



There's more to customs and visa policies than security

MEDIA RELEASE

'Facilitating the smooth flow of goods and people is critically important for Australia's international competitiveness' said Lisa McAuley, CEO of the Export Council of Australia (ECA). 'We need to ensure they are seen from an economic perspective, not just through a security prism.'

With the recently announced creation of a Home Affairs portfolio, the focus has been on enhancing linkages between law enforcement agencies, and transforming the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) into a Department of Home Affairs. This department would have responsibility for aligning planning, coordinating and supporting these agencies.

However, some of DIBP's current responsibilities are policy areas that are critical for Australia's economy. It is responsible for striving to enhance the competitiveness of exporters by ensuring Australia's trade with the world is as smooth and at as low a cost as possible. It does this through initiatives such as the Trusted Trader Program, the National Committee for Trade Facilitation (implementing Australia's commitment under the World Trade Organisation Trade Facilitation Agreement) and the planned Single Window for Trade (a commitment from the 2016 election).

It is also responsible for making visas as accessible as possible, vital for supporting Australia's boom in tourists and international students, and facilitating business travel. And it is responsible for making sure Australian businesses can access people with the right skills through the skilled migration program.

'These policy areas all have important security dimensions', said Ms McAuley, 'but they cannot be viewed only in that context.'

As Senator the Hon George Brandis explained, the Home Affairs Minister would 'give 100 per cent of his time and his attention to national security, both domestic, national security and border security.'

As part of the implementation of a Home Affairs portfolio, the ECA urges the government to transfer policy responsibilities that support Australia's economy from immigration and border protection to a minister who has greater scope to focus on improving Australia's international competitiveness. The Minister for Home Affairs would be able to have a say in relevant policies from a security perspective.

'The ECA has long called for the Australian Government to develop a national strategy for trade and investment that enhances coordination of the government's activities to support advancing Australia's economic interests. This ranges from customs processes to trade promotion to free trade agreements,' said Ms McAuley.

'A major step towards better coordination within government, and better outcomes for business, would be to now move responsibility for customs and visa policy to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, under the responsibility of the Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment.'

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