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Budget Estimates May 2021

DGNI Opening Statement

Good evening.

I appreciate the opportunity to make some brief opening remarks at this, my first appearance before the Committee since commencing as Director-General of National Intelligence on 18 December 2020.

My association with ONI (and formerly ONA) goes back several decades and over that period I've engaged with ONI and the intelligence it produces from a number of perspectives: as a young current intelligence officer; throughout my career as a foreign policy and national security professional; as Deputy Director-General of ONI; and now as Director-General.

I can't think of any other time over that period when our mission has been as important as it is now. And the demands on our intelligence community, and our people, have never been greater.

Strategic trends are running increasingly against Australia's interests. The world was already complex but is becoming even more so as a result of COVID-19, the introduction of game-changing technologies like 5G and artificial intelligence, the impact of social media, the weaponisation of cyber and information as a regular tool of statecraft, great-power competition and the changing world order; the list goes on ...

Our job at ONI is to help Government make sense of that complexity by analysing matters of political, strategic or economic significance to Australia. And I'm mindful as Director-General that our success is measured by the quality, rigour and integrity of that analysis.

The universal feedback during my introductory meetings – whether with ONI's stakeholders and customers across government, business leaders or our international partners – was respect (and often growing demand) for our insights.

This is testimony to the commitment and hard work of all of ONI's staff right across the organisation; I'd like to take this opportunity to thank them – including for the way they've risen to the additional challenges imposed by the pandemic.

ONI's response to COVID-19 demonstrated resilience and adaptability. We were able to quickly pivot to new ways of working and collaborating to deliver for our customers, while also looking after our people.

It also reflects the enduring strength of ONI's culture. At its core is contestability – an openness to different ideas which depends on a diverse

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and inquiring workforce and the mutual respect needed to contemplate divergent opinions.

But in a world where threats and adversaries move quickly we can't afford to stand still.

I am committed to further improving ONI's capabilities and ensuring we:

- remain a world-class all-source analytical organisation;
- model best practice and lead the NIC by example;
- are forward-leaning on the use of technology;
- leverage our unique strengths: the credibility of our assessments; our visibility across the National Intelligence Community as an enterprise; our convening power; and our position as a trusted source of advice to government; and
- carry out ONI's NIC leadership responsibility in a manner that provides maximum value to other agencies and ensures that what we do as a National Intelligence Community is greater than the sum of our individual parts.

We have to update our business model to cope with the exponential growth in open source information, big data and classified reporting and ensure our intelligence remains relevant, timely and easily absorbed by our customers – who themselves are already often dealing with information overload.

This will require new analytical and dissemination tools and new approaches to recruitment, training and tradecraft.

It will also require increased collaboration – with an increasing span of departments and agencies beyond the traditional national security realm; with the private sector, academia and think tanks; with States and Territories; and with our international partners.

Above all it also entails working even more closely and constructively with my counterparts leading the other nine agencies and the more than 7,000 dedicated professionals who comprise our National Intelligence Community to keep Australia and Australians safe and protect our national interests in an increasingly contested world.

Government makes a significant investment in our intelligence enterprise and there's a legitimate expectation that we keep delivering tangible results.

Concluding remarks

In concluding I'd like to thank my predecessor, Nick Warner, for his leadership of ONI and the NIC and the significant work done to establish the new architecture of our National Intelligence Community.

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A great deal has been achieved in the two and a half years since ONI was established, but there's much more to be done.

I look forward to working with the Committee to ensure ONI and the NIC continue to deliver world-class intelligence and a world-class intelligence community.

END

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