

Australian Border Force – Meeting COVID-19 challenges at the Border

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Australian Border Force's (ABF) role at the border is more important than ever.

While passenger air travel has dropped sharply, the ABF processed 57.8 million air cargo consignments in 2019-20 – up from 53 million in 2018-19. Wharf activity remains strong, with redirected e-Commerce resulting in the number of consignments arriving by sea increasing by 32 per cent in the past financial year.

Overall, the ABF and trading community have adjusted well to COVID-19 disruptions, but other risks persist. Criminals are adept at identifying and exploiting perceived weaknesses at our borders; and rather than being deterred by events like a worldwide pandemic, see them as an opportunity.

For example, travel restrictions required to slow the spread of the coronavirus may have significantly reduced opportunities for

smugglers of drugs and other illicit goods to conceal them on travellers. However, with trade volumes still strong, it's inevitable they will look for ways to use supply chains to bring contraband to Australia.

The ABF is alert to this and has surged staff and resources to meet the threat. It's not a threat that we face alone. We work closely with other law-enforcement agencies, particularly the Australian Federal Police and state and territory police services, as well as partner agencies at airports, seaports and in international mail centres.

You, as traders and logistics professionals, are also a key partner. You understand what is happening out there in the freight sheds and cargo terminals. While the pandemic has been disruptive, there is still much that you and your staff can identify that doesn't look right. We have had some excellent results recently from referrals through our Border Watch program. We encourage

you to continue to engage with us as the situation at our borders continues to evolve.

If you do see something suspicious, you can make a confidential online report or telephone Border Watch on 1800 061 800. For more information on what constitutes suspicious behaviour and what you can do about it, please visit www.abf.gov.au/borderwatch.

Another core part of our engagement with you is through our Australian Trusted Trader program, which reduces red tape for businesses demonstrating compliant trade practices and secure supply chains, expediting the flow of their cargo in and out of Australia. We are still progressing applications and where we can, subject to COVID-19 restrictions, validating businesses to join the program.

You can find out more about the Australian Trusted Trader program by visiting <https://www.abf.gov.au/att>.

We can also work with you if you are encountering unforeseen challenges with border clearance processes and systems as a direct result of COVID-19. The ABF has a dedicated area to deal with COVID-19 border-related questions and ideas. You can contact us at industry.engagement@abf.gov.au.

We will continue to work with you during this challenging time to facilitate legitimate trade while preventing and disrupting the movement of illicit and prohibited goods.

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