

Interview

Vanessa Holben, First Assistant Secretary, Aviation and Maritime Security

Paul Zalai, Director FTA, speaks to Vanessa Holben as she takes up the reins at Australia’s transport security regulator, the Aviation and Maritime Security Division of the Department of Home Affairs.

1. PAUL ZALAI – Vanessa, you’ve started at Aviation and Maritime Security (AMS) just after the implementation of piece-level examination for all export air cargo in March this year. How has the change gone from your perspective?

Firstly, I want to say thank you to all those in industry who contributed to the successful implementation of this important reform. Aviation remains a high profile terrorist target and it’s critical that Australia’s transport security measures evolve as required to meet new and emerging threats.

We’re continuing to work with industry as the new arrangements bed down, but as I talk to those involved and impacted it’s clear to me that this has been a job well done by government and industry working collaboratively together.



2. PAUL ZALAI – Many FTA members have remarked on how smoothly the changes rolled in on 1 March. How was that achieved and what were the takeaways?

Without a doubt the key to success was collaboration, as it is for any complex project. The relationships built over a long period through the Air Cargo Security Industry Advisory Forum (ACSIAF) allowed all the players to work together, raise and address concerns, and adjust plans as required to achieve a positive outcome.

Not everything will go to plan in these sorts of projects. A good example of that was when communication with exporters was initially falling short, we worked with ACSIAF members like FTA to adjust the approach and make sure the messages cut through and that people knew how to contact the AMS Guidance Centre where required.

We also worked closely with ACSIAF members to accommodate industry requests where we could and to plan for various contingencies that might occur at the time of transition and implementation.

3. PAUL ZALAI – So what are your priorities for AMS in general, and in the air cargo space specifically?

I’ve come to AMS from the Australian Border Force (ABF), and I see many parallels in how the two organisations need to work with stakeholders to manage security risk. A key priority for AMS is to build capability so that we can be more agile in responding to emerging threats, as well as being innovative with internal processes to achieve better outcomes.

In terms of air cargo, we’ve been working with industry on options to strengthen domestic air cargo security and this will be our major focus, along with ensuring compliance with the international requirements.

In addition, we have identified a number of other reforms that we plan to advance through ACSIAF including the use of detector dogs, screener accreditation, an update of the Examination Notices, and a review of the current requirements for security declarations.

4. PAUL ZALAI – That’s a lot of change to manage. How do you see industry and AMS collaborating to deliver necessary reforms?

Yes there is, and we’re committed to continuous improvement to ensure that our air cargo security arrangements are in line with best practice globally, and the growing air cargo demand can be met efficiently by Australian industry.

I think the collaboration and cooperation demonstrated for the piece-level reforms means we now have a solid platform for the work ahead. I am looking forward to working with industry, and hearing their views and suggestions over the coming months.

“ *the key to success was collaboration* ”