

The Australian Border Force

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The Australian Border Force, an operationally independent body under the Home Affairs Portfolio, has been established to protect Australia's border and enable legitimate travel and trade. It is making rapid progress toward a more seamless border across which the majority of legitimate migrants, travellers and traders can move without unnecessary delay, but where transgression and non-compliance can be readily detected, thereby focusing intervention efforts on the non-compliant.

Key words: Australian Border Force; Counter-Terrorism Unit; Airline Liaison; Maritime Border Command; Australian Border Operations Centre; organised crime; illicit drugs; cybercrime; people smuggling; SmartGates; Trusted Trade Programme; Mutual Recognition Arrangements.

The Australian Border Force (ABF) was established nearly three years ago on 1 July 2015, transitioning from the former Australian Customs and Border Protection Service. Our Customs predecessor, however, had a proud history dating back to Federation. The 'stand-up' of the ABF in 2015 completed the integration of the Customs Service with the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, which saw the ABF drawing together the operational border, investigations, compliance, detention and enforcement functions of the two agencies.

The fledgling organisation was charged with keeping Australia safe, secure and economically competitive. Our mission is *to protect Australia's border and enable legitimate travel and trade.*

To deliver the dual imperatives of enforcement and facilitation, the ABF would focus on building a disciplined and professional uniformed workforce, defined by integrity and trusted by government and the Australian public. The ABF College began taking form in the lead-up to the ABF's official launch, providing us with a national standardised approach to training, and the ABF now recruits from entry level traineeships to senior command and management roles.

Home Affairs Portfolio

More recently, on 20 December 2017, the ABF became a part of the Home Affairs portfolio, established by the Australian Government to consolidate and enhance co-ordination of Australian agencies responsible for national security, intelligence and law enforcement. The portfolio's responsibilities include certain key engines of economic growth, stability and social cohesion – migration, trade, multicultural affairs and emergency management. The Home Affairs portfolio reflects that migration and trade – drivers of economic growth – are inseparable from security, stability and social cohesion.

Under Home Affairs, the ABF is working as an operationally independent frontline body, with support and corporate services provided by the Department of Home Affairs. The portfolio currently includes three other frontline operational agencies:

- Australian Transactions and Analysis Centre (AUSTRAC);
- Australian Federal Police (AFP); and

- Australian Criminal Intelligence Commissioner (ACIC).

It is intended that the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) will join the portfolio after the passage of relevant legislation.

The Department of Home Affairs is the policy and co-ordination agency overseeing the Home Affairs Portfolio. The Department focuses on policy, strategy and planning, including co-ordination, capability assessment and resourcing to support the portfolio agencies in their efforts on the front-line. The ABF, however, operates independently in terms of enforcing the law and ensuring compliance with relevant legislation. The ABF Commissioner is a statutory office holder responsible to the Minister for Home Affairs.

Border Security Threats

In recent years, we have experienced significant changes in our operating environment. These include: increased border movements; growth in organised crime; continuing unauthorised maritime arrivals and maritime threats; and increasing cybercrime.

Border Movements

We are contending with increasing volumes of people and goods at the border driven by travel, business, trade, investment, study, work and leisure. We are in the midst of a trend toward short-term visitation, temporary migration and faster-moving goods.

Last financial year, travellers made more than 43 million crossings of the Australian border and traveller numbers continue to grow at more than 5 per cent per annum. The number of travellers is forecast to increase by almost 10 million in the next four years, rising to over 53 million by 2020-21. We also received and risk-assessed 42 million air cargo consignments – a 20 per cent increase on the previous year – and inspected more than 58 million international mail items. These growth trends support new economic development and they are expected to continue. But the magnitude of these numbers presents border management challenges. We cannot simply employ more people to manage the volumes.

At the same time, the threat environment is rapidly evolving. Modern globalisation and increasing interconnectedness, while providing great opportunities, has also

created the avenues for those with nefarious intentions to conduct their business. I will mention a few of the major threats.

Australia now faces the most significant ongoing threat from terrorism and violent extremism in our nation's history. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and similar organisations have adopted a networked operating model to perpetuate extremism by recruiting vulnerable people within our communities, potentially to conduct lone-actor attacks. In September 2014, the Australian national terrorism threat level was raised to 'probable' for the first time, and it remains at that level. This means there is credible intelligence indicating an intention and capability to conduct terrorist attacks in Australia.

Since September 2014, there have been six attacks and 14 major disruption operations related to imminent attack planning in Australia. In July last year, authorities disrupted a suspected attempt to smuggle an explosive device onto an international flight departing from Sydney. Had this attempt been successful, the results would have been catastrophic.

