



Australian
BORDER FORCE

National Committee on Trade Facilitation

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Communique

NCTF Meeting 21 November 2025

The National Committee on Trade Facilitation (NCTF) convened for its second and final meeting of the year at Australian Border Force (ABF) Headquarters in Brindabella Park, ACT. The Co-Chairs welcomed members to the meeting by thanking them for their continued engagement.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) provided an update on Australia's free trade agreements (FTAs). The Australia–UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement entered into force on 1 October 2025, eliminating tariffs on over 99 per cent of Australian exports to the UAE and marking Australia's first FTA with a Middle Eastern nation. DFAT also continues negotiations with India on a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement and with the European Union on an FTA. General reviews of the China–Australia FTA and the Indonesia–Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement are underway, with submissions open until 31 March 2026. A review of Australia's FTAs in Southeast Asia has also commenced, with submissions closing 31 December 2025.

The ABF outlined progression on three trade modernisation initiatives:

- **Early Detection of Illegitimate Trade:** Work has commenced to strengthen data analytics and risk profiling capabilities, identifying high-risk activity earlier in supply chains. Initial efforts have focused on developing advanced data models and legislative scoping to support early intervention. Engagement with industry is expected in 2026 once foundational analysis is complete.
- **Modernising the Integrated Cargo System (ICS):** Working with The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) to progress a contemporary ICS that meets international standards, supports efficient trade flows and strengthens border protection. Engagement with government is crucial to establish the foundational settings of a pathway forward to align with key industry partners. The aim is to identify a system that is less resource-intensive, enables industry connectivity, and positions Australia to meet global benchmarks.
- **Improving Speed and Security at Ports and Airports:** Funding has been received to deliver the Streamlining Cargo Intervention trial, embedding ABF operations within a private port operator to enhance cargo screening. Pending finalisation of administrative arrangements, trial outcomes are expected to provide a clear dataset on effectiveness by late 2026. Work in the air cargo space is progressing in partnership with DAFF, further details to follow.

DAFF outlined progress on reforms to the low value self-assessed clearance pathway, which has experienced significant growth. Updated long term regulatory settings are expected by the end of 2026. DAFF is also reviewing risk profiles, considering additional detection tools such as x-ray and detector dogs, and progressing rural container and first point of entry policy updates. Work continues on the new integrated container and cargo platform, with initial rollout by early 2026.

The Simplified Trade System (STS) Unit has completed the STS Benefits Realisation Framework, commencing an industry research project to reassess major business pain points. Findings are expected to be delivered in January 2026. Peak bodies and industry partners have been invited to participate.

The Attorney-General's Department advised that the Standing Council of Attorneys-General (SCAG) has noted the proposal to implement the Model Law on Electronic Transferable Records through uniform amendments to electronic transactions legislation. SCAG agreed to establish a working group of Commonwealth, state and territory officials to develop national model amendments for referral to the Australasian Parliamentary Counsel's Committee.

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Australia is a member of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL), which undertakes substantive work through six working groups. The latest project in Working Group VI has been focused on the topic of Negotiable Cargo Documents (NCDs). Australia has been monitoring the progress of this work. In 2022, UNCITRAL agreed to develop a draft instrument establishing a negotiable document of title representing goods in transport. The proposed Convention allows NCDs to be issued in paper or electronic form for use in both unimodal and multimodal transport and seeks to ensure these documents are recognised across borders by States Parties. This work addresses gaps in existing frameworks, as maritime bills of lading are widely recognised but no equivalent instrument exists for land-based transport. At its 58th session in July 2025, UNCITRAL finalised the draft Convention on NCD's. The next step is consideration by the UN General Assembly, which will open the way for adoption by individual States. Australia is monitoring progress, with any future decision subject to government consideration.

DFAT outlined broader trends in the global trade environment, noting increasing fragmentation of the global trading system, a rise in industrial policy interventions, the use of tariffs and export and investment controls and investment restrictions, and growing geostrategic competition. Emerging technologies, including critical technologies such as AI are also reshaping global trade. The Government continues to work to maintain open markets, cooperate with international partners and bring trade benefits to the whole community.

DFAT advised that the Government continues to advocate with the United States for the removal of US tariffs on Australian products. Australia's investment in the United States stands at AUD 1 trillion, demonstrating the strength of the relationship. The Government is continuing to support our affected industry, including by diversifying Australia's export markets.

The Chair of the World Customs Organisation (WCO) Asia Pacific Regional Private Sector Group provided an update following the October 2025 meeting in Hong Kong. A workshop on Authorised Economic Operator programs was held, with members discussing regional experiences and opportunities for enhancement. A draft questionnaire outlining the five regional priorities, aligned with the WCO Strategic Plan, is under review. Industry members were invited to seek further information as needed.

The next NCTF meeting is scheduled for 29 April 2026.