



Australian
BORDER FORCE

ABF Illicit Tobacco Challenge

Border Integrity Meeting

29 April 2026



The Illicit Tobacco and Vape (ITV) Threat Landscape

- System exploitation across the supply chain
- Evolving criminal methodologies
- Joint disruption opportunities
- ~1,000 tonnes detected in <4 months
- Air and sea cargo primary vectors
- Activity national but concentrated
- Indicates resilient criminal supply chains



Why it matters

Crime

Exploits border vulnerabilities - leverages insider access and gaps to secure high profits with minimal risk

Employs severe, unlawful methods - uses violence and intimidation to dominate illicit trade market

Finances major criminal enterprises - including drug production and trafficking, human trafficking, slavery, and terrorism



Health

Poor quality products - tobacco often mouldy, stale and treated with harmful chemicals

Hazardous ingredients - illicit vapes may contain highly toxic substances

Violence - creating unsafe conditions for shops owners, staff and consumers



Economic

Tax evasion - significant loss of government revenue

Biosecurity & safety - protentional harm to Australian industries

Impact on essential services - reduced government tax revenue limiting funding for essential services like healthcare, education, and law enforcement

Criminal Strategy

Observable strategy of criminal actors

- Exploiting legitimate systems
- Embedding in supply chains
- Adaptive and agile methods
- Use of insiders and weak controls



Key methodologies



01

Mis-declaration

02

Transshipment

03

Downsizing and dispersal

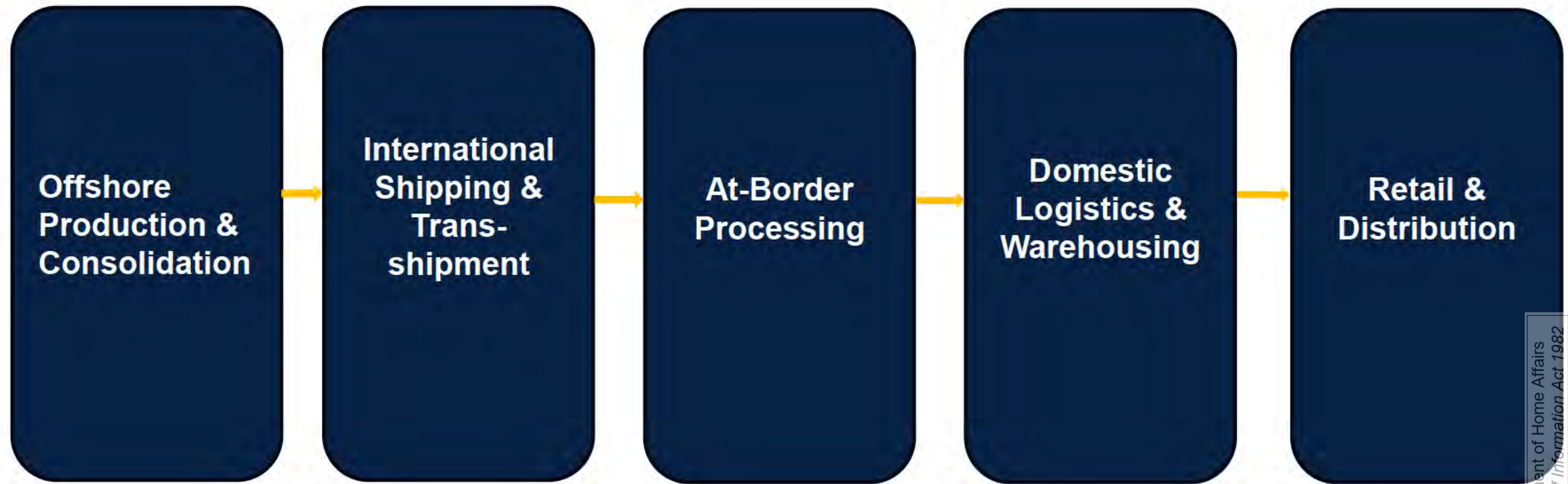
04

Concealment

05

Front-companies

Supply Chain Pathway



Industry Role

- Controls key choke points
- Data integrity critical
- Customer vetting essential
- Visibility of goods movement

Illicit tobacco and vapes do not “slip through” – they move through predictable pathways where industry controls critical choke points.

ABF Response

- End-to-end disruption model
- Intelligence-led targeting
- Multi-agency collaboration
- Focus on criminal networks



Released by Department of Home Affairs
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ABF Response

Structure

Vape & Tobacco Operations Coordination (VTOC)

**Est
2023**

- Strengthening international relationships.
- Coordinating across customs continuum nationally & internationally.
- Building national & international capability.

The Illicit Tobacco Taskforce (ITTF)

**Est
2018**

- Enhancing investigative & intelligence gathering.
- Targeting & prosecuting serious organised crime networks.
- Encouraging cohesive operational response.

**Increased
capability &
strengthened
partnerships**

- Pre-border (off-shore)
- At-border
- Post-border

Illicit Tobacco National Disruption Group (NDG)

**Est
2025**

- Targeting to disrupt mid-level criminal activity within Australia.
- Cross-agency partnerships leaning into each other's powers & capabilities to support investigative & other regulatory activities.



Underbond Vulnerability

- High volume movements
- Limited in-transit visibility
- Diversion risk before inspection
- Exploited by organised crime

Industry actions

ABF reliance on industry engagement

- Strengthen due diligence
- Refuse high-risk consignments
- Improve data accuracy
- Report suspicious behaviour
- Support upstream disruption



Industry support

- Shared problem
- Shared responsibility
- Make system hostile to exploitation
- Industry insight critical

Suspected border related activity can be reported through
Border Watch:
<http://www.abf.gov.au/borderwatch>

Reports can be made anonymously and play an important role in protecting Australia's border and the broader community.

The ABF is committed and focused on breaking the illicit tobacco model by using disruption to make the environment hostile and increasingly difficult for criminal groups to operate





Questions



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Thank you

