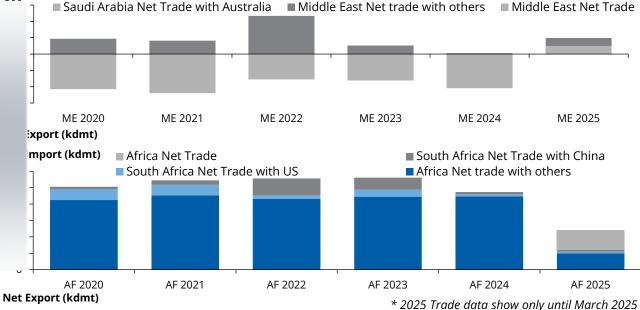
## Middle East-Africa trade analysis

#### Middle East chlor-alkali stabilised.



- Although one of the major integrated facilities undergoes maintenance and upgrading, the region's chlor-alkali production has been operating at full capacity this month.
- Some exports were available in the region for June loading. These cargoes are likely heading to Mediterranean ports as the arbitrage gap widened.
- Imports of India-origin cargoes heading to two alumina refineries were also reported to supplement the supply shortfall.
- A major refinery in Nigeria has started some downstream units that will significantly increase the refinery's demand for caustic soda and increase imports to the country.

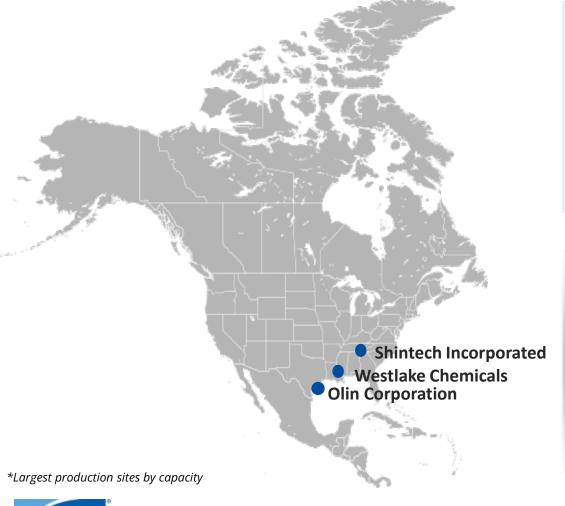




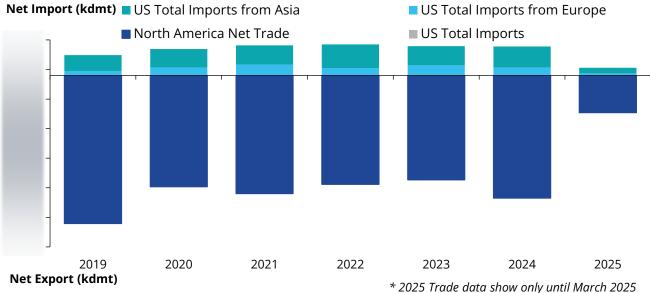


## North America trade analysis

### Weak PVC demand to keep caustic soda supply limited.



- Indian and European tariffs on US PVC are limiting export demand, while an uncertain economy in the US is limiting PVC offtake. This lower-than-anticipated level of PVC production is limiting the availability of excess caustic soda from the US Gulf coast and making contractual deliveries difficult to fulfil by the US producer. Some US producers are exporting higher volumes of EDC to meet caustic soda contractual volumes.
- Falling international energy prices are also resulting in headwinds for PVC exports from the US Gulf coast, as the ECU cash cost in China is lower than in the US Gulf coast. This is reducing the cost competitiveness of US PVC exports into international markets.
- The arbitrage window for caustic soda between Asia and certain Atlantic basin markets is anticipated to close over the next 4-6 weeks.

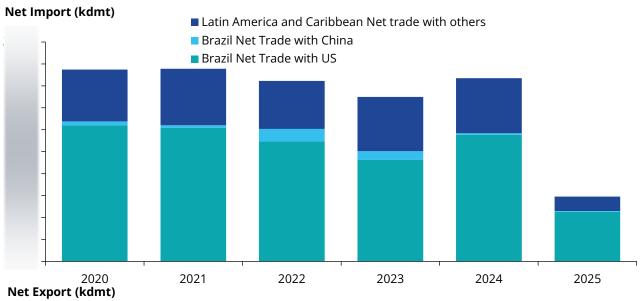


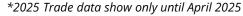
## Latin America trade analysis

#### The arbitrage window to Asia is expected to close soon.



- The arbitrage window between the US Gulf coast and Asia for caustic soda to certain South American ports is anticipated to close soon, with US Gulf coast prices declining and Asia prices rising. In May, caustic soda deliveries to Santos, Brazil, from Asia are approximately \$80/t less than deliveries from the US Gulf coast. A rise in maintenance activity in Asia and increasing supply from the US Gulf coast is expected to close the window over the next few weeks.
- The alumina sector and the pulp and paper sector in Latin America are driving caustic soda demand higher in 2025. This trend is anticipated to continue for the remainder of the year despite potential economic headwinds impacting the overall global economy, as Latin America is among the lowest-cost regions for the production of these products.







