

Opening Remarks to Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee
Senate Estimates, 25 May 2021
Director-General, Office of the Special Investigator

Thank you – I don't have an opening statement as such, but having explained the establishment, remit and approach of the OSI for the Committee in March, it may be helpful for me to provide you with a brief update.

As previously advised, Ross Barnett is our Director of Investigations. He is supported by two Commanders to lead the investigations, and the initial cohort of 24 investigators and analysts (the first of up to 75) has now been selected and will join us shortly.

These specialist investigators are being drawn from state police services and the Australian Federal Police, consistent with this work being a national effort. All investigators, no matter their home jurisdiction, will be sworn in as Special Members of the AFP. They will be based in a Sydney workspace.

In close cooperation with the AFP, a substantial induction training program is being delivered soon to prepare these investigators and analysts for the challenging task ahead – investigating potential criminal matters raised in the Brereton Report and any new allegations of criminal offences under Australian law by members of the ADF in Afghanistan from 2005 to 2016.

We have started receiving information relevant to our mandate and are focussed on ensuring this sensitive information is handled appropriately, to protect the integrity of our joint OSI-AFP investigation and any future potential prosecutions.

Most of that information will come to us via our Special Counsel, which as I outlined in March, is now undertaking the important function of a quarantined review of the Inquiry information – as well as some new material – to ensure investigators only receive information they can lawfully use.

We look forward to having the first tranche of investigators on board – ably supported by our corporate and legal team – and progressing the investigations as expeditiously as possible.

As I advised the Committee in March, I will remain focussed on ensuring the appropriate workforce, structures, systems and protocols are in place to underpin our independence and our ability to conduct an impartial and rigorous process.

Thank you.