

**MICHAEL OUTRAM
COMMISSIONER
AUSTRALIAN BORDER FORCE
Opening Statement
Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee
Estimates Hearing
Monday, 21 May 2018**

Thank you Chair and Committee for the opportunity to provide some opening remarks.

The Australian Border Force today

With the Australian Border Force established on 1 July 2015, we are approaching our third anniversary as Australia's border enforcement agency. I wish to acknowledge the dedication and commitment of the men and women of the ABF—uniformed and non-uniformed, sworn and non-sworn who continue to confront the diverse range of the ABF's operational challenges with great determination and deliver outstanding border protection for the Australian community.

In the last 12 months we have achieved a great deal; our operational performance has been excellent, against the tide of increases in traveller and trade volumes and in a difficult and changing threat environment; at the same time we have seamlessly established the ABF within the Home Affairs portfolio as an independent operational body.

We have also undergone a lot of renewal and I am proud to lead a diverse, fresh and capable senior leadership team. I'm very confident that within this team there is a great depth of talent, which we need to guide and lead our organisation through new and complex challenges and to ensure succession for the ABF's future leadership roles at the very highest levels.

The ABF's workforce is our most important and valuable asset - both uniform ABF officers and non-uniform staff who work in our front line areas and in close support. The commitment and skill of our people, combined with the broad range and scope of our functions and capabilities at the border place the ABF in a strong position for the future. The range of operational levers available to

us within the ABF is the envy of many overseas counterparts. It gives us the potential to act with great speed and agility against new or heightened threats, and also to deal with significant increases in cross border movements of people and goods.

Our task as a leadership team is to fully harness the potential of our people and capabilities. We could not achieve this without the intelligence and data integration capabilities of the Department of Home Affairs, or without continuing to realise the broader coordination benefits of integration across the Portfolio. Realising our full potential will require that we continue to improve in some key foundational areas and I'll talk about those in a moment. Firstly I want to discuss our operational priorities.

Over the next 12 months the ABF will focus on the delivery of key operational objectives that align with our role as a contemporary border enforcement agency; enabling the unobstructed movement of goods and people across the border through well planned, coordinated and targeted compliance and enforcement operations.

ABF Operational Focus 2018/19

Our operational priorities will fall under three key areas; effective use of intelligence, data and technology underpin all three:

Integrity of our migration and visa system.

As we continue to modernise, open up and leverage our migration and visa programs for social and economic good, we need to maintain the integrity and health of that system through deterring, preventing, finding and dealing with systemic vulnerabilities and threats. Our work in this area includes Operation Sovereign Borders, our compliance operations that deal with serious or systemic non-compliance and criminality within the visa holding cohort, detention & removal operations and Task Force Cadena that addresses cases of serious misuse of the visa system, for example in relation to the exploitation of foreign workers.

Our role as Australia's Customs Service

We seek to ensure a level playing field and streamlined processes for companies that do the right thing by finding and penalising people and companies that don't. This includes the Australian Trusted Trader Program that sits within the Department and supports me as the Comptroller

General for Customs, and our trade enforcement operations that protect intellectual property rights, look for evidence of slavery in the supply chain and, importantly, that deal with revenue evasion.

The recently announced Illicit Tobacco Task Force will be important in this area. Its precursor initiative, the Tobacco Strike Team, since 2015 has seized in excess of 100 tonnes of smuggled tobacco and 247 million smuggled cigarettes, representing more than \$300 million in attempted duty evasion. Moreover, its work with the Criminal Assets Confiscation Taskforce to target criminal wealth has seen the forfeiture of \$6 million in proceeds of crime and the restraint of a further \$3 million. Since 1 July 2015, more than 115 people have been charged with tobacco related border offences, with 69 successful prosecutions under the Customs Act.

Through these efforts, the identification of supply chain vulnerabilities and through international collaboration, including through our membership of World Customs Organisation, we will support a broader agenda of trade modernisation and facilitation.

Protecting the Border

Last but certainly not least; our border protection role. We will tackle the cross-border movement of prohibited goods and people who would do us, or others, harm. Continuing and strengthening of our work to detect, seize and take action in relation to the cross border movement of illicit firearms, weapons parts, asbestos and narcotics; in this financial year, we have made more than 17,000 detections of illicit drugs weighing more than 9,000 kilograms. And our counter terrorism unit's work falls under this area of operation.

In tackling these priority areas our capabilities will simultaneously be utilised to support the Portfolio's broader fight against transnational organised crime, terrorism and protecting vulnerable people, particularly children. We will work with the Department, with the relevant Commonwealth Coordinators and with lead agencies such as the AFP, ASIO, ACIC and Austrac in order to ensure that our work complements and helps them to disrupt those threats, through coordinated action in Australia, on our seas and internationally.

We will continue to build and strengthen our relationships with our fellow border protection, customs, immigration, coast guard and border enforcement agencies in countries within our region and farther afield; the portfolio's work to enhance international coordination and cooperation across our front line agencies will serve as a force multiplier.

ABF: Realising Our Full Potential

I would characterise where I want the ABF to be in four or five years' time by saying that when members of our community, industry, parliament or our partner's see an ABF officer, whether in a facilitation, compliance or enforcement setting, I want them to think "professional, disciplined, law enforcement officer".

We're not a police force, but we are a uniformed law enforcement agency with significant coercive powers at our disposal. In that regard we will continue to work hard to maintain and strengthen the trust and confidence of our stakeholders.

Our role at the border, whether at our ports, screening facilities, compliance and enforcement operations, detention centres or maritime operations, brings a responsibility to exercise legislative power judiciously and always with integrity – acting proportionately, operating within the law, being highly accountable and taking responsibility at the individual and organisation level for the way we use our powers; only using coercive powers such as force when absolutely necessary.

I will be very focussed, as will my leadership team, on engaging very closely with our workforce to drive the necessary changes collectively; to instil that sense of pride, professionalism and discipline that is required of any modern law enforcement agency. And our workforce is up for this approach.

Our college, leadership, values and operational tradecraft are the key foundations that will enable this shift to occur – and we have begun making improvements in those foundational areas. For example by developing contemporary operational doctrine, with a stronger intelligence focus, and the necessary operating procedures and training that sit above it. Also by enhancing medical and fitness standards, officer mobility, uniform standards and dress code, reviewing and enhancing our procedures and leadership competencies, making our training more accessible and improving administrative compliance.

We will also continue to relentlessly seek to identify and appropriately deal with any person in our organisation who's standard of integrity or behaviour falls beneath that required of an ABF officer, which damages the reputation of the 99% plus of our people who are dedicated to their work in protecting our community and who live by a set of common values that most of us share.

I look forward to discussing these and other issues with the Committee and let me finish by saying I am very proud and honoured to have been appointed and sworn in as the ABF Commissioner in the last two weeks.

Thank you Chair.