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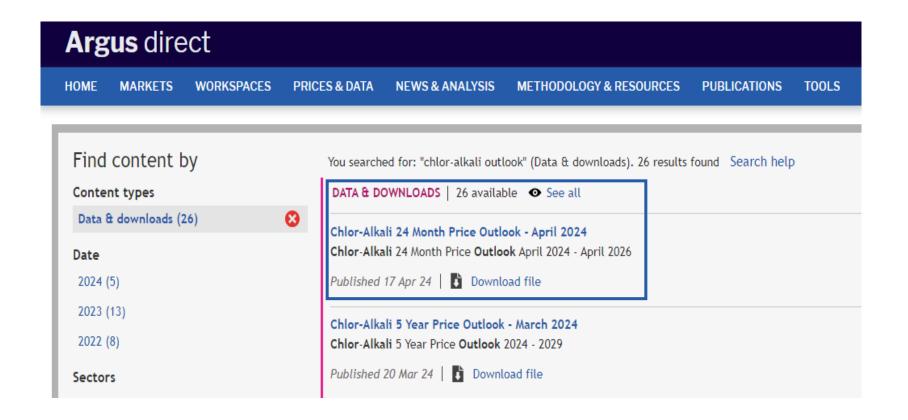
### Chlor-alkali related markets score card

#### Impact on chlor-alkali markets.



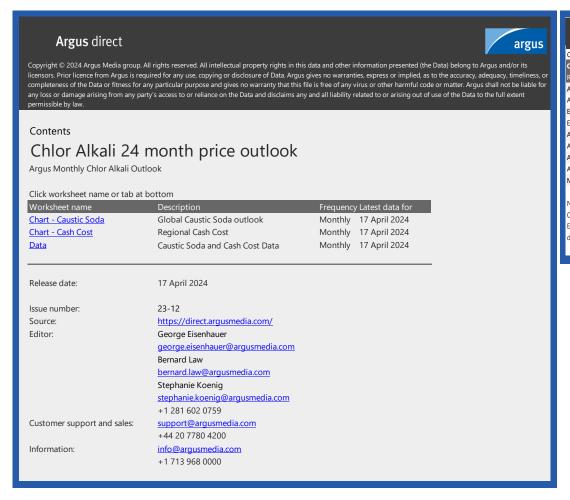


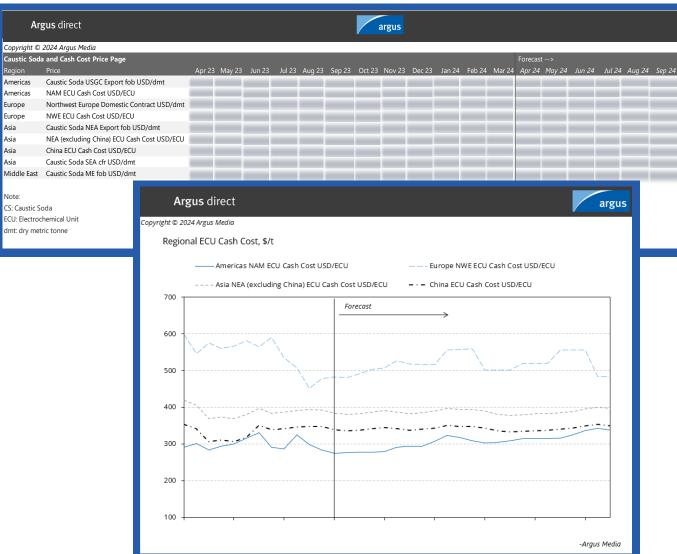
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George leads the global chlor-alkali team, He has 30+ years' experience with roles in acquisition and asset management as well as operations control and strategic objectives, before his consulting career. Before joining Argus in 2012, he was director of Chlor-Alkali for HIS. George's experience also includes roles at FMC Technologies, Dow Chemical and Union Carbide. He holds a BSc in Chemical Engineering from the University of Texas and an MBA from Rice University.



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## Stephanie Koenig Head of European Chlor-alkali

Stephanie is the Editor for European chlor-alkali market she oversees content and analytical standards across the European operations, spanning from editorial, to outlooks, analytics and events. She also contributes to single-client consulting projects and has over 15 years of experience directly related to the chlor-alkali industry. Before this, she spent time at IHS Chemical, leading the global Bleaching Chemicals Service and contributing to chlor-alkali products. Stephanie has a Master's Degree in Business Administration from the University of Leipzig, Germany.



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## Bernard Law Chlor-alkali Editor

Bernard Law is Editor and covers the chlor-alkali and vinyl markets in Asia. Bernard has more than 25 years of experience in the chemical industry in Asia, holding various responsibilities in market and competitive analysis, benchmarking, sales, marketing, and business development. He spent 13 years working for speciality and commodity chemicals in the Asia-Pacific region. He generated benchmarking pricing and assessments, including northeast Asia and southeast Asia caustics to alumina indexes. He also contributes to single-client consulting projects.



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