

AFP COMMISSIONER – OPENING STATEMENT

ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES – MARCH 2021

- Good morning Chair and committee members.
- To begin, I would like to congratulate Senator Henderson on your appointment as the new Chair.
- I have a lot of ground to cover in this opening statement, so I'll do my best to make it concise.

1. While the AFP's operational priorities are focused on counter terrorism and foreign interference; transnational serious and organised crime; cyber; fraud and child exploitation, the AFP's maxim is **Policing for a Safer Australia**. It is in our DNA to protect Australians and Australia's interests.
2. It is incumbent on all law enforcement leaders to work together to ensure Australians feel safe at home, their workplace and in the community.
3. In the context of events and public discourse in recent weeks, both in Australia and overseas, it is important for me, as the Federal Police Commissioner, to call out and denounce in the strongest possible

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terms, the prevalence of **violence, abuse, harassment and intimidation** in our community, and in particular against women and the vulnerable. It is **unacceptable**.

4. The AFP has **zero tolerance for violence and abuse** of any nature in our organisation. In order to strengthen cultural, people and wellbeing priorities in the workplace, in late 2020 we established a new partnership agreement with the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC).
5. We're looking forward to working with Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins and her team to build on past initiatives with practical solutions suitable to the AFP's context.
6. I hope to provide you with further detail on this at the May Budget Estimates hearing.

APH allegations

7. In relation to the alleged sexual assault at Parliament House in 2019, I will be limited in what I can say today, to ensure the active criminal investigation is not compromised.
8. The allegation is serious. The AFP, through ACT Policing, is investigating this matter and it is being treated with due care and

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attention, including with oversight by our Sensitive Investigations Oversight Board.

- This is an internal senior-level decision-making body, chaired by Deputy Commissioner McCartney.
9. Noting there are a number of inquiries into related matters, I have communicated to those responsible the primacy of the criminal investigation and the importance of letting it run its course.
- This includes - the Presiding Officers, and Senator Chandler as Chair of the Finance and Public Administration Committee. I have also spoken with Ms Jenkins about her inquiry. I have also spoken with Mr Gaetjens, Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, that I am particularly concerned about the intersection of his inquiry with our investigation.
10. I would like to reference the letter I wrote to the Prime Minister, shortly after media coverage and the receipt of a separate allegation, in relation to a serving Member of Parliament.
11. My letter provides guidance - to Members, Senators and staff in their parliamentary and electoral offices - in relation to the reporting of any criminal conduct to police without delay.

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12. The AFP is available to provide advice to parliamentarians and their staff regarding appropriate processes to be followed.
13. While alleged criminal conduct may not always be within the jurisdiction of the AFP to investigate, and may instead be a matter for state or territory police, we will assist with reporting to the appropriate agency.
14. I want to reinforce how reporting a crime intersects with the wishes of alleged victims:
 - o An investigation will always turn on the unique set of circumstances and available evidence;
 - o The earlier a report is made, the best chance police have to secure key evidence; and
 - o Our officers are well trained in dealing with vulnerable witnesses, and ensuring the rights of victims are respected.
15. I will now outline the AFP's involvement in relation to the allegations against a Member of Parliament:
 - o We received a report on 24 February 2021 via a Member of Parliament.

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- We made contact with NSW Police at the earliest opportunity on 25 February.
- AFP officers, including at the Deputy and Assistant Commissioner level, spoke with their NSW Police counterparts during that week to confirm contact points for previous involvement with the complainant.
- The matter was also considered by our Sensitive Investigations Oversight Board, and after ascertaining there were no allegations within the jurisdiction of the AFP, we provided all relevant documentation to our colleagues in NSW Police.

16. I request that further detail on matters currently under consideration either by police or state coroners not be aired in this public forum today.

17. My focus remains on both respect for the privacy and dignity of complainants, and the resolution of any investigation in a timely manner.

- I will always be frank, open and as helpful as I can be to this Committee. However, where answering a question may prejudice

an ongoing or future criminal investigation, I consider this is contrary to the public interest.

- o I invite you to consider this in framing your questions, noting I will be prepared to confer with the Minister to make public interest immunity claims – and protect the integrity of these investigations – if required.

18. While these investigations continue, I'd also like to highlight the extraordinary results the AFP is recording in challenging circumstances.

Ministerial Direction

19. The focus of those results are centred on the Ministerial Direction issued by the Minister for Home Affairs on 12 December 2020. Under the AFP Act, the Minister provided clarity on our expected areas of focus, namely:

- Countering terrorism, espionage and foreign interference
- Combatting child exploitation
- Transnational serious and organised crime

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- Cyber crime
- Fraud and anti-corruption, and
- The provision of Specialist Protection Services and operations.

20. In the time available I'll touch on just a few key operational successes to demonstrate our performance against this Direction.

21. During the height of the pandemic, in the period March 2020 – February 2021, compared to the same period in 2019:

22. We **accepted 28% more matters for investigation** (that is, 1105 matters in total).

- This included a **75% increase in online child abuse** matters.

23. Overall, we **seized 50% more illicit drugs**. This included continued significant volumes of **MDMA and Ice** (almost 12,500 kgs) as well as concerning increases, like:

- 3 times as much **Cocaine** (almost 4,000 kilograms prevented from entering our community), and
- a 60% increase in the quantity of **Heroin (and other opiates)** seized.

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24. I wish to acknowledge our Forensics teams, who deliver specialist scientific, technical and intelligence capabilities in support of AFP operations.

