

May Senate Estimates – Opening Statement Environment and Communications Committee

- Chair and Senators, thank you for the opportunity to make a short opening statement this morning.
- Firstly, I would like to bring to the attention of the Committee an inadvertent omission in the Portfolio Budget Statement. I wrote to the Committee Chair about this last Friday.
- The department has identified a section of Table 2.2.3: Budget expenses for Outcome 1, on page 55 of the PBS was omitted from the document tabled in Parliament on 11 May.
- The missing section of Table 2.2.3 describes the administered expenses for Program 1.2: Environmental Information and Research.
- I can assure you this was an unintentional publishing omission only, there are no funding implications for the program.
- My letter to the Committee of Friday 21 May gives more details. Copies of the replacement page are available for the Committee. I again apologise for this omission.
- Secondly, I would like to draw the Committee's attention to the useful outcome structure diagram provided in advance of today's session which will assist you in directing questions today.
- I have found this document to be very helpful in providing a further level of description of our business, below that of our outcome structure and I trust it will be of assistance to you all too. We have additional printed copies today which we can table if any Senators don't have a copy on hand.
- I would also like to remind the Committee that due to COVID protocols, outside of the officers in the room now, our

remaining staff are waiting in a room on a different floor to us. We remain poised to be responsive to Senators questions today, but we seek the Committee's patience as we rotate officers in and out of the room.

- Chair, Senators, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to be a dominating factor in our work as Australia emerges from the pandemic and shifts to the recovery phase.
- The Bushfire Response Package has been a primary focus, and solid progress has been made on implementing the \$200 million recovery package for wildlife and their habitats impacted by the 2019–20 bushfires. We are continuing our work with the National Recovery and Resiliency Agency to support agribusinesses in recovering from the bushfires and other natural disasters.
- The government has recognised through the budget the important role that the Agriculture, Water and the Environment portfolio has to play, and we have a significant agenda going forward.
 - Strengthening our leadership in oceans conservation through our \$100m package to restore blue carbon ecosystems, expand and further strengthen our marine park estate and establish new Indigenous Protected Areas over sea country
 - tackling waste and helping to transform the recycling industry in Australia to reduce waste impacts on our environment, create jobs and grow the economy
 - being much better informed about the impacts of our changing climate through the establishment of the Australian Climate Service; and
 - enhancing our natural assets on land and in the sea around us by tackling the threats posed by invasive pest

animals and weeds and through a range of practical on ground recovery actions.

- Last week saw the launch the new Threatened Species Strategy which will expand on the successes of the inaugural strategy and further guide investment for threatened species recovery.
- This new strategy now focuses on a wider variety of native plants and animals, includes priority places and marine and freshwater species for the first time and builds in a more landscape focused approach. I am sure our Threatened Species Commissioner Dr Sally Box will provide the Committee with further detail on the Strategy later today.
- Chair, this week sees the start of National Reconciliation Week and this year's theme "More than a word, Reconciliation takes action" is something to which my department is strongly committed.
- This week I will have the pleasure of launching our department's commitment to reconciliation – our Reconciliation Action Plan for 2021-2024.
- My department remains committed to working alongside First Nations people, bringing together Indigenous Knowledge and western science to aid us in delivering our responsibilities from threatened species recovery, feral animal management and land and sea stewardship.
- First Nations people are the longest stewards of this country and as such have a critical role in how we care for country.
- Finally Chair, can I again place on the record my thanks to my leadership team and the thousands of department staff working across the country.
- The department has a diverse workforce and we recognise we cannot do our job on our own. This is why we actively work in

partnership with others – from traditional owners, farmers and private landholders through to scientists, thousands of businesses and other government departments.

- Over the last year and a half, we have faced extraordinary challenges that have affected our people personally, our communities and our work as a department as we engage across Australia. We have more work ahead of us. I can say that we are approaching it with a strong sense of purpose, and with a strong focus on good delivery to ensure we contribute positively to the future of our country.