

RRAT Senate Committee Hearing 5 November 2024
Opening Statement – Adam Fennessy PSM
Secretary, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

- Chair and Senators, thank you for the opportunity to make a short opening statement and to give evidence to the committee.
- My focus as Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) continues to be leading an efficient and focused department that delivers on Australian Government priorities, and, importantly, the needs of the Australian agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors. Our significant departmental transformation program is continuing, we have engaged staff internally to lift our capabilities across a range of areas, and the department is on a sustainable financial footing.
- Since my last appearance at this committee, we have published a Statement of Strategic Intent for the department. This statement sets out our high-level strategic goals as we look towards and beyond 2030, including how we work closely with our partners across industry, community and other governments to grow Australian agriculture. Our strategic objectives cover supporting the growth of the agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors, both domestically and internationally, strengthening our national biosecurity system and increasing sector resilience and sustainability.
- I would like to thank all our staff, as well as all our agriculture, fisheries, forestry, food and fibre industry partners and stakeholders involved in bringing this statement together. Over 1,600 staff and 40 stakeholders engaged through the process. I can table the Statement of Strategic Intent for the committee, and it is also available on our website.
- Reflecting on our international opportunities and challenges, we are continuing to navigate increasing geopolitical complexity to expand and diversify international market access for our agriculture, fisheries and forestry exports, particularly into South East Asia and Asia more broadly. In the 2023-24 financial year, the department recorded a total of 88 technical market access achievements, including:
 - 29 actions to maintain and 5 actions to restore existing markets. These actions protected markets worth \$4.6 billion.
 - Opening 10 new markets and 44 improvements to existing market access.

- Market access gains are continuing in the 2024-25 financial year, with the announcement of new access for plums to Vietnam and removing varietal restrictions on grapes to Japan.
 - Industry estimates that the expanded grape variety access will grow by approximately \$30 million, reaching \$50 million over the next few years.
- We're pleased with the stabilisation of relationships with key markets, especially China. The department continues our technical engagement which support removing remaining trade impediments. I want to acknowledge the dedicated work of our staff and our overseas posted agriculture trade counsellors, alongside our government and industry colleagues to support these outcomes and continued technical work. A recent example of this work was the agreement between the Australian Prime Minister and Chinese Premier Li to recommence the live rock lobster trade by the end of the year, and in time for Lunar New Year. We are continuing to work through technical matters with our Chinese counterparts to support this trade resumption. We are happy to speak more to agriculture policy and trade outcomes under Outcome 1.
- Parliament has now passed legislation that sets an end date to phase out live sheep exports by 1 May 2028. Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Julie Collins, recently announced an additional \$32.7 million for a transition assistance package, which allows us to tailor the package to the needs of industry in WA through a co-design process. This brings the total transition funding to \$139.7 million. My team and I will be happy to answer further questions on progress in implementing the transition plan as part of Outcome 1.
- Our biosecurity system is crucial for protecting Australian livelihoods, and strengthening the environment and economy, including in agriculture, tourism and trade. Biosecurity risks are growing, and with significant investments by the Australian Government, we are focusing on how we better prepare for, anticipate and respond to these risks, as well as provide stronger national leadership of the biosecurity system.
- One of the significant risks to our industries, economy and wildlife is high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI), and in particular, the H5N1 variant. This variant is now in every continent except Australia. The Australian Government recently announced more than \$100 million in investment to support preparedness for a potential incursion of this strain of avian influenza through a One Health approach, with initiatives to protect Australian agriculture, boost environmental measures and strengthen public health preparedness. We will be happy to answer questions on biosecurity as part of Outcome 2.

I have been secretary of DAFF for just over 12 months now, and I continue to be proud of the hard work, expertise and passion of our staff in our 86 sites across the country and internationally. Our staff provide front line services at airports and ports, support agriculture policy development, regulation and international capability development, maintain and grow overseas markets and provide internal corporate support, working together as One DAFF.

- We have prepared a list of issues by Outcome to help guide the Committee's questions and ensure that we have the relevant officials available. We appreciate and understand the important oversight role of the parliament and parliamentary committees, and stand ready to answer the committee's questions.