



**Australian  
BORDER FORCE**

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AUSTRALIAN BORDER FORCE  
Opening Statement  
Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee  
Estimates Hearing  
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I thank the Committee for the opportunity to provide this statement.

The Australian Border Force continues to manage rising volumes of trade and travel across our border; e-commerce is having a substantial impact on our air cargo and international mail operations, whilst air and sea passenger numbers have increased by 25 per cent over the last three years.

As this committee knows, the movement of people and goods also contains and often conceals a number of challenging and volatile threats at the border, whether from terrorism, transnational and domestic serious and organised crime, the smuggling of illicit goods such as child exploitation materials and people smuggling.

At the same time we have finite resources and this requires that we continuously balance and re-adjust our enforcement, compliance and facilitation efforts. Ultimately it is our contribution to the safety and security of the Australian Community that counts the most.

Last financial year we also collected over 15.6 billion dollars in customs duty revenue. Our role as Australia's customs service is a key priority, to ensure that we minimise the administrative impost on industry, for example through the Australian Trusted Trader Program, and simultaneously use data and intelligence to identify and deal effectively with individuals and companies in the supply chain who aren't doing the right thing, whether that be through deliberate revenue fraud or evasion, dumping or countervailing or manipulation of the supply chain.

Our operating environment demands that we continuously strive to perform at our best. Our officers and supporting teams are up to this task and are both committed and able. We will continue to build the ABF as a contemporary, professional and disciplined border enforcement organisation; based on cohesive values and behaviors.

These values and behaviors must be grounded in integrity, be inclusive and enhance diversity throughout the ranks of the ABF. As many other organisations and industries continue to find and deal with unacceptable behaviors such as workplace bullying and sexual harassment, I am also committed to ensuring that such behaviours are not tolerated within the ABF. An ABF Culture and Behavior Taskforce has been established, to consult with our people and inform the design and implementation of strategies to further strengthen our culture. The ABF has undergone significant change since its establishment in the last three years and we must continue to evolve and develop.

Despite the increasing demands being placed on our resources, it is also imperative that we continue to nurture and invest in building a more resilient, flexible and agile operating model to enable us to continue to deliver the results that this Parliament, the Australian Government and our community expect of us. This is being achieved by focusing on three areas of priority;

- 1) Through our college we are seeking to build the knowledge and skills of ABF officers, to enable more of our officers to perform more seamlessly across our customs, migration and maritime domains.
- 2) We have a number of initiatives in place to strengthen our leadership throughout the ABF, with a focus on values and behaviours.
- 3) To ensure a consistent operational mindset across the organisation, we are developing the necessary operational doctrine on which we will build our operating procedures and training in the future.

In addition, the ABF is leveraging its already close connections within the Department of Home Affairs and with other portfolio agencies, as well as with our international partners, to share information and to co-design and coordinate operational responses.

I'd now like to briefly summarise a very small cross section of the excellent operational work undertaken by the women and men of the Australian Border Force.

The ABF led Illicit Tobacco Task Force was established on 1 July 2018, bringing together a number of agencies including the ATO and CDPP. Already the task force has seized in excess of 8.6 tonnes of smuggled tobacco and 33 million smuggled cigarettes. This represents more than \$31 million in attempted duty evasion.

The ABF is also strengthening its approach to trade enforcement, helping to level the playing field for those companies who are doing the right thing and reducing the economic harm that is associated with revenue fraud and evasion. In the last financial year revenue recovery was complemented by an increase of more than 50 per cent in voluntary disclosures, correcting revenue errors to the value of approximately \$100 million.

We are of course also committed to preventing the importation of illicit goods that have the potential to cause the most harm to our community. Last financial year the ABF made more than 43,000 detections of illicit and restricted drugs; preventing more than 11 tonnes of those drugs from reaching the community. This is almost double the total weight of illicit and restricted drugs that was detected the previous year.

In a similar vein, we have continued our focus on firearms and keeping illegal guns off our streets. In 2017-18 we detected more than 2000 undeclared firearms, parts and accessories; almost 300 more detections than in the 2016-17 financial year.

It's a matter of fact rather than speculation that the threat posed by people smugglers is ongoing; Australia is a sought after destination country and the displacement of significant numbers of people to our region continues. In August 2018, an illegal maritime venture arrived in far-north Queensland; the first such venture to reach Australia in more than four years. All 17 individuals who arrived were swiftly detained and returned to Vietnam.

To reinforce the security of our borders, aerial surveillance and on-water patrols have been expanded, with Australian Border Force and Australian Defence Force assets and resources mobilising to identify and intercept any suspicious vessels approaching Australia's borders.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the work of the outgoing Commander Joint Agency Task Force, Air Vice Marshal Stephen Osborne, whose appointment concludes later this year. I thank Air Vice Marshal Osborne for his tremendous leadership and skill in a challenging role.

In conclusion, I am proud of the work and accomplishments of our ABF officers and supporting staff over the last year. Our span of operations across trade enforcement and compliance, helping to maintain the integrity of our visa and migration system and border protection is vast. Ensuring that we continue to be effective will require that we achieve an increasingly delicate and agile balance between volumes and risk on the one hand and the allocation of our resources on the other. Configuring our capabilities with that in mind will be critical to our success in the future.

Thank You.