



**Australian
BORDER FORCE**

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**Opening statement to the
Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs**

**Senate Estimates Hearing
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Senators, since the stand up of Home Affairs in December last year, the Australian Border Force has been working as one of the portfolio's front line independent operational agencies.

Home Affairs builds on the gains we've made since 2015, which integrated the ABF's customs and migration enforcement and facilitation functions within the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, by creating greater strategic alignment with other law enforcement, intelligence and national security agencies, maximising our combined capabilities to protect the Australian community.

My ABF officers continue to adapt and contend successfully with ever-increasing threats at the border, and volumes of travellers and goods at the border; volumes are projected to grow by as much as 22 per cent for passengers and 34 per cent for air cargo in the years leading up to 2020-21. The scale of non-compliant and criminal behaviour will likely mirror that trend.

The transition to Home Affairs will enhance the ABF's ability to perform its role as Australia's customs service, including the dual and mutually complementary imperatives of travel and trade facilitation and enforcement of border laws, which are essential to Australia's security and prosperity.

The ABF Commissioner remains the Comptroller-General of Customs and the ABF continues to work closely with international partners, including through the World Customs Organization, to shape the global customs and border protection system. Through greater coordination and cooperation between Commonwealth agencies and our national and international networks, we can better target entities in Australia and overseas that represent a higher risk of transgression, while we develop and expand programs that facilitate legitimate trade and benefit Australian industry and consumers.

We continue to build the Australian Trusted Trader (ATT) program, providing businesses with trade facilitation benefits and improving access to international markets. Since its inception in July 2016, Trusted Trader has accredited 138 businesses and service providers into the program, and we are expanding the benefits available to accredited traders.

ATT is supported by Mutual Recognition Arrangements with five key trading countries, including arrangements signed in November with China, our largest trading partner. These arrangements are expected to bring around half a billion dollars of benefit over ten years through reduced customs delays in both countries. We continue to negotiate MRAs with other countries. Last week in Seattle, I signed a work plan with my US Customs and Border Protection counterpart to progress an MRA with the United States.

The ABF is working with the Department of Home Affairs to progress future trade facilitation initiatives—including a single window environment for international trade to streamline how businesses interact with Government, and more seamless risk assessment of incoming and outgoing goods. Recent and emerging advances in analytics and technology are offering new opportunities to further enhance trade efficiency and security.

ABF officers do an incredible job in protecting our border and work well with our law enforcement partners. Consequently we continue to make significant seizures of illicit drugs:

- In December, a joint operation with Western Australian Joint Organised Crime Task Force resulted in the seizure of 1.2 tonnes of methamphetamine — the

largest seizure of methamphetamine in Australian history with an estimated street value of more than \$1 billion.

- Last month we concluded a nine-month operation in partnership with the Australian Federal Police, and law enforcement and border protection agencies worldwide, which resulted in the seizure of 1.28 tonnes of cocaine in Sydney with a potential street value nearing half a billion dollars. This was the second largest seizure of cocaine in Australian history.
- This followed separate seizures of 700kg and 300kg of cocaine, with a combined estimated street value of \$350 million, in joint operations with law enforcement agencies in November last year.

Looking ahead, the ABF is very focussed on achieving its mission of protecting Australia's borders and enabling legitimate trade and travel. We will prioritise key threats—in particular, people smuggling, terrorism, illicit drugs, tobacco and firearms, and any systemic exploitation of our visa programmes. My leadership team, with support from the Department, is also focussed on developing our people, systems, facilities and technology.

We will also ensure that the ABF is meeting the highest levels of personal, professional and ethical standards that the Australian public expects of us, and that we expect of each other.

The ABF is committed to cementing its place in the Home Affairs portfolio as a professional, disciplined and respected border enforcement agency, which stands ready to meet the challenges and opportunities before us, today and in the future.

Thankyou.

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