

Additional Senate Estimates – March 2020

Opening statement – Commissioner, Australian Federal Police

- Since the last time I appeared before this Committee:
 - The AFP has been part of the government and community response to the bushfires, the White Island volcanic eruption, and the coronavirus outbreak.
 - I would like to acknowledge, and wholeheartedly thank, the first responders from across Australia, as well as all of our members who have been directly involved in the events of the past few months. And for those families that have suffered loss, I offer my deepest personal sympathies.
 - The AFP will continue to respond, with our partners, to serve the Australian community.
- And the AFP has kept up its operational intensity, achieving some significant outcomes:
 - Arrests in connection with the largest methamphetamine importation in history, preventing over 1.7 tonnes from reaching our community.
 - 120 charges laid for child exploitation crimes, and 18 children removed from harm – just since last October – by our joint state and territory teams.
 - We arrested and charged a man with 5 terrorism offences upon his return to Australia from Turkey.
 - And the AFP coordinated more than a dozen law enforcement agencies in Europe and Australia for one of largest cybercrime investigations to date, disrupting the use and sale of ransomware in 124 countries: 85 warrants executed internationally, 434 devices seized and 13 people were arrested overseas.

Commissioner's intent:

- I appear before you today having represented the Australian Federal Police as the 8th Commissioner for over 100 days. And it has been a very busy 100 days.
- In my last appearance before this Committee I made it clear that my absolute focus is ensuring the AFP is the best-performing police force it can possibly be.
- This involves:

- Supporting our front line, to maximise operational impact
 - Reducing red tape, for faster decision-making, and
 - Strengthening key partnerships.
- I have recently concluded my 100-day plan of action and embarked on a new strategy for 2020 that will see the AFP deliver maximum damage to the criminal environment.
- However, I want to touch on matters previously subject to media reporting and detail what they mean for the AFP and the public.

Lawler Review:

- I announced at the last Estimates hearing that I had asked Mr John Lawler AM APM to examine the AFP's response to and management of sensitive investigations.
- Mr Lawler examined more than 200 documents, conducted 55 meetings and consulted more than 100 internal and external stakeholders.
- As part of this process, and as I committed to you, I met with media executives to understand their concerns.
- Mr Lawler's report was made publicly available on the AFP's website, again as I committed to you at my last appearance.
- I have accepted all 24 options in principle, and work is underway to implement the investigations, governance, and structural improvements suggested by the Review.
- Of note:
 - Referring agencies will have a clearer understanding of the requirements to make a referral, and
 - A Sensitive Investigations Oversight Board will provide an additional layer of analysis and consideration governing decision-making for sensitive investigations. A key focus of this consideration is on the harm of the referred matter.

MP Taylor Referral

- Which brings me to my next point.
- I'm sure you would be aware of a recent matter referred to the AFP by NSW Police in relation to a Member of Parliament.
- In deciding not to pursue the matter, we have taken on board certain elements of the framework set out in Mr Lawler's review report.

- We provided clearer detail about our considerations in determining that the matter should not be pursued.
- I want to express, once again, my utmost confidence in AFP officers who investigate a range of complex matters in a challenging environment, and do so to a high standard.

100-day plan:

- I'd like to move on to the completion of my first 100 days as Commissioner and the strategy for the remainder of 2020 and beyond.

Supporting the front line

- From 3 February, the AFP has a new organisational structure, based on regionalised service delivery.
 - The new structure will result in quicker decision making at the frontline and deployment of appropriate resources across the organisation.
- This year we will hold one of our largest graduations ever, for five recruit courses, including Federal Police Development Programs, a Protective Service Officer Program and a lateral program recruiting experienced police detectives into the AFP.
- Protection Operations Response Teams are in place in Canberra and Brisbane airports, providing specialised first-response capabilities to better detect, deter and prevent potential hostile threats, and the roll-out of this capability continues across our designated airports.
- This year we will also focus on attacking one of the primary motivators behind organised crime – profit – something I have elevated through a dedicated Criminal Assets Confiscation Taskforce, reporting directly to my office. This will provide the AFP and our partners with an opportunity to deliver maximum damage to the criminal environment, and I have set a KPI of \$600 million dollars in restrained assets, out of the hands of criminals and back to the Australian government, over the next five years.
- I will continue to focus on the physical and mental health of the AFP.
- And I'm committed to further work on the US Cloud Act, streamlining requests for evidence held by US-based companies.
 - Too often, too many investigations are held up by the fact that critical electronic data is stored offshore.
 - The processes to access that information have not kept pace with the everyday use of technology.

- We want to cut through that, to make sure justice is swift and certain, and ultimately protect vulnerable Australians.

Reducing red tape

- To further reduce red tape, I have established a new Strategy and Performance Office, to see that the goals we set are implemented and monitored, in line with organisational priorities and intent.p

States and Territories

- And last week we announced the National Operations State Services Centre, which will work more closely with jurisdictional partners and provide stronger connections between Australian policing, offshore partners and other external stakeholders. That's what we're here for.

Conclusion

- I'm looking forward to 2020, and beyond. Each year we will set ourselves ambitious goals, and each year we will deliver on those.
- I am focused on ensuring the ongoing safety and protection of the Australian public from those that seek to do us harm. Whether it's organised crime, terrorism, child abuse, or criminal finances: the AFP will be relentless in delivering maximum damage to the criminal environment.
- I am committed to ensuring our people are equipped to do their job as effectively and safely as possible.
- I am also looking forward to your questions.
- My acting Chief Operating Officer, Darren Box, is here with me to try to limit the number of questions I take on notice.