

UNCLASSIFIED

**SENATE LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES
21 OCTOBER 2019 (1330)
OPENING STATEMENT**

Introduction

- Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to provide some opening remarks.
- I commenced as the Director-General of Security on 15 September 2019 and I am pleased to make my first appearance before this Committee.
- My initial observations as Director-General confirm what I have long known, ASIO is extremely well regarded (both in Australia and overseas). It is a professional agency, staffed by dedicated and passionate people who work tirelessly to protect Australia and Australians from security threats.
- While ASIO necessarily operates in secret it is a highly accountable organisation and well developed in its approach to deploying investigative tools and authorities.
- The use of ASIO's powers is always applied proportionally and with consideration to changing circumstances.
- ASIO regularly revisits assessments and amends appropriately if the information supporting a security case has changed.
- In my view, this is an example of a healthy organisation- one committed to operating with integrity and respect.

Partnerships

- For ASIO, partnerships are critical, particularly with intelligence and law enforcement agencies.
- The Joint Counter Terrorism Teams (JCTTs) have demonstrated a proven and effective capability to rapidly mobilise Commonwealth, State and Territory resources to achieve significant security outcomes.
- Within the Home Affairs Portfolio and broader National Intelligence Community, I am pleased to report close cooperation between agencies on important national security matters.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

- I would also like to acknowledge the importance of ASIO's intelligence partners around the world. These partnerships make a difference and help ASIO protect Australia and Australians from security threats. .
- Most importantly ASIO also works in partnership with the Australian community.
- The relationship between ASIO and the community is based on trust and this is one of the reasons I will stringently avoid identification of individuals, sources or methods when speaking in any public forum.
- While ASIO has a variety of powers and capabilities that we can draw upon, it is often through the assistance of everyday Australians that we are able to detect and counter security threats.
- To those Australians I offer my thanks for their efforts.

The security environment

- We face an unprecedented level of threat across both our counter-terrorism and counter-espionage/foreign interference missions. These threats are not constrained to one section of the Australian community or a single nation state.
- ASIO identifies and investigates threats to Australia where ever they arise. The threat determines ASIO's interest and investigative activity.

CT

- On counter-terrorism, extremist groups involved in the conflict in Syria and Iraq, particularly ISIL, continue to inspire, radicalise and direct individuals in Australia to support and engage in politically motivated violence.
- Additionally, the threat of violence from the Extreme Right Wing continues, and remains the subject of close ASIO attention.
- The terrorism threat level for Australia remains at **PROBABLE** – credible intelligence, assessed to represent a plausible scenario, indicates an intention and capability to conduct a terrorist attack in Australia.

UNCLASSIFIED

CEI

- I would like to turn briefly to our security mandate of protecting Australia and Australians from espionage and foreign interference. This is fundamental to ASIO's work, catching spies was our original reason for being.
- ASIO assesses the current scale of foreign intelligence activity against Australian interests' remains at an unacceptably high level.
- Hostile intelligence activity continues to pose a real threat to Australian security and sovereignty.

Concluding remarks

- I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the leadership of the former Director-General of Security, Mr Duncan Lewis.
- Mr Lewis led ASIO for the last five years, through an extremely challenging period with the concurrent rise of the threats from terrorism and foreign interference.
- I would like to extend my thanks to him, not only his significant contribution as Director-General, but also for his service to our country throughout his professional life.
- Lastly, as ASIO's 70th anniversary ends, I am committed to ensuring ASIO remains fit-for-purpose, and that we are appropriately equipped to respond to enduring and future security threats.
- Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to speak this afternoon.