

MICHAEL OUTRAM APM
COMMISSIONER, AUSTRALIAN BORDER FORCE
Senate Estimates
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Thank you Chair and Committee.

I concluded my last opening statement to this Committee in May, paying special recognition to the work of Australian Border Force officers in assisting with evacuation of Australians as conflict broke out in Sudan.

Over the past few weeks as the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories has unfolded the ABF has again been involved in facilitating the secure departure of Australian citizens and approved foreign nationals from Israel.

In support of whole of government efforts, the ABF undertakes pre-border risk assessments and confirmation of visa eligibility for non-citizens to facilitate seamless repatriation. We have officers deployed to regional and transit countries providing on the ground support to individuals and family groups. Meanwhile our officers across Australian international airports continue to support the facilitation and reception arrangements of Government facilitated flights. I remain highly appreciative of my officers, and all of our partner agencies, who have been working around the clock to assist those seeking to move out of harm's way.

Chair, since I last appeared before the Committee, the operating environment for the Australian Border Force has remained challenging.

International trade and travel volumes continue their rapid return to pre-COVID 19 levels; and we are confronting a global surge in the trafficking of drugs and other illicit goods which will continue to test the ABF's agility and resolve.

In the last financial year the ABF detections of major illicit drugs by weight increased by over **30 percent**. Most concerning was the significant increase in cocaine detections which more than doubled on the previous year.

The increase in detections is consistent with long-term trends. The ACIC Illicit Drug Data report released earlier this month reported the total weight of illicit drugs seized nationally has increased by **74 percent** over the last decade.

Positively, the increase in detections will in part be due to the fact that we are continually getting better at finding illicit goods – through investment in our screening and targeting methods our strike rate has improved by more than **30 percent** over the past decade. But the reality is Australia remains a lucrative market and we are in a constant battle with serious and organised crime groups who continue to target our communities.

As I have regularly advised this Committee, as Commissioner of the second biggest revenue raiser in the Commonwealth I must constantly balance our role on enforcement and compliance with that of facilitation. Advancing Australia's economic prosperity remains a key deliverable for the ABF and in the last financial year we collected revenue totalling **\$18.3 billion** – up from \$17.5 billion the year prior.

The ABF also remains focused on ensuring the integrity of Australia's migration system. The package of reforms recently announced by the Minister for Home Affairs in response to the *Rapid Review into the Exploitation of Australia's Visa System* (the Nixon Review) will further enhance the Department and ABF's ability to manage these risks through effective compliance and enforcement capability.

It is important to note that while many of the reforms are focused on post-border activity, they fit within part of a larger border continuum. The ABF takes a multi-layered approach to managing migration risks. This includes working ahead of the border through our Airline Liaison Officers who last financial year prevented over **1,000** inadmissible travellers boarding flights to Australia and our Border Operations Centre which denied uplift to a further **12,318 travellers**. This is in addition to our work at the border where ABF officers refused immigration clearance to over **1,400** travellers.

These layers are important, but sometimes forgotten, elements of our approach to border and migration integrity.

With an increasingly challenging operating environment one of my first order priorities as Commissioner is ensuring the well-being and support of all ABF officers.

I am immensely proud of the work of the ABF, of the integrity of our organisation and of the commitment to mission that my officers demonstrate every day. But we can never become complacent.

The ABF has recently completed the first year of a five year partnership with the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC). This partnership will provide an independent and impartial lens to support the ABF to implement initiatives that ensure we continue to provide our officers with an equitable, diverse, inclusive, respectful and safe working environment. An environment that will best enable them to perform and deliver for the Australian community. I look forward to providing additional updates to the Committee as our work with the AHRC continues.

I thank the Committee for its time and welcome any questions.