

October 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 quickly bring to the attention of the Committee a typographical error in our Annual Report.
- The department has identified on page 202, Table 61 provides incorrect figures for our budgeted and actual Average Staffing Levels for Outcome 4 in 2020-21, which we will correct formally.
- The correct figures in 2020-21 should have read a Budgeted ASL of 3,738 and an Actual ASL of 3,599 and I table the correct replacement page today for the Committee's information.
- Although the missing section relates to an outcome which falls under the responsibility of the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee, which I will raise with them tomorrow, I wanted to ensure full transparency with this Committee also.
- Secondly in keeping with COVID protocols, I would like to remind the committee that outside of the officers with us in this room, additional witnesses are waiting in rooms on a different floor and some witnesses are ready to join us later in the session.
- As always, 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 and encourage you to refer to the outcome structure diagram, we have provided in advance to the Committee, when directing questions.

- Chair, Senators, as we all know so well, the pandemic continues to be a dominating and evolving situation which is impacting not only our work, but our way of living across the country.
- Since we last met, we have seen significant lockdowns across several jurisdictions which has impacted many Australians, as well as business and government operations.
- I am incredibly proud of my staff across the country who have continued to tirelessly work within these changing arrangements.
- Chair, when we last met, I had the pleasure in letting you know that we had just launched our department's latest Reconciliation Action Plan – our commitment to reconciliation through a range of key initiatives.
- DAWE understands the importance of developing a cohesive approach to working with Indigenous Australians that creates the foundations and accountability to deliver on our shared purpose and generate value for Indigenous communities.
- I am pleased to say over the past six months we have achieved some significant outcomes such as:
 - expanding our Indigenous Protected Areas network by providing funding for seven new consultation projects;
 - launching a new grant opportunity round last week that will provide \$9.7million in grants for new sea country IPAs as part of the \$100million oceans leadership package; and
 - expanding the Traditional Owners representation on the Kakadu Board and formally handing back the township of Jabiru to the Mirarr People.
- But there is always more to do, which is why we are looking into how we can further enhance delivery of our

responsibilities, and make us an employer of choice for Indigenous recruitment and career progression.

- Chair, as I mentioned earlier, despite covid challenges there have been other significant achievements across the department over the past 6 months.
- And probably none bigger than the arrival of the RSV *Nuyina*¹ last week in Hobart. The arrival of the most scientifically advanced icebreaker and resupply vessel in the world is the culmination of years of planning and is a huge advancement in Australia's scientific capability in the Antarctic.
- Further dedicated efforts and investment have been made in wildlife recovery following last year's devastating bushfires, including for iconic species such as the Koala and the Regent Honeyeater.
- The one-year review of the Threatened Species Scientific Committee's 10-point Bushfire Response Plan showed critical progress on all actions including accelerated assessments for fire affected species as a result of efforts from departmental technical staff but also working closely with a range of external partners.
- Continuing this work, the Threatened Species Strategy's new priority species list has been published and will guide focused recovery efforts for a range of bushfire impacted species and for other threatened plants and animals right around the country.
- On the first of July, we saw the commencement of Australia's ban on the export of mixed plastic waste which will stop 75,000 tonnes of mixed plastics being exported. The department's work on waste is not limited to changing the way we process

¹ *Nuyina*, pronounced noy-yee-nah, means 'southern lights' in palawa kani, the language of Tasmanian Aborigines.

plastics; we have also been progressing partnerships with other governments and businesses to tackle a variety of waste challenges – from textiles to tyres; food and organics to microplastics in our oceans.

- All of these and many more achievements too long to list here today, are due to the hard work of my staff across the nation but due to our efforts also in partnering with other experts and on-ground professionals to get the job done.
- As a department, we are committed to embracing new ways of operating, as outlined in our recently released Future Department Blueprint. Transforming our approach to become better future ready will enable us to conserve and protect our unique and diverse natural environment which underpin all Australians' way of life.
- Of course, there is still much more for us to do, but we are working hard to put our department in the best position possible to support the government, and through it the communities, industries, and environment that we serve.