

**Tony Nutt
Non-Executive Director
Australia Post**

**Opening Statement
3 May 2021**

check against delivery

Thank you, Senator Hanson-Young.

I do have a brief opening statement.

I appear this afternoon in an individual capacity.

Our Chair speaks for the Australia Post Board and individual part-time, Non-Executive Directors speak publicly only for themselves.

From my perspective, there are a number of important factors relevant to this matter as it sits today.

Up to and including some submissions and evidence given to your Committee on 27 April 2021 – this episode has now morphed, at least in part, into high farce.

Straightforward facts, events and actions have been distorted.

During this Inquiry, for example, it has been asserted that I, “seemed to be running the show” on the 22nd of October.

The fact is that Christine Holgate asked for my assistance after her Estimates appearance.

I spoke to the Chair.

We agreed ground rules.

I explained those to Ms Holgate.

I was not a substitute for the Chair or the full Board.

I was not making decisions. I was, however, able to give her support and counsel.

This involved:

- Listening to Ms Holgate and trying to work through these difficult issues;
- Giving her my best advice;
- Keeping the Chair updated on our discussions. Noting, of course, that he would speak directly to her himself.

Leaving aside those specific details for a moment, let me pick up the broader theme that I was “running the show”.

Senators, I can assure you that if I had been directing events, the wretched watches wouldn't have been bought two-and-a-half years ago.

- We also wouldn't have spent some of the money disclosed in answers to Senate Estimates questions prior to the Committee's hearing in October;
- The 'Office of the CEO credit card' – now abolished – wouldn't have become a catch-all for some expenses that should have been more accurately ascribed to other relevant cost centres;
- And someone with a sharp pencil and an eye for the legislative and regulatory environment in which Post actually operates would have been keeping guard in the CEO's private office so that the inevitable momentum for facilitation of a very busy CEO's activities - a culture that predated Christine Holgate - was offset by prudent advice they would listen to at the time they were considering any expenditure.

- Further, Ms Holgate, an otherwise intelligent, articulate and effective interlocutor with the Parliament in general and Senate Estimates in particular, wouldn't have given Senator Kitching a partial answer to questions about the watches.

Indeed, had I been directing events, Ms Holgate - faced with an unexpected, rapidly escalating level of deeply hurtful criticism which she clearly found almost inexplicable – might have stayed the course over the next month or so.

By ignoring the short-term politics and the increasingly inaccurate, on occasion completely false and sometimes rather vile commentary - and concentrating on methodically sorting through all the queries of the investigation - Ms Holgate would be CEO today.

An outstanding CEO, Christine Holgate would now be a little more careful of the numerous technicalities in the extensive legislative and regulatory framework in which Post actually operates as a GBE and a bit more cautious of the inevitably conditional professional relationships a person in her role has across the Parliament.

Finally, Ms Holgate would be CEO today because she had the support of the Chair and every member of the Board of Australia Post, throughout what was an unexpected and challenging time.

By lunchtime on 22 October last year, my assessment was that the watches, some aspects of the corporate expenditure previously disclosed and the Senate Estimates answer to Senator Kitching earlier that day was a problematic cocktail and would need to be dealt with thoroughly.

More granular detail would inevitably emerge over the next several weeks as more assertions were made and elements

of the media were provided with cherry-picked information from people with their own agendas.

Once the government, before Question Time, had decided to establish an inquiry, the best course of action was to:

- stake out a strong and principled position, including stating that there had been no improper action;
- acknowledge error, even if well intentioned and explain briefly what happened, and why;
- confirm that Ms Holgate would fully assist the investigation and that while she did so senior executive Rodney Boys would act as CEO for a few weeks as we prepared for our busiest and most important time of the year.

On the basis of known facts and likely contingencies on 22 October, Australia Post, its CEO, the Board and our hardworking executive team would come through these issues collectively a bit wiser, and with Post a better, stronger organisation with enhanced policies procedures and systems.

Happy to take your questions.