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DEPARTMENT OF HOME AFFAIRS
Opening Statement
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Senate Estimates

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At the direction of the Australian Government, the Department is examining how Australia's international border can be re-opened in a graduated way, at the direction of government and guided by public health advice.

The gradual removal of restrictions on Australians' ability to travel internationally at scale, when conditions allow, will require significant preparation, including by way of collaboration across Australian Government departments and agencies, and with States and Territories, airlines, airports and international partners.

As the Committee would be aware, the assumption that has been made in the FY2021-22 Budget is that there will be no significant reopening of the international border before June 2022.

The Department is focused on developing biosecure border arrangements across the travel continuum:

- starting with pre-departure checking of visa and health status, as well as an individual's prior travel history;
- operating with check-in authorities at overseas airports where flights depart for Australia, to ensure they are processing only those passengers who are cleared to fly;
- working closely with airlines to monitor health in-flight;
- supporting Australian airports to establish 'green' and 'red' zones to facilitate safe movement within the airport environment; and
- working with States and Territories to provide them with the necessary passenger information which is required to support quarantine, for so long as it exists in some form, and contact tracing.

In each of these steps, interim arrangements have been in place since the Biosecurity Declaration was made on 18 March 2020. The arrangements have been refined and updated as required, including in relation to State and Territory quarantine arrangements, and they continue to be reviewed in light of public health advice.

The current arrangements are operating effectively given the restricted number of daily arrivals—around 2 percent of pre-COVID border movements—but will not be sustainable once international travel at scale is gradually re-introduced.

In October 2020, the Government announced the commencement of a tender process for the proposed digital permit processing capability. This new platform will help us to modernise and streamline the way that government agencies deliver services, such as visas, permits, licences, and identity documents.

The Digital Passenger Declaration—DPD—will be a critical first use case for the capability. It will digitise the Incoming Passenger Card and the current Australian Traveller Declaration, providing biometrically-anchored and digitally-verified travel, health and vaccine status information. Verified data will be able to be securely shared with State and Territory public health authorities.

The DPD will have the capability to validate the vaccination status of people who have been vaccinated in Australia when they return from overseas. At the appropriate time, subject to public health advice, this could support Australians' ability to travel without the need for 14 days quarantine on return, including by providing additional assurance to support the future delivery of potential alternatives to hotel quarantine.

We are also actively engaged with likeminded countries and industry associations (such as the International Civil Aviation Organization and the International Air Transport Association) on vaccine certification solutions, including mechanisms to recognise international immunisation certificates (digital or otherwise). This will help to mitigate the risks posed by the use of fake and fraudulent vaccine certificates.

Subject to these international discussions and public health advice, these critical pieces of information could be collected, verified and shared through the DPD.

Discussions on possible safe travel pathways with Singapore and in the Pacific are ongoing. The commencement of any safe travel pathway would be subject to government decision and based on health advice from the Chief Medical Officer and the Australian Health Protection Principals Committee.

I thank the committee for the opportunity to make this opening statement. I will table a full statement which will provide further details on other departmental priorities.

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The seventh edition of the *Administration of the Immigration and Citizenship Programs* paper has been published on the Department's website. This edition provides updated information on the delivery of the 2020-21 Migration Program and other visa programs, particularly in the context of COVID-19, and reflects the projections for Net Overseas Migration (NOM), including a gradual increase to 235,000 over the forward estimates, as set out in the 2021-22 Budget.

As announced in the Budget, the 2021-22 Migration Program will have an overall planning level of 160,000 places, carrying over the 2020-21 Migration Program composition and planning levels, including 79,600 places for the Skill stream and 77,300 places for the Family stream. The Skill stream will continue to focus on visa categories that will help Australia's economy rebound from COVID-19, with priority given to visa cohorts that drive economic growth, job creation and investment into Australia.

The Committee would be aware of the ransomware cyberattack on 7 May targeting the operator of the Colonial Pipeline in the United States. The Colonial Pipeline transports critical liquid fuels such as petroleum, diesel and jet fuel throughout the East Coast of the United States from Texas to New York. The Colonial Pipeline attack is only the latest in a series of cyberattacks against critical infrastructure. It is a timely reminder of why the Protecting Critical Infrastructure and Systems of National Significance reforms being progressed by the Department of Home Affairs are so important.

On 10 December 2020, the Government introduced the *Security Legislation Amendment (Critical Infrastructure) Bill 2020*, which was referred to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security (PJCIS) for review. The Bill would legislate a series of reforms aimed at strengthening the Government's ability to ensure robust security measures—particularly cyber security measures—are in place, and to assist industry to respond when attacks of this magnitude occur.

The Bill provides a legislative mandate for Government to establish baseline security standards that critical infrastructure owners and operators must implement, and for Government agencies to step in where necessary to defend our economy, sovereignty and way of life.

I wish to draw the Committee's attention to the provisions of the Bill that would:

1. Broaden the definition of critical infrastructure to capture entities such as the energy sector, along with health services, banking and finance, food and grocery, education and research, water services, data storage and processing, communications, transport and logistics, defence industries and the space sector.
2. Introduce a positive security obligation that would set minimum standards for critical infrastructure owners and operators to defend against threats from cyber attacks, human-induced hazards and natural disasters,
3. An Enhanced Cyber Security Obligation on designated Systems of National Significance; and
4. Provides Government with last resort powers to help entities respond to the most serious cyber attacks when in the national interest.

In the absence of these measures we will remain vulnerable in an increasingly hostile threat environment for our critical infrastructure. The legislation is currently being considered by PJCIS and we look forward to it being considered by Parliament.

I welcome the establishment of the National Recovery and Resilience Agency (NRRA) within the portfolio of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, in response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements.

The NRRA, to be led by the Hon Shane Stone AC QC as the Co-ordinator General, will provide strategic leadership, policy advice and coordination for the government's response and recovery efforts directed at disasters and emergencies of all kinds. From 1 July 2021, the current disaster risk reduction and recovery functions from the Department of Home Affairs will transfer to the new agency.

Emergency Management Australia—EMA—will continue to be responsible for planning, preparedness and response to a disaster while working closely with the NRRA to ensure a seamless transition into the recovery phase of the Australian Government National Disaster Management Continuum.

These two functions will work seamlessly together in a new end-to-end operating model for the national disaster management and recovery continuum.

The Budget included investment of \$92 million over four years to improve the way we prepare for, and respond to, disasters through enhancements to EMA.

The enhanced EMA will include uplifting the Australian Government Crisis Coordination Centre to become the National Situation Room, providing near real time situational awareness of emerging threats and current crises, and impact analysis of these, to key decision makers across Government.

Expected to be operating for this High Risk Weather Season, the National Situation Room will consume information and data from the new Australian Climate Service and other data sources, analyse this information and provide a national common joint operating picture of the situation.

The National Situation Room, inclusive of the National Coordination Mechanism which was established to good effect during the COVID-19 pandemic, will model likely consequences on communities and then share this modelling with the NRRA.

This will enable more timely relief and recovery operations and Commonwealth coordination efforts in support of States and Territories.