

**Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee****Additional Estimates 2025-26****Opening Statement – Secretary Victoria Anderson – 10 February 2026**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a brief opening statement.

I'm honoured to have been appointed as Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, commencing on 8 December 2025. I'm passionate about the work of the department, whether it's enabling the growth, competitiveness and sustainability of our industries; facilitating trade; or strengthening our biosecurity system to protect our people, environment and economy.

I've spent a large part of my career in the department and it's been a great pleasure to return. I have been quickly reminded of the dedication, diversity, experience and expertise of our staff—ranging from scientists and vets to policy analysts and frontline staff to ICT and systems experts—all performing an incredible breadth of work right around the country to deliver outcomes for Australia's agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries, and the Australian community.

I'd like to acknowledge the ongoing impact on our industries of persistent drying conditions in some parts of the country, as well as bushfires and floods. We remain closely engaged with industry representatives to understand the impacts, and ensure that there is information available about the support on offer. For instance in our portfolio we have programs available to assist those experiencing financial hardship such as the Farm Household Allowance and the Rural Financial Counselling Service. And in other portfolios there is disaster recovery assistance available, such as the emergency fodder support provided under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.

Notwithstanding these challenges, Australia's agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries continue to grow, and continue to provide

high quality food and fibre to Australians and around 190 global markets each year. The gross value of production for the sector for 2025-26 is forecast to be \$106 billion, with exports forecast to be worth close to \$84 billion. This year's record builds on strong growth over the past five years, which has seen the sector reach four of its highest production years on record. The recent period of growth, following several challenging years, points to a resilient sector, underpinned by relatively strong productivity growth, and demonstrates the adaptability of our producers in increasingly uncertain international markets.

I look forward to providing further information and support to this Committee in this and future hearings.

For today's hearing, I'd like to inform the Committee that Deputy Secretary Justine Saunders APM is currently on planned annual leave — a commitment made many months ago. Ms Christie Sawczuk will be appearing in her place and will be able to address relevant matters under Outcome 2.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this opening statement, and we welcome your questions.