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**COMMISSIONER AND COMPTROLLER-GENERAL OF CUSTOMS**  
**AUSTRALIAN BORDER FORCE**  
**Senate Estimates Opening Statement**  
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Thank you Chair.

As the Committee is well aware, since my last appearance the Australian Border Force's highest order priority has been the establishment of **Operation AEGIS** – a joint operation with the Australian Federal Police to enforce and monitor compliance with visa conditions imposed on individuals subject to the NZYQ High Court decision. OP AEGIS was up and running within about 36 hours of the High Court's decision and, working closely with state and territory authorities and law enforcement partners from the start, has been a key element of the Government's efforts to ensure the safety and protection of the Australian community.

In addition, following the passing of legislation in this Parliament the ABF also rapidly established the **Community Protection Board**, which met for the first time on 11 December 2023 and has met several times since. The Community Protection Board provides informed, impartial and evidence-based recommendations regarding community protection conditions which may need to be applied to NZYQ affected individuals in order to ensure community safety. The board is made up of pre-eminent individuals from across a wide section of the community comprising former State Police and Corrective Services Commissioners, a clinical psychologist and multicultural and justice experts.

There has been much public commentary regarding the NZYQ High Court decision and its implications, but outside the public discourse our ABF officers, and our

partners, have worked tirelessly and with great speed and resilience to protect the Australian community, and I want to acknowledge their efforts.

Chair, there is one other significant operational matter that is worth highlighting briefly.

As the Committee would be well aware from 1 January it became unlawful to bring into Australia single-use disposable **vapes**. From 1 March that ban will extend to all other vaping goods, including reusable vapes and their component parts. Although it is still early and there is much work to be done, signs are positive with the ABF and our partners detecting and seizing over **500,000 vapes** since the ban was introduced. More importantly however, is the influence the ban is having over the number of vapes attempted to be brought into the country and the behaviours of importers. For example, an online supplier who was responsible for 74 percent of imports of declared disposable vapes into Australia in 2023 has now ceased supplying these goods to Australia. This is positive, but we can't get complacent as there are still bad actors out there who will seek to circumvent these new laws.

I note that in addition to vapes we are also redoubling our efforts on **illicit tobacco** following significant investments to enhance ABF capacity announced by the Government in January this year.

Chair as I enter my final months as the ABF Commissioner my focus beyond our operational priorities is very much on **modernising our border** and workforce for the future. Like most Customs and Border agencies globally, the exponential increases being forecast regarding volumes of trade and travel forces us to think about how to accommodate this whilst not allowing risk to similarly amp up. International borders will become overwhelmed in the coming years unless they are truly digital, automated and secure.

Many countries are getting ahead of this curve and investments from our Government in MYEFO last year has put us on the right path, as is the work we are doing through the Trans-Tasman Seamless Travel Group that is required to report to our Prime Minister later this year.

I intend to do all that I can, including through partnerships with industry, to fast track that work. As an organisation we are also shifting our thinking and starting to work differently in how we target risk and disrupt threat actors at the border. This involves making the best use of data as well as intelligence and, in the future, AI. This important work will also support growth in economic activity across our border in the future.

Thank you and I welcome any questions.