

**AFP COMMISSIONER'S OPENING STATEMENT**

**BUDGET ESTIMATES 2020**

- Good morning Chair and Committee members. I thank you for the opportunity to make an opening statement.
- I appear before you today having represented the Australian Federal Police as the 8th Commissioner for just over one year.
- As an organisation, we are focussed on improving our delivery of services to the community, through investigations, operations and ACT Policing.
- I have here with me today, Ian McCartney, Deputy Commissioner of Investigations, Brett Pointing, Deputy Commissioner of Operations – including our specialist protective services, and my acting Chief Operating Officer, Assistant Commissioner Debbie Platz.
- In my statement today, I will briefly address three areas:
  - The first - is the AFP's support to the community, including Indigenous Australians, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, while still delivering maximum damage to the criminal environment.
  - The second is our commitment to building community awareness and confidence in the work we do for Australians at home and abroad.
  - And lastly, to address the recent Budget announcement and how a new funding model for the AFP will support our agency to keep the Australian community safe into the future.

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- Throughout the pandemic, the AFP has acted swiftly in response to the changing criminal environment and adapted to the challenges presented by COVID-19.
- We have continued to prevent, disrupt and investigate crime.
- We have protected the community and taxpayers' money.
- I would like to acknowledge our state and territory police colleagues; Commonwealth departments and agencies, including the Australian Defence Force, which have all worked tirelessly to protect the community during these difficult times.
- Our focus in responding to COVID-19 is:
  - protecting our people;
  - safeguarding Australia's national interests; and
  - assisting with public safety.
- The AFP continues to prioritise investigations into Counter Terrorism and Foreign Interference, Child Exploitation, Transnational and Serious Organised Crime, Cybercrime and Fraud.
- The AFP has also landed a double-blow by prosecuting offenders and seizing their ill-gotten wealth through the AFP-led Criminal Assets Confiscation Taskforce – the CACT.
- We are hitting criminals where it hurts most, and taking the profits out of crime.
- In the past financial year, the CACT has restrained \$264 million in criminal assets in courts across Australia and overseas.

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- These criminal assets are linked to investigations into money laundering, drug trafficking, illicit tobacco, identity crime, tax and corporations offences, and various types of fraud.
- We have restrained residential and commercial property, rural land, luxury cars and boats, bank accounts, cash, cryptocurrency, high-end jewellery and other luxury goods.
- As at 30 September 2020, the CACT had already restrained more than half of the initial 5 year, \$600 million KPI target that I set following my commencement as Commissioner.

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- The AFP has a flexible workforce, and our staff are readily deployable for situations such as the pandemic. And, I commend our officers for adapting quickly to meet operational needs.
- The AFP and key partners successfully facilitated the purchase and delivery of more than 1.9 million surgical facemasks and hand sanitiser to help protect frontline police against COVID-19.
- The AFP made this supply chain available to other policing, health and emergency-response agencies across Australia, and we have supplied 962,000 (or almost 1 million) masks to NSW Police, Queensland Police, WA Police and two State Rural Fire Services to complement existing stocks for officers working to protect local communities.
- On 23 March 2020, the AFP received a request from Northern Territory Police Force, requesting assistance to implement border control measures across the Northern Territory.
- We have deployed 104 Police and Protective Service Officers to work alongside the NT Police Force.

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- AFP officers continue to support NT Police Force to prevent the spread of COVID-19 – and to protect and support Indigenous Australians in remote communities.
- The AFP has also assisted key policing counterparts in New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland. We have provided assistance with arrival and transportation to accommodation for repatriated Australians.

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- Throughout the pandemic, we have responded to an increase in many types of crime.
- For example, reports of online child exploitation increased by approximately 163%, compared to the corresponding period last year.
- To ensure the protection of children during COVID-19 the AFP has bolstered resources within the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation's triage unit and covert online engagement teams, to address the increase in referrals received.
- The AFP has also successfully targeted those seeking to commit fraud against the Government's COVID response measures.
- The AFP established a dedicated Anti-Fraud Investigations Taskforce – Taskforce IRIS – on 27 April 2020, with its first arrest on 30 April 2020.
- As at 30 September, the AFP has received 28 reports of fraud against the Commonwealth COVID-related response packages. Taskforce IRIS will continue to pursue those who defraud taxpayers' money.
- The AFP has also continued to prevent and disrupt organised crime groups. Recently, the AFP alongside ABF and NSW

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Police dismantled an organised crime group attempting to import 1.8 tonnes of cocaine into Australia.

- The desire to source high purity illicit drugs and the diversification of drug supply and manufacture increases the risk on the community.
- We are seeing a diverse range of industrial chemicals being sourced to manufacture illicit drugs and these chemicals are not designed for human consumption; their long term impact to user's health is unknown.
- Some crime types and criminals have ramped-up during the pandemic but we are ensuring we are one step ahead of those who seek to do Australians harm.

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- We can't protect the community without protecting our people – looking after our people has be a top priority. Our members on the ground have ready access to personal protective equipment which assists their operational duties.
- The AFP's technology mobility program, which was established prior to the pandemic, aims to ensure our people have access to the operational systems they need wherever their duties require. This foresight and investment positioned us well to respond to COVID. We rolled out a number of mobile applications and systems to support members in the field, limiting their need to attend the office or station.
- We partitioned our workforce to reduce the potential for exposure across teams. At one stage we had over 2,100 members working remotely, protecting themselves and our frontline officers from exposure.

