

Retired US Customs chief strengthened ties with Australia

United States Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) first Commissioner, Robert C Bonner, who retired in September 2005, is credited with implementing wide security and counter-terrorism programs after 9/11. The key ones were the Container Security Initiative (CSI), the 24-hour rule and the Customs Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (C-TPAT).

CSI is based on bilateral agreements for the placement of US officers at ports to target high-risk containers. Australia is not part of this CSI program.

C-TPAT is a partnership with the trade community, where the trade agrees to meet security criteria in return for benefits and facilitation. There are more than 9000 C-TPAT members, most of them US importers.

The 24-hour rule requires sea carriers to report cargo 24 hours before lading in the foreign port. This allows risk assessment before cargo is put on board.

In April 2003, Commissioner Bonner visited Australia for Customs-to-Customs bilateral discussions.

The two organisations agreed to:

- a reciprocal arrangement to examine high-risk export cargo at the request of either country
- further discuss opportunities to advance container and supply chain security
- share information on targeting and methodology approaches
- collaborate on new or emerging technologies to develop working models
- an in-depth exchange of information on the modernisation of cargo systems.

In June 2005, the World Customs Organization (WCO) agreed to the Framework of Standards for International Trade Security and Facilitation (FoS), based on two pillars:

Pillar One is Customs-to-Customs arrangements. Pillar Two is Customs-to-business partnership programs.

US programs are largely reflected in the WCO standards framework. In particular, C-TPAT was a key model for Pillar

Two and the 24-hour rule is reflected in Pillar One where Customs administrations are recommended to introduce advanced cargo reporting.

In September 2005, Australian Senior Customs Representative in Washington Teresa Conolan accompanied a team from US CBP to Australia. The aim was to agree protocols for an arrangement to x-ray or examine high-risk export cargo at the request of either country. This is in line with the WCO standards framework and will not involve any US CBP officers being posted to Australia.

Australian Customs views this as an opportunity to test and demonstrate the principles of Pillar One which includes Customs-to-Customs exchange of data and x-ray images, and export examinations on request.

Australian Customs is in the early stages of developing a Customs-to-business partnership in line with Pillar Two. The program will be similar to C-TPAT but not require foreign validations by Customs or Australian industry. A key element of Pillar Two is mutual recognition of Customs partnership programs world-wide.



A farewell reception for Commissioner Bonner was held at the Australian Embassy in Washington. (From left) Assistant Commissioner of US CBP International Affairs E. Keith Thomson, the Hon Jennifer Dunn, Mrs Betty Richardson, Commissioner Bonner, Mrs Kimmi Bonner, Australian Ambassador Dennis Richardson, Australian senior Customs representative Teresa Conolan and Australian Customs representative Dean Hogarth.