

CCES Community Webinar

Staying aligned in turbulent times: How Customs stay ahead of policy shocks



WISETECH GLOBAL GROUP

Key themes and take-aways

On 10 June 2026, the Centre for Customs and Excise Studies (CCES) and International Network of Customs Universities (INCU) co-hosted a webinar entitled Staying Aligned in Turbulent Times: How Customs Stay Ahead of Policy Shocks. Our panelists included:

- Pam Radin, Former Australian Border Force (ABF) Commander.
- Sabine Schröder, Senior Expert for Export Control and Customs.
- Ozlem Baser, Customs Broker, Cable International.

The following insights highlight practical lessons for frontline supervisors and managers responsible for translating policy into action.

1. The first 24–72 hours: expect confusion, then compression.

Policy shocks trigger confusion followed by urgency. Early effectiveness depends on quickly establishing legal clarity, assessing operational impact, and providing clear and structured direction to teams, even when information is incomplete.

2. Coordination failures start internally, not at the border.

Coordination challenges start internally. Industry stakeholders must rapidly recalculate tariffs, halt shipments, and adjust supply chains. Customs must recognise these pressures and align responses across agencies, ports, and stakeholders. Externally, the most common coordination gaps occur:

- Between customs and industry.
- Between government agencies.
- Between policy centers and frontline operations.

Effective border management requires understanding that industry coordination pressures are immediate and parallel.

3. Data and impact visibility are critical early capabilities.

Use data to stabilise operations. Rapid analysis of affected goods, volumes, and traders allows customs to prioritise resources and manage risks effectively during the initial disruption period. Customs officers who can rapidly translate policy into quantifiable operational scenarios can gain decision advantage.

4. Stakeholder collaboration is not optional; it is operational infrastructure.

Customs brokers, freight forwarders, and industry bodies play a central role in absorbing policy shocks. Brokers act as intermediaries managing compliance, costs, and delays. Customs administrations must continue to treat industry as operational partners. Strong outcomes depend on direct communication channels, trusted and established relationships (“having a name to call”), and ongoing engagement through industry associations and advisory groups.

5. Leadership credibility depends on transparency, not certainty.

Lead with transparency, not certainty. Credible leadership during policy volatility relies on clear communication, honesty about uncertainty, and consistent messaging. Leaders should draw on expertise across all levels of the organisation. Credibility is built through consistency, honesty, and clear, structured communication, not perfect foresight.

6. Operational trade-offs are inevitable; prioritisation is a leadership skill.

Policy shocks often require redeployment of finite resources, increased inspection requirements or compliance checks, and sudden surges in workload. Leaders therefore must decide what to scale up, what to pause or scale down, and how to avoid staff burnout.

7. Future shocks will be more complex and systemic.

Panelists highlighted sources of future volatility including:

- geopolitical conflict and sanctions regimes,
- supply chain disruptions (e.g., port closures, re-routing),
- climate and environmental shocks,
- food security risks, and
- the expansion of export controls and defence-related trade.

These trends will increase non-compliance risk (especially among new or unprepared traders) and require broader technical expertise.

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