

## Director-General of Security – Opening Statement

### Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs

Budget Estimates – Thursday, 31 March, 2022

Good morning. Thank you Chair.

Australia's security environment remains complex, challenging and changing.

Espionage and foreign interference has now supplanted terrorism as the most serious security threat facing Australia. This threat is pervasive, multifaceted and, if left unchecked, can do serious damage to our sovereignty, values and national interest.

Threat to life will always be a priority for ASIO and our partners. The terrorism threat level remains at PROBABLE.

There are ideologically and religiously motivated extremists who have both the intent and capability to do us harm.

The most likely terrorist attack scenario in Australia over the next 12 months will be a lone-actor or small-group attack.

The number of domestic terrorist attacks was recently revised upwards—from nine to 11—to include two separate incidents that occurred in 2021.

The two additional attacks—one that was determined to be religiously motivated and the other ideologically motivated—were subsequently recategorised following lengthy investigations.

The nature of these incidents further reflects the complexity of countering terrorism where the motivation for an act of violence may not be immediately apparent.

As these incidents are now before the courts, I will not comment further.

We are also seeing a rise in specific-issue motivated violence driven by a wide range of grievances including anti-government sentiments, conspiracy theories and opposition to COVID-19 restrictions and vaccinations.

This highlights the complex, challenging and changing security environment.

As you would expect, I am conscious of these threats as we head towards a federal election.

ASIO's assessment is that it is highly unlikely the election will attract planned violent protest.

Having said that, opposition to COVID-19 measures, belief in conspiracy theories and other emotive specific-issue grievances are likely to persist, and there is a risk of

spontaneous or opportunistic acts of violence at otherwise peaceful protests.

Provocative or disruptive activity is also possible.

ASIO will continue to work with law enforcement agencies and other partners to ensure national security threats are identified and mitigated.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge Ms Heather Cook, who recently retired from the role of ASIO's Deputy Director-General of Intelligence and Service Delivery. Mr Chris Teal has now commenced in this role.

As you know, I take transparency and accountability very seriously, and Senate Estimates is an important mechanism in this regard.

I will always protect our people, sources and capabilities—we need to be able to do things that Australia's adversaries believe are impossible, and exposing certain secrets can put our people, partnerships and operations at risk.

However, I firmly believe a vibrant liberal democracy requires a Security Service that is transparent and trusted, so I thank you for this opportunity and look forward to your questions.