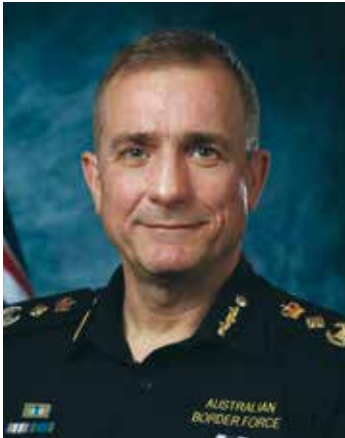




Working together to re-open Australia

By MICHAEL OUTRAM, APM
Commissioner, Australian Border Force

For many of us in the Australian Border Force (ABF) and the Australian shipping industry, 2021 has been another challenging year. COVID-19 continues to complicate the global movement of people and goods, while also impacting our staff and business operations. Despite these challenges, however, the ABF and industry can be rightly proud of the critical role we have played during the

past two years in keeping the Australian economy moving and ensuring our community has continued to have access to essential supply chains.

The pandemic has changed many of our day-to-day activities, affecting the way we live and do business. A good example of this has been the rise of online purchases, which have been the most viable option for many individuals

and businesses during extensive lockdowns. This shift has seen a marked rise in sea cargo volumes, with a greater share of Less than Container Load (LCL) consignments, as traditional air cargo supply chains have decreased. In 2020-21, the ABF facilitated and processed 26.9% more sea cargo consignments, requiring us to be agile in shifting our workforce and intervention

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methodologies to match the changed environment. I have been particularly pleased that cargo clearance rates have continued or improved during the period of the pandemic, bearing out the ABF's continued focus on facilitating legitimate business.

At the same time, the ABF remains committed to protecting Australia's border as we manage the movement of goods across it. The rise in sea cargo volumes has been accompanied by a similar increase in the detection of illicit goods. Through both air and sea movements, the ABF detected over 23 tonnes of illicit drugs, 1059 consignments of illegal firearms and over \$1.9 billion worth of illicit tobacco at the border – preventing these harmful goods entering our community.

As upward trends in international trade continue and supply chains become increasingly complex, the scale of our intervention will remain heightened, as it must, to mitigate the threat posed by criminal entities who seek to exploit the border and circumvent our migration, visa, trade and customs laws.

Supply chain integrity is crucial to safeguarding our community from criminal activity. Australian Federal Police Operation Ironside demonstrated the extent of criminal penetration of our supply chain. This criminal activity puts the community at risk, as well as undermining legitimate businesses. The ABF works closely with Australia's law enforcement agencies to counter this

criminal menace: we have dedicated extra resourcing to this effort, and expanded our industry engagement to encourage reporting of suspicious activity.

Managing present challenges does not distract us from looking to the future. During 2021, the ABF has been developing a range of innovative policy, regulatory and technology reforms in the trade and customs context, as part of the Australian Government's Simplified Trade System (STS) reform agenda.

Under the STS, the ABF and the Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment (DAWE) are seeking to develop new intervention models for sea and air cargo. These models will enable us to inspect a higher proportion of consignments, reduce delays for legitimate trade, enhance the detection of threats and risks, and maintain the integrity of the border. The models will include options to non-intrusively inspect cargo, leveraging technology and automation, and embedding technology in the logistics chain. More efficient supply chains will benefit the economy and Australian businesses of all sizes.

The ABF continues to innovate to address industry concerns about process and 'red-tape' adding costs to trade. A prime example of this is our introduction of 'gateway clearance' of goods to reduce the need for costly underbond movements. In this case, the practical step of amending the information required in the Port of

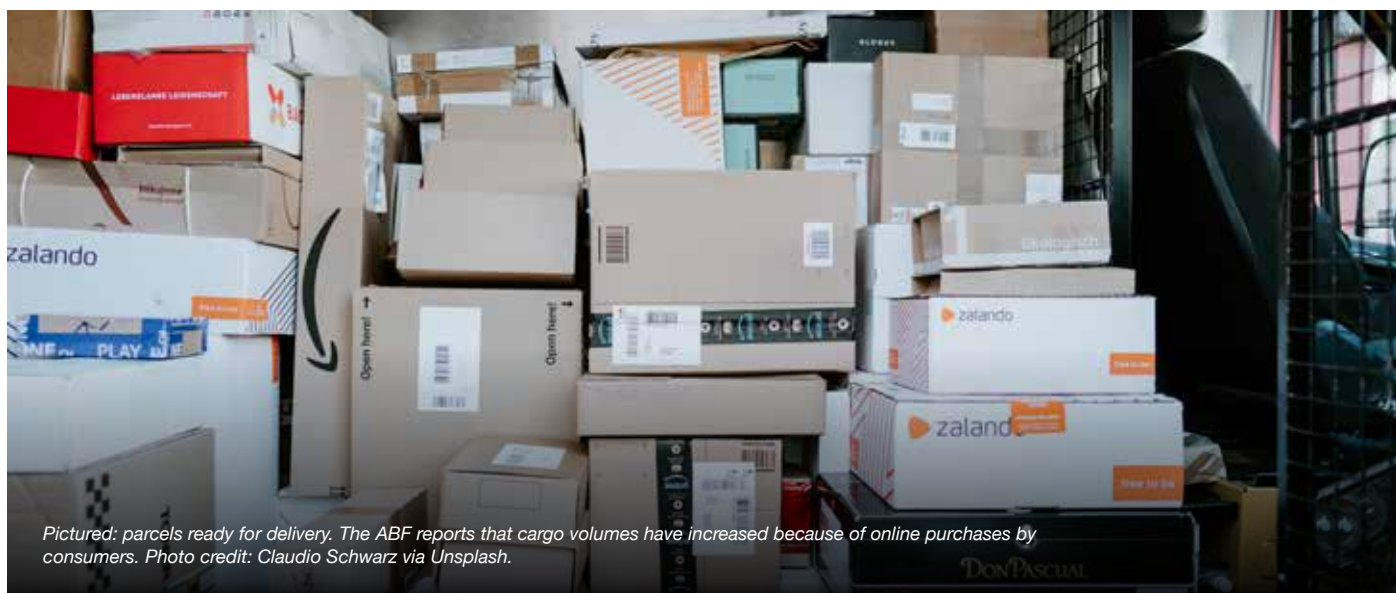
Destination field on the Sea Cargo Report has allowed goods that were traditionally moved long distances under customs control to their Port of Destination to now be released at the Port of Discharge – saving time and money for importers.

COVID-19 has shown how important it is for border agencies to maintain their operational capability to respond to changing environments. This can only happen if we maintain our partnerships with industry and other stakeholders, including international counterparts.

Through the World Customs Organization (WCO), the ABF is working to shape the development of global customs rules on issues that matter to Australia, including e-commerce, trade facilitation and supply chain security. The ABF also delivers capacity building through the WCO to development partners on customs issues that are relevant to their core national interests. These interactions benefit Australian businesses trading with countries in our region, while also helping to keep our border and region secure.

The opportunities ahead of us are significant. We will continue to extend and strengthen our partnerships with business and industry to meet our shared goals.

I look forward to continuing to work with Shipping Australia and the maritime sector as we reopen our borders to the global community. ▲



Pictured: parcels ready for delivery. The ABF reports that cargo volumes have increased because of online purchases by consumers. Photo credit: Claudio Schwarz via Unsplash.