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Communiqué

NCTF Meeting 28 April 2026

The National Committee on Trade Facilitation (NCTF) convened for its first meeting of 2026 at Australian Border Force (ABF) Headquarters and via Microsoft Teams. The Chair and Co-Chair welcomed members and acknowledged their ongoing engagement. Members endorsed the minutes of the 21 November 2025 meeting and agreed to close outstanding action items.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) provided an update on the World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) second review. The review, scheduled to conclude in September 2026, is focused on practical implementation rather than renegotiation. Early themes include increased emphasis on pre-arrival processing, digitisation and transparency. Industry members raised questions regarding implementation reporting and Single Window obligations, noting the importance of aligning policy settings with operational practice. DFAT confirmed Australia's compliance with TFA requirements and will continue to engage agencies and update members as the review progresses.

Members were briefed on preparations for the Harmonized System 2028 (HS Codes) changes, with implementation scheduled for 1 January 2028. Planning activities during 2027 will include legislative amendments and development of concordances and supporting materials. Industry highlighted operational risks associated with compressed implementation timeframes, including system updates and the timing and format of classification materials. Concerns were also raised regarding potential misalignment with international partners and the treatment of Indigenous products under future classification frameworks. The ABF will explore options to address these issues, including implementation timing, communication strategies and possible administrative tolerance arrangements.

The ABF, in partnership with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and Austrade, provided an overview of the current operating context, noting continued growth in air cargo and e-commerce volumes and increasing complexity across cargo streams. Members discussed the cumulative impact on industry systems and workforce capability, as well as the importance of aligning regulatory settings with commercial realities and embedding facilitation principles in future system design.

The Simplified Trade System Unit advised that most currently funded initiatives are complete or transitioning to sustainment, with some activities continuing into the next financial year to support completion. Industry research into business experience at the border has identified improvements alongside persistent challenges. Austrade reaffirmed the Government's commitment to simplifying cross-border trade, particularly in the context of global economic uncertainty and export diversification. Industry members emphasised the importance of a clear long-term reform vision and improved integration across trade systems.

The ABF provided an update on the Trade Facilitation Initiatives Working Group, including outcomes from the March 2026 extraordinary meeting. Members supported a refined, outcomes-driven approach, focused on co-design between government and industry. Initial work will prioritise cargo business model and system modernisation, with smaller, time-limited sub-working groups to progress defined issues. The NCTF endorsed both the updated focus areas and revised Terms of Reference.



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The ABF also provided an update on Integrated Cargo System modernisation activities. Data indicates continued growth in cargo volumes, with over 13 million cargo reports processed in February 2026. Recent system disruptions were attributed to gateway and network dependencies rather than core system failure. The Cargo Reporting System Transformation initiative will explore longer-term reform options, supported by a public discussion paper expected in mid-2026. Industry members highlighted the need for a clear future-state vision and emphasised that reform should address compliance effectiveness as well as processing efficiency.

Updates were provided on the Trade and Goods Compliance Advisory Group (CAG) and the Border Intermediaries Sub-Working Group (BISWG). CAG continues to mature as a forum for addressing systemic compliance risks and testing regulatory approaches, with increasing engagement from industry representatives. BISWG is examining longer-term issues affecting the customs brokerage profession, including licensing models, workforce sustainability and professional standards. Members noted the importance of evidence-based reform developed in close consultation with industry.

The ABF briefed members on illicit tobacco and vaping enforcement activities, highlighting the significant scale of organised criminal involvement. In 2025–26 to date, over 1.6 billion cigarette sticks and 8.4 million illicit vapes and vaping accessories have been seized, disrupting more than \$3.45 billion in evaded excise duty. Members acknowledged the scale of the threat and supported continued collaboration and information sharing.

In other business, industry members raised the need for further updates on the Maritime Single Window. The NCTF agreed that ABF would seek an update from the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts and provide this to members out of session.

The next NCTF meeting is scheduled for November 2026.