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Opening Statement

Chair (Senator Smith), thank you for the invitation to appear before the Committee and the opportunity to make a brief opening statement.

We also appreciated the range of questions from this Committee that we responded to, following our attendance at the October estimates hearings.

This included questions on a number of important national reforms that we are either leading or partnering with all governments on to deliver.

In that regard, I thought it would be helpful to give the Committee a brief update on some of these critical programs of work.

I'll start with the national early childhood worker register.

As you are aware, the intent of this new national register - in its foundational phase - is to provide regulators with visibility of who works in the sector and where, and in turn, improve the safety and quality in early childhood education and care services.

The first stage of this project has involved ACECQA building a foundational register within our existing, secure National Quality Agenda IT System (NQA IT System). The foundational register is on track for delivery, with an initial pilot scheme with the sector commencing next week.

Seventeen approved providers that collectively deliver many hundreds of children's education and care services across Australia will participate in the pilot, as well as regulators. The pilot scheme will enable testing of register functionality and useability to address any issues, prior to the planned national rollout in February 2026.

The Early Childhood Legislation Amendment (Child Safety) Bill 2025 proposes to make the register mandatory, and is expected to pass and receive Royal Assent in the Victorian Parliament in coming weeks. Currently, the Child Safety Bill states that the use of the register by all providers approved under the National Quality Framework will be mandatory from 27 February 2026, with a small transition period (one month) for providers to update the register with the required information.

We are also simultaneously leading other child safety reform initiatives, in collaboration with all nine governments. Two of which I would like to highlight now.

First, through our StartingBlocks.gov.au website, we have strengthened transparency and awareness of our regulatory system and supporting family decision-making. Families now have access to enforcement actions taken by state and territory regulatory authorities against providers and their services over the previous two years. There are now six types of enforcement actions that are published on our StartingBlocks website, these include:

- **approval amended** – whether a provider or service approval has been amended
- **condition imposed** – whether a condition has been imposed on the provider or service approval to require them to comply with specific requirements in addition to the National Law

- **compliance notice issued** – a formal instruction to providers and services to make sure they are aware of their responsibilities, the requirements they haven't met, what they need to fix and by when
- **emergency action notice issued** – a notice requiring them to fix serious safety issues at a service immediately
- **enforceable undertaking issued** – a legally binding agreement with a provider or an individual which sets out what they agree to do or stop doing to comply with the National Law
- **notice of suspension issued** – whether a provider or service has been suspended

This builds on the information we already publish about operational conditions placed on providers and their by regulatory authorities, identifying the provider that operates each service, as well as the date of the last regulatory authority's visit to a service.

The second piece of work I would like to briefly mention is our rapid assessment of safeguarding practices. Education Ministers asked us to examine whether current operational applications of ratios requirements are being appropriately applied and are adequately supporting child safety in ECEC services.

From August to October of this year, we undertook sector consultation and data analysis, and I am pleased to say that the report has now been submitted to Education Ministers for consideration.

In addition to the above, we are continuing to work with all governments to effectively implement the suite of wide-ranging legislative reforms that are contained in the Child Safety Bill 2025. This includes taking a national leadership role, in collaboration with all states and territories and the Australian Government, to inform and prepare the sector for these changes – including through new and update national guidance, updated resources and training materials for state and territory regulatory authority staff, and devising and deploying modifications to the NQA IT System to help both the sector and regulators operationalise these changes.

We look forward to providing you with further information on any of this reform work, or any of ACECQA's broader functions, in particular to strengthen safeguards for children attending National Quality Framework approved education and care services.

Thank you.