

OFFICIAL

## Communique

### NCTF Meeting 5 June 2024

The NCTF convened for its first meeting of the year at the Department of Home Affairs in Belconnen ACT. The acting Chair Mr Ashley Bell, Assistant Secretary Customs and Border Modernisation Branch, opened the meeting and thanked members for their attendance; made an acknowledgement of country; introduced Dr. Ben Evans, Commander Governance and Strategic Partnerships Branch; and welcomed Ms Tharanie Vithanage, the incoming First Assistant Secretary, Strategy and Policy Division and Chair of the NCTF.

In outlining the meeting agenda, the Chair established the context for discussions to align with the simplified trade reform agenda. Members were advised of the structural realignment recently undertaken by the ABF to ensure it is better positioned to deliver Government priorities. This includes the re-positioning and centralisation of targeting within the customs division to support compliance and enforcement responsibilities. Taken together, this will enable the ABF to effectively utilise the funding received from the 2024-25 Federal Budget which reinforces the Government's priorities to strengthen border security, tackle illicit goods, and modernise trade and travel settings.

Following coordination by the STS (STS) Taskforce of the STS reforms to government's digital services, provision of advice to government regarding priority reform investments and the development of the Trade Single Window business case, the Taskforce will transition to the Simplified Trade System Unit (STS Unit) for two years from 1 July 2024.

Members then considered the emerging issues related to e-commerce, acknowledging the large growth in volume poses challenges to border agencies globally. The discussion noted that express carriers had a role in furthering the use of simplified e-commerce clearance processes, and noted that customs' procedural issues will require development of new methods to identify illicit and controlled goods within the increasing flow of legitimate trade.

An update was provided on the current status of Australia's obligations under the auspices of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), with advice provided regarding controls, inspections or detentions; applicable fees and charges; and how the Integrated Cargo System (ICS) meets the requirements of a 'single window' for the purposes of the TFA.

Members noted the proposed legislative reforms to strengthen and modernise the customs licensing regime and that the consultation process had been undertaken through another committee. Discussion was held in relation to an industry member's proposal to establish a government/industry committee on cross-border trade cost recovery fees and levies. The Chair advised members that collection and control of customs duties and excise is a matter for Executive Government. It was further noted that fees and levies charged by border agencies have been developed in line with the Australian Government Cost Recovery Policy.

In closing the meeting, the Chair thanked members for their engagement, and noted that in line with the established review process, the committee's Terms of Reference are now under review, with members invited to provide feedback.

The next NCTF meeting will be held on 19 November 2024.