Around 220 Australians have travelled to Syria and Iraq to join the conflict since 2012, and about 110 are still active in the conflict zone. Returning foreign fighters, who have been exposed to extremist ideology and are hardened to the everyday violence of the conflict in the Middle East, have capacity to radicalise individuals here and abroad. Around 40 people have returned to Australia after travelling to Syria or Iraq and joining groups involved in the conflict. Hundreds more have returned to the Southeast Asia region.

To meet such challenges, in August 2014 we introduced Counter-Terrorism Unit (CTU) teams to support whole-of-government efforts to intercept individuals travelling from Australia to unlawfully participate in foreign conflicts and manage those seeking to return from the conflict zones. The ABF currently has approximately 120 CTU officers deployed across major international airports and airports operating international sectors. This includes Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Cairns, Gold Coast, Adelaide, Darwin, Canberra, Townsville and the Sunshine Coast (when international flights are in operation).

The CTU has prevented the travel of minors to conflict areas, found evidence of significant movements or attempted significant movements of large sums of cash, and images and material of an extremist nature. For example, in the last three-and-a-half years, CTU activity has resulted in more than 890 passenger offloads and 707,000 real-time assessments nationally. They have intercepted a variety of items which were in breach of the *Customs Act 1901* and detected more than \$12.3 million in undeclared currency. Some cases have resulted in the suspension or cancellation of passports, others the imposition of infringement notices, and some cases are the subject of ongoing investigations.

Further, the ABF also runs the Airline Liaison Programme which sees officers working with airlines and our international partners at international airports around the world. Airline Liaison Officers identify and prevent travellers who threaten the integrity of the Australian border from boarding aircraft bound for Australia.

We have introduced Advance Passenger Processing which operates at check-ins overseas and onshore and verifies that a traveller holds a valid visa or other authority to travel to and enter Australia or depart Australia. The *Foreign Fighters Act 2014* requires airlines to send information to border agencies when a person checks-in to depart Australia. This provides border authorities with more time to

conduct checks, including against alert lists, before an individual arrives at the airport to depart Australia. Complementing these activities are the SmartGates, which use facial biometric technology to confirm the identity of the traveller and authenticate travel documents.

Organised Crime

Criminal alliances and joint ventures have an increasingly transnational footprint. Intelligence from the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission indicates that about 70 per cent of Australia's serious and organised crime threats are based offshore or have offshore links. They utilise complex and opaque supply chains to disguise the true origin of goods and the identities of players in their networks. They are well-financed, organised and innovative, devising creative methods to conceal their illicit activities and to circumvent border controls.

Illicit drugs continue to be a challenge. In the past 18 months, the ABF, in co-operation with Australian and international partners, has made record seizures of methamphetamine, ephedrine and cocaine. Criminals importing illicit drugs know no boundaries when it comes to concealing their goods. We have detected illicit drugs and controlled substances concealed as cosmetics, cleaning products, and iced tea. We have found them hidden in home audio speakers, highlighter pens, machinery parts, pre-fabricated steel, pallets of cocoa powder, door hinges and wall tiles, just to name a few. We detected more than seven tonnes of major illicit drugs and pre-cursors last financial year.

The ABF also targets the importation and distribution of illicit tobacco, which often involves organised crime groups evading payment of government revenue. Australia established the Tobacco Strike Team in October 2015, to disrupt imports of illicit tobacco. Since it began, the Tobacco Strike Team has stopped more than 64 tonnes of smuggled tobacco and 123 million smuggled cigarettes from reaching the black market.

Our success in interrupting illicit tobacco importation enterprises and preventing revenue evasion helps stem onward criminal investment in other activities, such as the trade in illicit firearms and narcotics, sexual servitude and counterfeit goods production.

Maritime Threats

Australia is the largest nation in the world to be completely surrounded by water¹. The maritime environment is an economic and environmental asset. Australia does not share a land border with any nation – this means that authorities face unique challenges in maintaining Australia's sea borders, offshore jurisdictions, and exclusive economic zone. At the same time, it is a vulnerability targeted by criminals, and a challenge for border surveillance and management.

The ABF, with the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and Australian law enforcement agencies, is responsible for protecting an extensive maritime area of about 38,000km of Australian coastline, and an offshore maritime area equating to around 11 per cent of the earth's oceans. This work takes place 24 hours-a-day, all year round.

Maritime Border Command (MBC), a multi-agency task-force within the ABF, is Australia's designated civil maritime

¹<http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/the-australian-continent>

security authority. Maritime Border Command utilises both ADF and ABF vessels, aircraft and people to enable the ABF to address threats offshore before they reach Australia's shores. The ABF deploys a world-class fleet of ADF and ABF maritime surveillance and response assets and maintains a strong presence around Australia's coastline.

