



4 March 2020: CSIRO Opening Statement, Dr Larry Marshall

Thank you Chair.

CSIRO was created to solve Australia's greatest challenges using science - and nature has certainly dealt us some clear challenges to kick off the new decade. I wanted to update the Committee on what we've been doing to help Australia deal with bushfires and coronavirus, drawing on almost 70 years of battling bushfires and 50 years of managing Biosecurity threats like coronavirus.

We have been working with state fire authorities using our predictive tools that created the original roadside fire danger signs, to better understand and predict fire behaviour, and deploy innovations like burn-over protection to shield firefighters in a firestorm. We've assessed every fire since Ash Wednesday fires in 1983, providing invaluable information on how fires start, how they spread and how to stop them. Australian science is in the pockets and on the shoulders of every fire fighter, but we have to do more to ensure our fire fighters are in the strongest and safest possible position to fight the fires of the future.

We'll deliver our initial report to COAG next week, but I'll say now that as devastating as the fires were, Australia's preparedness and the courage of our fire fighters saved more lives than we have seen in any major fire event on record.

Now the coronavirus is gripping the world and it is not an isolated incident, but another marker for things to come. The world is seeing an increased risk of significant disease outbreaks. The growth and geographic expansion of human populations and the intensification of agriculture means the likelihood of emerging infectious diseases being transmitted from animals to people is increasing, with almost 80% of infectious human diseases coming from animals, with their spread accelerated due to global travel.

Fortunately, we partnered a year ago with the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) to prepare for just such a situation, and well prepared, today we combat this new viral enemy. Production of candidate vaccines, like that grown by the University of Queensland, happens at CSIRO's state-of-the-art biologics production facility in Melbourne, created in 2016 to translate science into real-world solutions.

The clinical work is being undertaken in the Southern Hemisphere's only National PC4 facility, at AAHL in Geelong. The Australian Animal Health Laboratory is one of only 6 unique facilities in the world that form the global network for biosecurity and disease control - and a big thank you to everyone working at AAHL to keep Australia safe.

Our people at AAHL are at their best in a crisis, as they were 2 Christmases ago when solving the white spot prawn outbreak in Queensland. Or researching the Hendra virus, or creating the influenza treatment Relenza. Or protecting Australia from Foot and Mouth or African Swine Flu. But this crisis will persist for many months, and we must support our people to ensure they don't burn out while solving this one. I've raised the attention of the Committee of the work performed by AAHL before, but never was it more needed than today.

As the national science agency, every one of our 5,500 team members is committed to solving the challenges facing Australia - that's our pledge, that's our purpose, that's our promise to all Australians.

Thank you.