- They also play a key role in supporting our state and territory counterparts, and work with international partners to take the fight against illicit drugs offshore, through our world-leading drug profiling programme which analyses and identifies the origin of seized drugs.

Transnational Serious and Organised Crime

25. Actors involved in Transnational Serious and Organised Crime are highly adaptable and resourceful. Many operate well outside of Australia – confident they won't be caught.

26. Unfortunately for them, the **recent arrest in Amsterdam of one of our highest priority targets, Chi Lop TSE**, demonstrates what I have indicated previously – if you commit crime against Australians or Australian interests, we will come after you.

- We allege Mr TSE is responsible for multiple large volume drug importations, worth billions of dollars, into Australia and the region for more than a decade.

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27. Australian authorities are now seeking Mr TSE's extradition to face prosecution in Australia.
28. And just last week in a joint operation (with the ACIC, ABF, NSW Police, and the NSW Crime Commission), a vessel was intercepted off the NSW coast carrying around **200 kilograms of cocaine**, on its way to Sydney's Port Botany.
29. We're also prioritising our criminal assets confiscation practice. Last financial year, the AFP-led Taskforce restrained \$264 million in criminal assets, and this year we are up to **\$140 million**.
- o We don't just go after multi-million dollar bank accounts and mega mansions: we have seized cars, electrical equipment and even scuba gear.
30. We are working tirelessly with law enforcement and other agency partners to dismantle criminal structures that are directly harming the Australian community. My message to these criminals is: We are coming, whether you are in Australia or abroad. We will also target everything obtained by your ill-gotten wealth: We will be **relentless**.

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31. I acknowledge the change in language, to **religiously motivated violent extremism** and **ideologically motivated violent extremism**, announced by the Director-General of Security last week. In AFP **we will adopt** this new terminology, as well as the subsets within those categories – but our **primary focus remains on targeting criminality**.

32. As we saw with the arrest and charging of two men by the Victorian Joint Counter Terrorism Team last week, we continue to see members of our community radicalising to violence. And we are committed to supporting communities who are at the forefront of prevention and early intervention efforts.

Child Protection/ACCCE: Operation Arkstone and Operation Saintes

33. I would also like to acknowledge two significant recent efforts from our teams who have one of the toughest jobs: child protection, human trafficking and slavery.

34. Operation Arkstone revealed an online network of alleged child sex offenders, producing and sharing child abuse material on social media forums.

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35. On 24 February this year, a 30 year old man in WA was the first convicted offender sentenced as a result of the operation.
36. Since the first arrest in February 2020, AFP investigators and forensic specialists have worked tirelessly to examine evidence from each arrest in order to identify more alleged offenders linked to this network.
- So far, 20 men have been charged and 53 children have been removed from harm.
37. We won't stop until we uncover the entire network of individuals and the full extent of their criminal activity. Just last week we laid a further 152 charges against a Sydney man for his alleged role in sexually abusing young children, some under the age of 10 years.
38. Also last week, a 40 year old man was arrested in Armidale and charged with three slavery and sexual servitude offences, and has been remanded in custody.
- The AFP wants all victims, potential witnesses or others impacted by human trafficking or slavery to be aware that there are pathways to get help.

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- The criminals who perpetrate these crimes are hiding in plain sight and I urge the entire Australian community to 'look a little deeper', and contact police if something doesn't seem right.

Cyber

39. Cybercrime is a significant priority for the AFP and we are aggressively progressing the Cyber Security Strategy 2020. We know firsthand that cybercrime can affect everyone in our community.

40. The AFP is shifting to a **victim-centred approach**, and we will continue to reduce the volume of cybercrime and other online harm by:

- growing our numbers of tech-savvy cyber investigators
- working more closely than ever with international partners to uncover offshore cybercriminals targeting Australia, and
- building even stronger partnerships within the Australian Cyber Security Centre; and with the E-Safety Commissioner - who also does important work to keep Australians safer online.

41. As we said to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security last week: the proposed powers in the Surveillance Legislation

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Amendment Bill, currently before Parliament, will help us to better **uncover, identify and then target** those profiting from the theft and sale of Australians identities and financial information.

- o In some circumstances we'll be able to disrupt or frustrate online offending, with **reduced harm and better outcomes** for would-be victims in the community.

42. It is very important that the public knows the appropriate place to make reports of online thefts, frauds and scams. This is through **REPORT CYBER.**

- o The AFP - and every state and territory police force - partners with the Australian Cyber Security Centre to coordinate this process and ensure your report gets to the appropriate investigating authority.
- o And if you have had your identity stolen, I encourage you to get in contact with **ID-CARE** who can help.

43. Finally, I want to draw your attention to the new AFP jobs website: **jobs.afp.gov.au.**

44. I want this agency to **fully represent the community that we serve.**

- I am proud that our most recent recruit training program, which commenced last Monday in Sydney, comprised a higher number of women than men.

45. To help us achieve a more diverse workforce, we launched the interactive site to reach a wider audience and provide applicants, their family and friends with information about the exciting career opportunities in the AFP.

46. At the AFP we outsmart serious crime through intelligent action. We out-think, and we out-manoeuvre: We're a step ahead.

47. So if you or someone you know is interested in being part of our team, and serving your country - in any of our Commands across Australia - I encourage you to take a look at our new site and apply.

- There's a lot more I could mention, like our ongoing contribution to the COVID-19 response, but I think we're out of time.
- I now welcome your questions.