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**CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE FORCE**

**Budget Estimates**  
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*\*\*Check against delivery\*\**

Senators, given the limited time allocated for today's hearing, I would like to focus my opening remarks on the Australian Defence Force's recent deployment to Fiji in the wake of Tropical Cyclone Winston.

The Category 5 cyclone is the strongest known to have crossed land anywhere in the southern hemisphere and it struck Fiji hard. Forty-four people were killed and up to 350,000 people were directly affected - 55,000 of those people lost their homes and were forced into one of the thousand evacuation centres.

The ADF was ready and willing to help our friends in Fiji when their government called for assistance.

Like the devastating cyclone that precipitated it, Operation FIJI ASSIST rates as one of the ADF's largest humanitarian assistance missions. At its peak, around 1,000 Australian Defence Force personnel were deployed to Fiji and many more were supporting our operations from here in Australia. Our contribution to the whole-of-government effort focussed on Suva, Koro, Taveuni, Southern Vanua Levu and Rakiraki and other places where ADF personnel worked side-by-side with our counterparts from the Republic of Fiji Military Forces to assess damage, clear debris, repair generators and rebuild critical infrastructure.

We delivered more than 580 tonnes of humanitarian and disaster relief stores, supplied almost 40,000 tonnes of food, 30,000 litres of drinking water and delivered almost 10,000 thousand hygiene kits. We also provided close to 3,000 shelter kits and together with our Fijian counterparts, deployed personnel helped repair nine schools, two medical centres and a hospital as well as several churches and community centres. The work we have undertaken with the Republic of Fiji Military Forces has had added benefit. Over the two months we worked together, the ADF has helped impart new skills and strengthen the existing friendships between our two nations.

Senators, Operation FIJI ASSIST highlighted what the ADF can achieve when we operate as an integrated joint force. It also demonstrated our ability to deploy a range of high end capabilities at short notice. HMAS *Canberra's* first operational deployment was probably the most visual representation of our contribution, but Army also provided a significant engineering element plus four of seven MRH-90 multi-role helicopters, which was Army's first deployment of these helicopters, while

Air Force AP-3C aircraft conducted initial aerial assessments followed by C-17A and C-130J crews who conducted 44 sorties that included transporting Army personnel and helicopters. That is in addition to our aero medical evacuation and our deployable medical capabilities.

In early March, I had the opportunity to visit Fiji to witness the devastation first hand, and the devastation was vast, and to meet some of the people affected by the cyclone. Everyone I met was deeply moved by the ADF's compassion and extremely grateful for our assistance. One of the most satisfying aspects of my job is being able to visit our people on deployment to personally thank them for their work. I am always impressed by what our people do on behalf of our nation and I am immensely proud of what our people achieved for our friends in Fiji under Operation FIJI ASSIST.

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