

**Opening statement
Additional Estimates (March 2021)**

Thank you Chair.

Paul Singer, Official Secretary to the Governor-General.

In my brief opening, I would like to highlight a few key achievements and ongoing priorities for the Governor-General and Mrs Hurley and, therefore, my Office.

The Committee may recall from my last appearance when I spoke of Their Excellencies intention to continue prioritising support for communities devastated by the 2019-20 bushfires.

This will remain a priority, and most recently they have spent time with residents of Mallacoota and the Snowy Monaro regions, and this week will be returning to communities in eastern Victoria and the New South Wales south coast.

I also note that the Governor-General and Mrs Hurley intend to visit those communities most impacted by the current flooding, at the first appropriate opportunity.

The committee may recall that last year that the 2019-20 bushfires were declared a nationally significant emergency for the purposes of the National Emergency Medal – a medal within the Australian honours and awards system which recognises individuals who render sustained or significant service during nationally-significant emergencies in Australia.

Funding was allocated in last year's Budget to ensure that the many Australians who provided sustained or significant service during the fires can be appropriately recognised and celebrated.

I'm pleased to update the Committee that applications for the National Emergency Medal are now open and that my Office is working closely with organisations like the state-based rural or country fire services to receive nominations.

These are being quickly assessed and we anticipate that in coming months many thousands of Australians who served our community during those dark days will be recognised.

The Governor-General is also committed to ensuring our honours and awards system recognises those responsible for the ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic. He has noted:

“As a nation we should give thanks to these people.
Most would never dream of asking for it – they've done their job and got on with it.
That is, I've found, the Australian way.
Yet they do deserve thanks, recognition and to be celebrated.”

The Governor-General is determined that our honours and awards system – whether it is the National Emergency Medal, meritorious awards or the Order of Australia – and indeed our entire operations are geared towards celebrating and supporting the Australian community.

This is what motivates us.

This important work is being underpinned by concurrent upgrades to our information technology systems.

This modernisation program – also funded in last year's Budget – is underway, on track and on budget. The project will address critical risks, migrate ICT services to the cloud and modernise the Office's ageing ICT infrastructure.

Chair, I also note the committee's ongoing interest in the Kirribilli Point precinct re-stabilisation project.

The project is proceeding well. Required remediation work is underway and the stone retaining wall is being reconstructed. While it has been complex, we remain confident that the project will be successfully completed in coming months and that, critically, the historic barracks will be preserved.

Finally, I wish to provide advice to the Committee with regard to the Senate Order for production of documents related to unanswered questions on notice:

- There were three questions taken on notice by the Office during the October hearings and 42 written questions on notice were received after the last hearing.
- Responses to all questions were sent to the Senate Committee by the nominated due date.

Thank you Chair, I look forward to answering the Committee's questions.