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**AUSTRALIAN BORDER FORCE**  
**Senate Estimates Opening Statement**  
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Chair and Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide an opening statement. I first appeared before this Committee in 2004, during my time with the Australian Crime Commission. I have since appeared before this Committee on about 50 occasions — I don't have the exact number, but it's a lot.

My 44 years in public service will come to an end on 29 October this year, so this is very likely to be my last Senate Estimates. I'd like to thank the Committee for its important work and thorough questioning over the years.

Senators, as you know, the ABF is a relatively young organisation. We will celebrate our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary as an integrated border agency next year. It has been an incredible honour to work with the dedicated, committed, passionate and extremely capable staff of the ABF in our role as stewards of the Australian border — which in my view is one of Australia's greatest and most important strategic assets.

I became the Acting Commissioner in May 2017 and was sworn in as Commissioner and Comptroller-General of Customs a year later. We've faced numerous complex challenges, including of course the COVID pandemic and all its effects on our border. Others we'll no doubt discuss today.

Senators, we have spent the past two years working with the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) to really dive into how we're doing things. I commissioned two initial reports looking at behaviours, culture, values and leadership, and some of the findings are uncomfortable and concerning.

I would certainly like to see different results — but the cultural and behavioural issues that we are seeing in the ABF are reflected in many Australian workplaces and our community as a whole.

The ABF senior leadership has committed to action and agreed to all recommendations in the reports. I set up the partnership with the AHRC to support us as we drive change. I see this work as critical not only in creating a safe, equitable, diverse and inclusive culture, but in establishing the ABF as an exemplar organisation that attracts and retains talent from across our community.

We know there's a lot that we must do to continue to improve, including with our colleagues in Home Affairs. During my tenure, the ABF workforce has consistently shown their resilience, commitment and dedication to our mission and, because of their qualities, I'm very optimistic about the future. The next Commissioner will have an excellent foundation upon which to continue to drive improvements in our effectiveness, readiness, capability and culture.

We are a future-focused organisation that consistently looks to the evolving border landscape and what this means for the Australian community we serve.

Relatedly, over the next decade, we'll see the opening of new international ports, including Western Sydney International Airport, and Australia will host an Olympic Games in Brisbane. By 2032, trade volumes are forecast to increase by about 70%, with passenger movements to increase by about 50%.

This places an obligation on us to invest and modernise, as we would for any strategic asset, to ensure that our global sea, air and cargo connections are digital and seamless, which in turn will help ensure our prosperity and security as a country.

In the future much of the work of the ABF will be augmented by technology, data and artificial intelligence — eventually, combined with the incredible power of quantum computing. All of this must of course be done with practical and effective guardrails and governance, and robust data science.

AI is already giving us more capacity to detect and disrupt new threats at and before they even reach the border.

Over the years I have prioritised engagement with industry leaders to leverage industry innovation and to inform our thinking about the future ABF.

Our Customs role is a truly global function, and with the support of our dedicated people I have made significant efforts internationally, including through the Border 5 group and the World Customs Organization, to generate initiatives that have significant flow-on benefits for the facilitation of Australian trade and travel, as well as our border protection. And, in my experience, many of our international partners look to the ABF as a global thought leader in customs and border security.

Chair, I would like to conclude with two observations. Firstly, I firmly believe that the function of the ABF as an integrated border agency is the best way to manage Australia's border, and the best way to deal with our unique set of circumstances and challenges.

Secondly, and most importantly, I offer my heartfelt thanks to the people of the ABF, both past and present, who, day in, day out, work tirelessly to protect Australia's border and ensure the safety, prosperity and unity of Australia.

Thank you Chair and Committee, for today and for previous hearings — I am happy to take questions.