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- We have also maintained our international presence during the pandemic, with members currently deployed across 33 countries.
- In these times, as ever, the AFP is deeply committed to protecting all Australians.

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- Much of what the AFP does is unknown to Australians. Our breadth and scope is unique globally.
- I have made it a priority to ensure that the AFP continues to increase awareness of the role of our agency, and how we protect Australia and Australia's interests.
- We do this by sharing our outcomes with the public, promoting awareness campaigns that help keep the community safe and maintaining relationships with key stakeholders.
- Our research shows that the biggest challenge in our community confidence levels is the community's awareness of what it is that we do.
- As part of our annual performance criteria review, the AFP increased its community confidence from 61 percent in 2018-19 to 69 percent in 2019-20.
- While we are still working towards our target of 75 percent – this is a step in the right direction.

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- Part of the effort to increase community confidence is our relationship with the media, particularly in the context of recent public conversations on press freedoms.

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- I have engaged in many Committee processes this year and put on the record that I believe in a free and open press.
- The AFP has continued to strengthen our relationships with media outlets and the community.
- The AFP has made significant progress in implementing the 24 options identified in the review I commissioned into the conduct of sensitive investigations, conducted by former Australian Crime Commission chief executive John Lawler.
- We have strengthened our governance structures, implementing an enhanced escalation model with an increased focus on actual and ongoing harm in the assessment of sensitive investigations.
- As I have said previously – as police, we do not target specific sectors of the community.
- We target criminality – which is determined by the laws created by Parliament, and based on our investigation to establish facts and evidence.
- The AFP respects the recommendations the PJCIS made in August as part of their Inquiry into freedoms of the press. The AFP is working with the Department of Home Affairs and the Attorney-General's Department in considering those recommendations.

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- In late May, I announced the AFP would enhance its policing capability across Australia.
- As a result, I established Taskforce Horizon. This will move much-needed sworn investigators from Canberra to the areas where they are needed most.
- I am strengthening the frontline to inflict maximum damage to the criminal environment.

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- An effective police force must be representative of the community they protect.
- The AFP has renewed its efforts to increase diversity in our ranks.
- We are working to raise awareness of our role, and ensure barriers to recruitment are minimised, so that we can attract a diverse and innovative workforce.

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- To ensure community confidence we must also accelerate our organisational capacity to acquire knowledge, develop individual and collective skills and generate a culture where the speed of learning within the organisation is faster than the change occurring outside.
- We are building systems and processes to accelerate and improve learning across all levels of the organisation.
- In an effort to support the frontline, the AFP has significantly increased the number of Police and Protective Service Officer Recruits.
- To date, 10 recruit classes have graduated in 2020, with an additional two classes scheduled to graduate before the end of the year.
- This reflects a projected total injection of about **320 new members into the organisation throughout 2020**, a record number of recruits graduating in a single calendar year [since 2007].
- To meet this demand, the AFP has streamlined and enhanced recruit training to make it as practical and relevant as possible to meet the challenges of contemporary policing.

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- On to our funding – I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Government for significant measures funded as part of the 2021 Federal Budget.
- Over the next four years the Government has committed \$223.1 million to retain existing capability and capacity.
- Importantly, Government has also committed to a new seven-year funding model flat-lining the AFP at current levels; providing an unprecedented level of certainty.
- As part of this investment, the Government has provided \$65 million over four years for a dedicated health program, called SHIELD – the single, biggest wellbeing spend in the AFP’s history.
- SHIELD will deliver new high-performance health centres, in each regional command across the country to enhance the support to our people.

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- The announcement also confirmed the AFP’s role in the Australian Government’s Cyber-Security Strategy 2020.
- It includes \$89.9 million to grow the AFP’s operational cybercrime footprint by 100 members, with 50 on track to be deployed in the current financial year.
- This is a critical investment to tackle the modern threat environment.

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- The funding also includes \$11.7 million over four years to formally establish the AFP Reserve Force.

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- The Reserve Force has been recognised as a critical element to provide the AFP with additional flexibility to surge operational members when and where needed.
- This is not about replacing police officers. This is about recognising the wealth of experience and knowledge among our retired and resigned members and leveraging it to its best effect.
- We've already seen the benefits during the COVID-19 period. We have been able to keep frontline police focused on key crime types, while surging into COVID-related efforts.
- With more than 50 Reserve Force members already sworn back in, we are well on track to build the force up to 200 members.
- While talking about the Reserve Force – I would also like to take an opportunity to thank – on the record – a strong supporter of this initiative – former AFPA President Angela Smith. I would like to thank Angela for her leadership of the AFPA, and for being such a strong advocate for all AFP officers.
- I welcome Alex Caruana as interim AFPA President, until elections are held in March next year. I look forward to continuing to work with Mr Caruana over the coming months, confident that both our organisations are working towards a safer community for all Australians, including those who police it.

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- In conclusion, 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

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abuse, or criminal finances: the AFP will be relentless in delivering maximum damage to the criminal environment.

- Lastly, I want to again acknowledge on the record our hardworking and dedicated people. They are doing a great job in difficult circumstances, and are working flexibly to maintain operational tempo and continue to achieve operational outcomes focused on keeping us all safe.
- Chair, my team and I look forward to answering any questions the Committee have on these or other matters throughout the course of today's hearing. Thank you.