

Thank you Chair.

It's been a busy few months for the Department since our last Estimates hearing, with some significant achievements to note. I want to highlight just a few.

Two foundational strategies, on cyber security and migration, were finalised and released late last year. I acknowledge both the hard work and the intellectual rigour our teams have put into these. They set the agenda for an ambitious work program over the coming years, and will be transformational for the Department's prosecution of these agendas.

The Department played the lead role in coordinating social cohesion efforts in response to the Israel-Hamas conflict. Drawing on our community liaison network around the country, we engaged closely with affected communities, developed proposals to respond to community needs, and are now implementing these programs. Our Immigration team, working closely with their Border Force colleagues, deployed a crisis response capability to respond to Australians and close family members affected by the crisis.

Another achievement of note was the rapid passage of legislation to allow for court-ordered citizenship cessation in December 2023. This followed the High Court's decisions in Benbrika and Jones on 1 November 2023 and forms a critical part of our national security legislative framework.

And of course the organisation has led the response to the impact of the High Court decision in the NZYQ case, putting in place legislative and operational responses to that decision rapidly and expertly. Ensuring community safety was, and remains, our overarching priority, in this response.

Again I want to acknowledge the extraordinary efforts not just of our own staff in Immigration, Legal, Border Force, Media and Corporate, but those of our partners in the Australian Federal Police, the Attorney-General's Department, including the Australian Government Solicitor, and the Office of Parliamentary Counsel. Similarly, I want to acknowledge the efforts of our colleagues in the states and territories who have engaged closely with us to ensure a coordinated and effective management of individuals in the community. I note also the terrific support from colleagues in the Departments of Finance and the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and many others. It has been a real team effort.

I am conscious there is significant interest in the NZYQ case and we have come prepared to answer as many questions as we can. In that context, I note that our response is ongoing, with the Department managing current litigation and preparing for future cases, continuing to engage internationally on removals and working with the states and territories to further embed our community safety arrangements. There has been much media interest in individual cases and, as you would be aware, the Department will need to avoid disclosing information that could identify any individual person.

As required during hearing today, we will flag where we consider that providing specific information could be contrary to the public interest.

Internally, we are continuing our organisational journey, with resolution of the Inquiry into the former Secretary and my subsequent appointment providing greater certainty for staff going forward. I am conscious of the enormous opportunity this portfolio offers in contributing to the prosperity, security and unity of Australia and Australians, and am confident that our committed and passionate workforce will deliver on this opportunity.

I am all too conscious that culture is not something that changes overnight, but we have all the right ingredients, with a unified senior leadership team and a workforce that is hungry for positive change, and ready and willing to embrace new ways of thinking and working.

Over recent months, we have significantly increased our lines of communication with staff at all levels, ensuring all staff have the opportunity to interact directly with their senior leaders, including through monthly interactive webinars. We are working through our policies to make them less onerous and rules-based, and at every opportunity we emphasise empowerment and collaboration as key principles in everything we do. In short, our leadership team is working hard to engage and listen to all staff to make sure we are creating an organisation in which everyone can be fully productive and fulfilled. It is of course the start of a journey, but staff and union representatives are telling us it is making a real difference. On that note, we are very excited to be going in to a vote on our new Enterprise Agreement with the support of union bargaining representatives.

We also received a significant injection of funding for new measures in the 23-24 Portfolio Additional Estimates, with \$276 million for this current year, and \$1.02 billion over the forward estimates.

Finally, on a lighter note, I committed to Senator Paterson in October to reduce the number of acting positions on the Department's organisation chart, which reflects our senior team. I'm pleased to say that the number of people acting in senior roles in the Department has reduced from 39 to 26, and the number of actual vacancies from 23 to 14. We have a number of recruitment activities close to finalisation which will reduce that number further over the coming month. Two critical positions we are working hard to resolve quickly are the Cyber Security Coordinator and the Associate Secretary Immigration.

As important as the raw numbers is the quality of the people we are promoting internally and bringing on board from outside. This renewal of our senior team is bringing with it a real capability uplift.

We look forward to your questions.