



Clarification: ECA position on Home Affairs portfolio

MEDIA RELEASE

The Export Council of Australia (ECA) clarifies it is not calling on the government to move policy responsibility for customs and visas to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, but for this to be considered as an option.

On 18 July, at the announcement of the Home Affairs portfolio, Senator Brandis stated the Home Affairs minister would be 100% focused on security. Based on this, the ECA called on the government to ensure there would be a minister responsible for striving to ensure legitimate travellers and goods can enter and exit Australia as smoothly, and at as low a cost, as possible.

One option, which the ECA has highlighted, would be moving customs and visa policy (but not operational staff) to DFAT, under the Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment. This option would be a major step towards aligning Australia's trade-related policies and ensuring there is greater policy coordination across the full trade supply chain. Given the implications for security, policy would need to be developed in close consultation with the Home Affairs portfolio.

Another option would be for visa and customs policy to transition into the Home Affairs portfolio. This would require expanding the Home Affairs minister's remit—from an exclusive focus on security to include an explicit responsibility for trade and travel facilitation. Given the implications for trade, tourism and investment, policy would need to be developed in close consultation with the Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio.

"Ahead of the creation of the Home Affairs portfolio, we call on the government to identify which minister will be responsible for improving the flow of people and goods. And, if these policy areas are included in Home Affairs, the government should outline the steps it will take to ensure they remain a priority," said ECA CEO, Lisa McAuley. "Australia already faces relatively high costs to trade internationally, we cannot afford for the government to lose focus on bringing these costs down."

According to the World Bank, for an Australian business exporting a shipment of goods, border compliance costs USD 749 and takes seven hours. The OECD average is USD 150 and 2.6 hours.

"The Department of Immigration and Border Protection, and the Australian Border Force, have made good progress in facilitating trade and travel, and we want to see that progress continue," said Ms McAuley. "The introduction of the Australian Trusted Trader (ATT) program, in particular, is an important step towards improving the flow of trade. The government has secured four bilateral mutual recognition arrangements (MRAs) for this program, but these are the tip of the iceberg.

"We are looking forward to seeing some progress on the Single Window for Trade, a Coalition commitment from the 2016 Election."

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