

## Secretary's Budget Estimates opening statement – Wednesday 24 May

Good **morning** Chair and committee members. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to the work of the Attorney-General's Department.

In the 2023-24 Budget, the Australian Government announced new measures in the Attorney-General's portfolio totalling \$840.6 million that invest in a justice system that keeps Australians safe, better protects women and children and advances integrity and accountability across public institutions.

I'm conscious we have a full Estimates program and won't attempt to cover the breadth of the work the department is undertaking, but there a few key things I'd like to highlight.

The department continues to be closely involved in legal work required for the planned referendum on an **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice**. Our officers have been working in close collaboration with the National Indigenous Australians Agency in progressing the legislative amendments for the first referendum in more than two decades, which will be a historic, democratic process.

We're continuing our work in the family safety space – and the recent Budget saw \$71.3 million over 4 years to deliver **women's safety initiatives** under the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-32

The department completed an **extensive review of the Privacy Act** late last year and we are now analysing feedback on the 116 proposals from that report. I would like to also note the recent announcements for a standalone Privacy Commissioner and funding for the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner, to bolster the protections in this area.

Work is underway to support the establishment of a **new federal administrative review body** in place of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. The department has been

consulting publicly on a wide range of matters that are central to the design of the new body. An Expert Advisory Group chaired by former High Court justice the Honourable Patrick Keane AC KS is providing independent, expert advice to the department on issues to be addressed through the reform.

The Budget provides funding to strengthen Australia's **anti-money laundering framework** and complete the design of Australia's electronic surveillance reforms.

Money has also been allocated for the **establishment of an Anti-Slavery Commissioner** to work across government, industry and civil society, to support compliance with the Modern Slavery Act 2018, to improve transparency in supply chains and to help fight modern slavery in Australia and abroad.

In the area of **national security**, the department received \$41.0 million to fund the management of terrorist offenders at the conclusion of their custodial sentences. The portfolio also received funding to bolster oversight of national intelligence community agencies, including the Independent National Security Legislation Monitor and the Office of the Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security.

The department will support **engagement in the Pacific**, with \$11.9 million over 4 years to increase the criminal justice capacity-building assistance that Australia provides under the Pacific Law and Justice Program and to support Pacific anti-money laundering initiatives.

I will also mention our contribution to the Government's integrity agenda, with the **National Anti-Corruption Commission** on track to commence on 1 July and the **first stage of public sector whistle-blower reforms** currently before the Senate.

The department is undertaking work to ensure its integrity measures are best practice, and that our culture embeds the highest standards of integrity within every aspect of how we perform our duties as public servants. This includes work to ensure the department is ready for the commencement of the National Anti-Corruption

Commission and that its fraud and corruption prevention, detection and sanctioning mechanisms are fit-for-purpose. The Attorney-General has responsibilities for whole-of-government integrity policy and activities, and the department is actively contributing to the Government's integrity agenda. Given these factors, I am conscious of the leadership role we play in championing integrity across the public service, and we are committed to integrity uplift across the APS.

I would like to acknowledge Leo Hardiman PSM KC for his work as Freedom of Information Commissioner from April 2022 to May 2023, and before that, for his long years of service in the Australian Government Solicitor..

Finally, I would like to acknowledge those within the portfolio for whom it is their last Senate Estimates appearance in their current role. From the Australian Human Rights Commission: Age Discrimination Commissioner the Hon Dr Kay Patterson, Race Discrimination Commissioner Chin Tan and Disability Discrimination Commissioner Dr Ben Gauntlett, who appeared before the Committee yesterday evening. And appearing tomorrow: from AUSTRAC, CEO Nicole Rose, and from the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity, Integrity Commissioner Jaala Hinchcliffe. On behalf of the department and wider portfolio, I thank each of these officers for their years of hard work and leadership to progress important priority projects over successive governments.

Dr Gauntlett, Ms Rose and Ms Hinchcliffe will remain within the portfolio as the inaugural deputy commissioners of the National Anti-Corruption Commission. I thank them for agreeing to serve in these important new roles and look forward to continuing our work with them once the Commission commences in July this year.

Thank you. We look forward to answering any questions.