

**Opening statement
Supplementary Budget Estimates (October 2021)**

Thank you Chair.

Paul Singer, Official Secretary to the Governor-General.

I would like to take the opportunity to give the Committee a brief overview of the Governor-General and Mrs Hurley's recent activity.

Since the start of the ACT lockdown two months ago, Their Excellencies have undertaken over 280 digital engagements.

These video and telephone calls have been with a wide cross-section of our community: front-line health and mental health workers, local government leaders, staff and volunteers of the organisations of which they are Patrons, students in lock-down and members of the community who, in challenging times are helping those around them in whatever way they're able.

In these calls and in his public statements, the Governor-General has sought to recognise outstanding contributions, comfort Australians doing it tough, highlight our inherent strengths and encourage unity.

While the hundreds of calls are varied in nature and topic, at their core is a simple proposition – finding out about the person and their community and making sure they feel acknowledged, appreciated and understood.

I am proud that my Office has been able to support Their Excellencies to continue to engage meaningfully, personally and with impact.

We have provided this support in a COVID-safe way – restricting the number of staff on-site, adhering to rigorous safety protocols and continuing to deliver on our objectives.

I'm equally pleased to report that my Office has continued to achieve outcomes in all facets of our operations. Whilst the 'how' has necessarily changed, the 'what' and 'why' have not.

In relation to the administration of the Australian Honours and Awards system, key developments include:

- continuing research and case work on nominations for the Order of Australia – allowing the Council of the Order of Australia to meet virtually to consider nominations for the Australia Day Honours List
- the efficient processing of thousands of National Emergency Medals, and
- Finalising arrangements for the Australian Sports Medal – with the first medals under the new guidelines to be presented by the Governor-General to members of the most recent Invictus Games by the end of the year.

In relation to the management and maintenance of Government House and Admiralty House there has been similar progress.

Most notably, the Kirribilli Point Stabilisation Project is nearing completion. While the COVID lock-down in Sydney caused some unanticipated delays, the project will be successfully completed and the historically significant Marine Barracks precinct will be preserved.

In concluding, I'd highlight that the last year has also been one of transformational change for my Office.

In addition to the roll out of the National Emergency Medal to up to 140,000 Australians over the forward estimates, we are implementing a sizable Digital Transformation Program. This program will modernise our information technology infrastructure, enhance our cyber security standing and transform internal systems for managing the Australian Honours and Awards system. This body of work is proceeding on time and on budget.

Chair, while the last months have presented challenges, I'm proud of how the Office has responded. We're fortunate in supporting Their Excellencies to witness the remarkable diversity, achievement and character of the Australian people. It is motivating and inspiring and I thank each of my team for their efforts.

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:

- Three questions were taken on notice by the Office during the Budget Estimates and 55 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.