

National Sea Passenger Facilitation Committee

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Communique NSPFC Meeting 15 May 2025

The Australian Border Force (ABF) convened the second National Sea Passenger Facilitation Committee (NSPFC) meeting of the year at ABF Head Quarters in Brindabella Park, ACT with Ms. Tharanie Vithanage, First Assistant Secretary, Strategy and Policy Division and Mr Greg Coopman, Cruise Coordinator/Operations Officer, Wilhelmsen Ship Service, overseeing the commencement formalities and meeting administration. The minutes from the previous meeting held on 29 January 2025 were endorsed by all members.

Members agreed to elect an industry Co-chair, out of session, to enhance agenda setting and promote balanced discussions, valuing the rotational aspect of the role for diverse representation.

Key discussions focused on strategic maritime initiatives, notably the Maritime Emissions Reduction National Action Plan, which aims to guide Australia's maritime sector towards net zero emissions. Strong stakeholder engagement and the plan's alignment within the broader Transport and Infrastructure Net Zero Roadmap were highlighted, with updates anticipated post-election.

The Independent Review's interim report of the Coastal Trading Act was noted as submitted to the Minister, with public release pending government consideration. Industry representatives emphasised the importance of transparent timelines, particularly concerning exemptions vital for cruise itinerary planning.

Operational matters, including the review of the New and Redeveloping Ports Framework around border security, biosecurity and resource allocation at international ports, were discussed. The need for better integration of state tourism strategies with national security measures, clearer cost recovery processes and collaboration among stakeholders was highlighted by some members.

Discussions also covered the complexities of En-route clearances (ERC), with some members seeking clearer guidelines to balance operational efficiency and border security. Some industry members expressed concerns about restrictions on unproclaimed/minor ports, noting the operational benefits of increased flexibility in using minor ports such as Newcastle and Eden to support regional economic growth. A set of ERC general principles and a list of currently endorsed Australian ports for ABF consideration of an ERC to aid industry planning have been shared with industry members.

Some members raised concerns about officer allocation proportionality to ship size, seeking improvements in resource deployment and communication. The potential for round-the-clock operational efficiency was noted, acknowledging resource limitations. The Maritime Traveller Processing Committee processes were discussed, particularly towards last-minute itinerary changes. The ABF acknowledged these changes are considered and approved in genuine extenuating circumstances, such as medical, security, major weather event and biosecurity. Examples of these extenuating circumstances have been published online.

Challenges related to handling deserter cases on cruise vessels was identified as an area needing streamlined procedures to reduce disruptions. Members agreed to explore this issue in greater detail.

The meeting concluded with a summary of key actions and appreciation for active participation. The next meeting is scheduled for September 2025, with continued focus on industry collaboration and co-chair nominations.

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