We have recently undertaken a refresh of two Bay Class vessels, ABF Cutter *Roebuck Bay* and ABF Cutter *Storm Bay*, which will be part of a tiered Torres Strait marine capability.

The ABF's maritime capability has received a significant boost with the arrival of two fast response boats (FRBs). The two FRBs are currently going through operational testing and evaluation, and we expect they will become operational shortly. The enhanced capability will give the ABF greater patrol capacity in a remote and vulnerable border area of northern Australia. Our officers will have improved ability to intercept small fast vessels that present challenges for existing capability.

The ABF is bolstering its maritime capabilities around Australia with new port, harbour and coastal vessels. The first of these, *Limestone Coast*, was launched in February 2018 in South Australia. It is one of 13 that will be rolled out to protect the Australian coastline. The vessels can manoeuvre at high speeds and will allow a larger number of officers to board vessels further out to sea, quickly and safely.

Maintaining Australia's civil maritime security entails being able to identify, respond to and deter threats which are common to many countries, from people smuggling, through to bio-security threats and illegal exploitation of natural resources, marine pollution, transactions of prohibited items, maritime terrorism, piracy, robbery and violence at sea.

Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB) was implemented in 2013 to protect Australia's borders, disrupt people smuggling syndicates operating in our region, and prevent deaths at sea resulting from people smuggling activities. While it has now been more than 1300 days since the last successful people smuggling venture to Australia, we know that people smugglers remain active in our region and will seek to exploit any opportunities to re-enliven their business. We remain vigilant and continue to work with our OSB partner agencies to ensure the illegal maritime pathway to Australia remains closed.

The ABF is continuing to work with domestic agencies and international partners, to mitigate the risks posed by the full range of civil maritime security threats faced by Australia, including through collaboration and capacity building to reduce pressure on Australian maritime assets.

Cybercrime

Technology is an enabler of crime, making it easier for criminals to operate with some anonymity. Increasingly, organised crime groups are exploiting online and digital communication to extend their global influence and operate clandestine marketplaces on the dark net to grow their trade in illicit goods. Further, terrorist groups continue to use digital technology to radicalise, recruit and fundraise. Encrypted communication can assist cyber criminals evade detection.

The ABF is working with partner agencies to identify and target drugs and illicit goods originating from the dark net and online marketplaces, to stop them making their way into the Australian community.

Managing the Threats

Knowing that we will continue to have increasing volumes

of people and goods at the border, and that the risks and threats we face are complex and constantly evolving, we have to be more innovative in our approach to managing them.

SmartGates

SmartGates enable travellers to self-process through immigration clearance processes. This provides less intrusive and faster processing at the border for low-risk travellers.

Arrival SmartGates have been operational in Australia since 2007. There are currently more than 70 Arrival SmartGates at Australian international airports, which biometrically match the traveller to the image in their passport. Just under half of incoming travellers are currently processed using arrival SmartGates. We are in the process of replacing the current (older technology) Arrival SmartGates with newer models, which are designed to allow all electronic passport holders to self-process across the border. These SmartGates will also include 'contactless' processing allowing an increasing number of travellers to self-process, *without* the need to present their passport. We anticipate at least 100 new Arrival SmartGates will be rolled out across Australia's international airports over the next 18 months.

In the 2015-16 financial year, Departure SmartGates were progressively introduced into international airports around Australia to allow passengers to self-process as they depart the country. There are currently 89 SmartGates at Australia's international airports. Last year, more than 16 million passengers used the SmartGates to depart the country – an average of more than 40,000 people each day.

In 2020, we expect that around 90 per cent of eligible travellers crossing the border at international airports will self-process using SmartGates. SmartGates greatly enhance our capability to manage rapid growth in passenger numbers, reduce processing times at the airport and meet the demand on our border controls. This technology uses state-of-the-art biometric facial recognition technology to confirm the identity of the traveller and authenticate travel documents. This has proven to be more effective than physical and visual checks and is a critical enabler in managing threats we encounter at the border.

Trade

In the trade domain, we are working with industry to progress facilitation initiatives. In 2016, we introduced the Australian Trusted Trader Programme to enable accredited Trusted Traders to move goods across the border faster with reduced regulatory barriers. The programme increases efficiency without compromising supply-chain security. Streamlined processing enables Trusted Traders to forge new global trade links more easily, be more competitive and operate with greater certainty. Australian Trusted Trader currently has more than 165 accredited Trusted Traders. They can access a range of trade facilitation benefits at the border of our Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRA) partners, providing faster access to international markets. The partnership with Trusted Traders allows us to work with them to identify and correct vulnerabilities in the supply chain and trade compliance practices, and to secure international supply chains.

In November 2017, Australia signed an MRA with China, our largest trading partner. This is in addition to the MRAs we have with New Zealand, Korea, Canada and Hong Kong.

