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COMMISSIONER
AUSTRALIAN BORDER FORCE**

Opening Statement

Budget Estimates

31 March 2022

Thank you Chair and committee.

Re-opening the border

In the six weeks since Australia re-opened its international borders to all fully vaccinated international arrivals, many Australians who have not seen loved ones since we first closed the border over two years ago have been able to reunite here in Australia and overseas.

Since we adjusted our operational settings on 21 February this year, to implement this stage of border re-opening, the ABF has facilitated the arrival of approximately 470,000 travellers into Australia, which is a vast increase in the number of arrivals at the same time last year.

For the time being, unvaccinated visa holders may still only enter Australia in limited circumstances, where they either provide acceptable evidence of a medical reason for being unvaccinated, or they have an approved ABF Commissioners exemption to arrive in Australia.

Our officer's ability to pivot, as public health requirements change, has endured throughout the pandemic and has now enabled the safe re-opening of our border to vaccinated students, skilled workers and tourists. While we look forward to the benefits and challenges of managing an increasing number international travellers arriving by air and sea, we will remain mindful of COVID-19 and the health risks it continues to present.

Digital Passenger Declaration

To enable the safe and timely facilitation of large numbers of travellers into Australia, the Department and the ABF launched the Digital Passenger Declaration on 15 February. The DPD has replaced the Australian Travel Declaration, and mobile applications for both Apple and Android have recently been released. Since go-live on the 15 February approximately 550,000 passengers have submitted a DPD.

Currently, the DPD collects important health information such as a travellers' COVID-19 test and vaccination status, which is shared with state and territory public health authorities to support them within their jurisdictions.

The DPD will expand to replace the paper incoming passenger card later this year. This will enable travellers to provide important immigration, customs and biosecurity information ahead of arrival in Australia. The DPD will provide a significant uplift in capability for the ABF and our partners in the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment over the coming years, supporting more streamlined border processing as passenger volumes return.

Russian Sanctions

While the ABF seeks to play its part in helping our country to recover from the pandemic and its economic repercussions, we face a range of other border threats including as a result of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine.

Along with many other countries around the world, Australia has imposed sanctions against Russia and the ABF is enacting border controls to support this, which includes measures that:

- Prohibit the import and export of arms or related material to and from Russia and the export of certain items used in oil exploration and production projects.
- Prohibit exports and commercial activity in relation to the creation, acquisition or development of infrastructure for the transport, telecommunications or energy sectors, and the exploitation of oil, gas or mineral reserves in Crimea/Sevastopol.
- Prohibit the import, purchase or transport of any goods which originate in or have been exported from Crimea, Sevastopol, Donetsk and Luhansk.
- And from 25 April 2022, prohibit the import of oil, refined petroleum products, natural gas and coal from Russia.

In addition, a total of 488 individuals subject to Autonomous Sanctions have been placed on our Central Movement Alert List which prevents them from having a visa approved and travelling to Australia. Where the individual has been identified as holding a valid visa for travel to Australia, visa cancellation action will be undertaken.

Our Airline Liaison officers have been working hard in Dubai and Doha and have provided significant support to a number of Australians and Ukrainian visa holders seeking to travel from Ukraine to Australia, who did not initially meet airline uplift requirements.

Op JARDENA

While we adjust our operations to support the sanctions, we will not be distracted from our focus on the risks that transnational, serious and organised crime poses at our international border and the vulnerabilities these criminal groups exploit.

We know that organised crime groups have infiltrated the international supply chain and that they use trusted insiders to import illicit drugs, precursors, firearms and other illegal goods into Australia. These criminal syndicates threaten Australia's prosperity, the safety of our community and their cost to our economy is estimated to be in the magnitude of \$60 billion per year.

Operation Jardena has been established by the ABF to harden the Australian border and make it hostile to criminals and their trusted insiders.

Through Jardena we have doubled the number of officers dedicated to supply chain operations, enabling targeted strikes against identified people and companies whilst increasing our physical presence at international airports, wharves and businesses licensed to store and handle international cargo.

And we've seen some early successes including:

- the interception of over 50 kilograms of cocaine concealed within the refrigeration unit of a reefer container in Brisbane;
- cancellations of depot licences following visits from the JARDENA Strike Team; and
- the identification and seizure of tonnes of illicit tobacco and millions of illicit cigarettes.

Key to Jardena's operational successes however will be the identification of systemic vulnerabilities and potential legislative, policy, regulatory and technological solutions; which both enhances our border security and facilitates trade.

Simplified trade package

In parallel with a harder stance on disrupting organised crime in our supply chain, we remain committed to simplifying and improving our border to enable legitimate and trusted businesses to flourish through Australia's simplified trade system.

Modernisation of our trade systems will improve trader experiences and ensure more Australian businesses participate in overseas markets, through more productive and transparent supply chains.

The ABF supports the principle of a 'Tell Us Once' model for the trade system as part of a Single Trade Environment that will limit duplication across border agencies, and make it easier for both industry and government to know where cargo movements occur at any given point in time. Over the next two years the ABF and Home Affairs will be developing the foundational capabilities for a Single Trade Environment to allow the piloting of a number of services with industry that will address known business pain points.

With increasing volumes of trade and emerging changes to illicit activity throughout the supply chain, a quicker and easier single trade environment will ensure our systems remain fit for purpose to enable increased economic benefits and harden the border against criminality.

Conclusion

The ABF has demonstrated its competency and ability to rapidly adapt to changing operating environments both domestically and around the world. Our border controls have been recognised as a major factor in Australia's pandemic success, and will now allow for and support economic recovery and stability. I am increasingly proud of our officers' resilience and dedication and our demonstrated achievements in protecting Australia's sovereign interests at the border.