



**Australian
BORDER FORCE**

Trade & Goods Compliance Advisory Group

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Communique

CAG Meeting 26 March 2025

The ABF convened the first CAG meeting of the year at the ABF Headquarters in Canberra ACT. The Chair, Dr Asha Rajah-Clarke (Commander, Customs and Trade Compliance) conducted opening formalities and meeting administration. The agenda was designed to progress discussion on matters previously brought before CAG and for the ABF to provide updates of strategic importance.

The meeting began with a discussion about the Border Watch program; highlighting its importance in addressing border threats and the significant results from industry participation. The new Border Watch approach will prioritise referrals, engage with risks by setting thresholds for referrals, identifying a suitable medium to provide regular feedback and build a model to educate and engage by using existing forums and interactions.

Members discussed the challenges of managing trade while addressing issues such as high-risk goods and piggybacking behaviour in importation. Members raised concerns about reputational risks and ABF's future intervention for innocent parties whose shipments are impacted by piggybacking. Members agreed on the challenge of illicit tobacco trade, emphasising the need to address organised crime behind these activities rather than solely focusing on seizures. Members agreed to continue to work with ABF to find collaborative solutions that can address the needs for industry while ensuring international supply chain security.

Members noted the update about the establishment of the Illicit Tobacco Task Force in 2018 to combat organised crime and the subsequent creation of the Vaping and Tobacco Operations and Coordination (VTOC) branch in November 2023. The team focuses on pre-border, at-border, and post-border strategies, including deploying ABF officers to key locations. By leveraging international relations and partnerships, significant progress has been made in border security, with over 180 referrals and 132 detections this financial year.

Members noted issues encountered in engineered stone product testing, emphasising the need for trusted suppliers and the challenges encountered by the high costs associated with batch testing. Members discussed the importance of establishing assurances before importing and minimising redundant tests.

Members noted the Regulatory Sandbox is a mechanism to turn off certain parts of legislation and does not impose additional requirements. It is deregulatory in nature, and participation in a trial is voluntary. The Sandbox is not a replacement for compliance requirements, which remain in place unless agreed as part of a trial. To ensure commercial-in-confidence is maintained, specific details on proposals that do not progress to trial will not be disclosed. To date, seven proposals have been received, reflecting a range of potential concepts and policy considerations. At least two legislative instruments will be required to support the trial – one to establish the structure and scope, and another to enable industry participation. As legislative instruments are involved, appropriate details, including opportunities for participation, will be made publicly available when relevant.

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Members noted the Customs Amendment legislation aims to modernise and streamline Australia's trade regulations. Key changes include:

- Enhancing digitalisation by allowing electronic lodgement of license applications and notices.
- Strengthening the licensing regime against criminal threats, including expanding fit and proper person tests.
- Removing redundant administrative burdens, such as the requirement for public notices of license cancellations to be published in newspapers.
- Aligning renewal and suspension time frames for licences to ensure equity between depots and warehouses.

Members were also provided with an update of the Border Intermediaries Sub Working Group (BISWG). At the last agenda item, members raised several issues including the ABF approach to securing an "Authority to Act" under section 181 of the Customs Act 1901, tariff classification and details about the ABF 2025-26 Budget.

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