MRAs help link international industry partnership programmes to create a unified and sustainable security position that assists in securing and facilitating global cargo trade.

Harnessing Intelligence, Biometrics, Analytics and IT

SmartGates and Trusted Traders are examples of the ABF's intelligence-informed operational model that will be a hallmark of our future operations.

Our work with partner agencies is supported by the intelligence capabilities of the Department of Home Affairs. The intelligence support we receive draws on all available information sources, including our national and international intelligence and law enforcement partners. As a result, the ABF is able to utilise timely, accurate and relevant border threat assessments. This helps us to identify and respond to threats and increases our confidence in meeting the community's expectations on who and what enters or exits our country. We have a wealth of information at our fingertips which offers the potential to facilitate movement of law-abiding travellers while also identifying threats such as identity fraud, trans-national crime and terrorism.

The Border as a Continuum

Globalisation has blurred the lines of traditional borders which have become national assets, holding national security, economic and strategic value, and increasingly tied to networks and connectivity. Hence, we consider our border today as a complex continuum, encompassing our physical border, our offshore operations and our activities in the Australian maritime and air domains.

Globalisation and interconnectedness provide us with economic and social benefits that Australia must seize and capitalise upon. Our ability to facilitate rapid transit trade and to attract visitors and skilled migrants, are essential to growing our economy and protecting our prosperity into the future.

While connectivity has transformed borders, it has also transformed how we manage our borders. The functions of managing our security, stability and social cohesion are also becoming increasingly networked, requiring greater collaboration between national agencies. They also require effective collaboration with industry and international partners, to work together, to share information, and to harness our respective expertise for our mutual benefit.

In effect, the national border security environment presents a shift from reactive incident management to a border security model of proactive awareness, deterrence, detection, interception and prevention.

International Co-operation and Collaboration

The ABF is supporting the International Border Co-operation Programme to help train participants from around 43 countries in the Asia-Pacific, Middle East and Africa regions.

In 2017-18, we will deliver 50 training activities across a number of disciplines, such as document examination, intelligence analysis, X-Ray image analysis, and vessel search courses [which focus on undertaking effective risk assessments; and boarding and safely searching suspect vessels for smuggled drugs, weapons and other goods]. These training exercises help improve co-ordination between jurisdictions and support a seamless, transnational enforcement framework.

The ABF also partners beyond the region with international organisations, including the World Customs

Organisation, making important contributions in the national security community and transnational border protection environment.

Future Opportunities

Being grouped with similar agencies within the Home Affairs Portfolio has given the ABF an opportunity to realise its potential as a world-class border enforcement body. Professionalism and integrity are fundamental to this objective.

The establishment of the ABF College has given us the opportunity to professionalise our officers. Being an ABF officer is a vocation with specific skill sets, requirements and a career path. We will continue to ensure that our workforce is multi-skilled and able to deploy across the full range of immigration and customs functions as they evolve into the future.

In October 2017, the first phase of the Australian Border Operations Centre (ABOC) was established. The ABOC will be a cornerstone of ABF capability in the future, providing a centralised and unified operations centre, and a single point of contact for partner agencies engaging with the ABF. The ABOC will streamline information sharing for improved operational awareness, operational planning, and command, control and co-ordination.

Conclusion

Australia is making rapid progress toward a more seamless border where the majority of legitimate migrants, travellers and traders can move effortlessly across the border without interference or unnecessary delay; where we can readily detect transgression or non-compliance and focus our intervention efforts on the non-compliant few. This necessitates new approaches to how we manage the border, new programmes, new technology, and enhanced and integrated intelligence and law enforcement.

Protecting the community is a priority shared by many government agencies. No one agency operating in isolation can do it. Home Affairs is building stronger partnerships within the Australian law enforcement and intelligence community that will enable us to make the most of our various skills and expertise. The strengthened capability enables the ABF to assess and manage risks across the border continuum. We look forward to working with our Home Affairs colleagues, and our international partners, to meet future challenges, protect the community and contribute to Australia's ongoing prosperity.

The Author: Mandy Newton joined the ABF on 3 April 2017, after a 28-year career in law enforcement and policing in the Australian Federal Police (AFP). As ABF Deputy Commissioner Support she is responsible for planning, support and training, detention and offshore related matters. Prior to joining the ABF, she was an Assistant Commissioner at the AFP for 11 years during which she developed the aviation portfolio at major airports across Australia. She has also served as Deputy Chief Police Officer within ACT Policing, has private sector experience working with ACT Electricity and Water, and was an Assistant Commissioner at the Australian Taxation Office. For her distinguished service to aviation security and during the Canberra bushfires, she has been awarded an Australian Police Medal and a National Police Service Medal, respectively. [Photo of Ms Newton: Australian Border Force]