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Communique

NCTF Meeting 09 April 2025

The National Committee for Trade Facilitation (NCTF) convened for its first meeting of the year at the Australian Border Force (ABF) Head Quarters in Brindabella Park, ACT. The meeting was conducted during caretaker period. The meeting opened with an award presentation, recognising excellence in the Master of Customs Administration program (presented by Prof. David Widdowson AM, Chief Executive Officer, Centre for Customs and Excise Studies, Charles Sturt University). The 2024 medal was awarded to ABF officer Lyn Foster, for outstanding academic performance.

Co-Chairs Ms Tharanie Vithanage, First Assistant Secretary Strategy and Policy Division, and Ms Louise McGrath, Head of Industry Development and Policy, Australian Industry Group, welcomed members to the meeting by thanking them for their continued engagement. The Co-Chairs extended a special welcome to Mr Bill Cole, representing the Law Council of Australia, and Ms Wendy Stanton, recently elected as Chair of the World Customs Organization Regional Private Sector Group (WCO RPSG) Asia Pacific (AP).

Members discussed the need for industry-driven agendas to continue fostering meaningful and dynamic discussion, rather than a reliance on government-focused reports and updates. It was acknowledged that this was particularly important to address, acknowledging the need for addressing current global trade challenges.

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade representatives provided members an update from the WTO Committee on Trade Facilitation. The update covered Australia's support of Vanuatu and Timor-Leste's implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement and Australia's ninth WTO Trade Policy Review.

The Chair of the WCO RPSG AP provided an overview of the committee's role in the broader WCO framework and customs environment. Members agreed on the importance of stronger customs-private sector partnerships and the need for improved data sharing and communication channels to support trade facilitation and security and to address emerging threats.

Members discussed the rise in low-value e-commerce consignments which is straining cargo reporting systems and has led to cost recovery measures by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) to better manage volumes and risk. Some industry members highlighted the limitations with current SAC reporting and impact on facilitating trade efficiency. This issue has been referred to a sub-committee for further consideration.

Representatives from the Simplified Trade System Unit updated members on the progress made in streamlining trade processes particularly noting the initiatives aimed at enhancing efficiency and reducing regulatory burdens for businesses. Members discussed the critical role of continuous stakeholder engagement to ensure real world applicability of reform work and the necessity of clear communication channels to keep all parties informed of changes.

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Members discussed the evolving global trade environment and the impact on Australian Industry. Discussions covered the evolving nature of international trade policies, with a particular focus on the influence of shifting tariffs and duties that have resulted from recent geopolitical developments. Further, members agreed on the importance of collaborative efforts between government bodies and industry stakeholders to navigate challenges effectively.

The next NCTF meeting is expected to be held on 11 November 2025.