



Opening statement

Thank you for inviting the Department of Immigration and Border Protection to appear at this hearing for the inquiry into illicit tobacco.

My name is Linda Geddes, First Assistant Secretary Traveller, Customs and Industry Policy. Also representing the Department are:

- Wayne Buchhorn, Assistant Commissioner Investigations, and
- Erin Dale, Acting Assistant Commissioner Border Management.

Stopping illicit tobacco remains a priority for the Department and the Australian Border Force. We detect, deter and disrupt the illicit trade of tobacco before the border, at the border and in the post-border environment. We are also responsible for managing the flow of legitimate trade across the border and collecting customs duty and taxes on legitimately imported tobacco products.

In the seven months since we last appeared before this Committee, we have made significant progress in tackling illicit tobacco. As you may be aware, the Government announced an additional \$7.7 million in funding for the Tobacco Strike Team as well as measures to strengthen illicit tobacco offences. This funding has allowed us to enhance the Tobacco Strike Team model and structure. The Strike Team has also built stronger ties with key international law enforcement partners involved in combatting tobacco smuggling at various points along the supply chain. At the same time, we have been progressing legislative change to

strengthen offences, which will allow our officers to better address the full range of offenders in the illicit tobacco trade. These measures will deliver more investigations, more prosecutions, more disruption activities and greater deterrence against the illicit tobacco trade.

We have also been working with partner agencies to explore ways in which the ABF can leverage their tools and powers to more successfully target and prosecute the most serious and organised of these criminals.

The ABF has increased the number of operational activities that it is able to conduct, which has resulted in a number of important seizures being made and briefs of evidence being submitted. My colleague, Assistant Commissioner Wayne Buchhorn, would be happy to speak about these operational activities in detail. We are also working more closely with the ATO, particularly in the warehouse environment. My colleague, Acting Assistant Commissioner Erin Dale, will be able to speak in more detail about these activities.

It is a crime for anyone to bring tobacco across the border without paying revenue – but illicit tobacco is not just a risk to Commonwealth revenue. The illicit tobacco trade has serious criminal implications, with proven links to serious organised crime groups. The trade in illicit tobacco also undermines the tobacco prevention and control initiatives of the Australian Government. The Department and the ABF are committed to tackling the trade in illicit tobacco, and implementing comprehensive policy, regulatory, compliance and enforcement initiatives to tackle the trade in illicit tobacco in the long term.