

OPENING STATEMENT – 2024-25 BUDGET ESTIMATES

SENATOR THE HONOURABLE PENNY WONG

MINISTER REPRESENTING THE PRIME MINISTER

28 MAY 2024

I would like to make some brief remarks at the outset of these Budget Estimates.

First, on the Budget itself: a Budget for every Australian - from a government working for all Australians.

A Budget about the two things that have driven our government for the past two years: cost of living relief and a future made in Australia.

Cost of living is, as the Prime Minister said, our number one priority.

We are delivering a tax cut to every taxpayer, and a \$300 energy rebate to every household.

We're continuing to help Australians get the healthcare they need. The Budget contains 29 more free Medicare Urgent Care Clinics. And we're freezing the cost of PBS medicines.

Labor will always invest in education – which is why we're wiping \$3 billion of student debt. And we're introducing prac payments for nursing, teaching, midwifery & social work students.

We also understand, Australians need affordable housing and we need to build more homes right across the country.

The Homes for Australia plan invests billions to do just that, and we're boosting Fee-Free TAFE to train more tradies to build them.

This Budget builds on cost of living measures the Government has already taken, such as cheaper child care, cheaper medicines and Fee-Free TAFE.

And while tackling these challenges of today we are setting the country up for success in the long term with a future made in Australia.

Taking advantage of the transformative opportunities of clean energy, new technology, strengthening our defence industry and capability, and investing in strategic industries.

Making more things in Australia will mean creating more secure, well-paid jobs in our suburbs and regions.

Senators, if I can also add briefly on issues abroad the Prime Minister has commented on recently.

You may recall that the Prime Minister and I have both said, in relation to Rafah, that our message to the Netanyahu Government: do not go down this path.

The international community has been as one on this.

What we have seen in the past 24 hours reinforces why we and the international community issued this warning.

The death and destruction in Rafah is horrific. This human suffering is unacceptable.

We reiterate to the Government of Israel, this cannot continue.

We must see an immediate humanitarian ceasefire so that civilians can be protected.

Australia supports the work of the United States, Qatar and Egypt to that end.

We continue to call for the release of all hostages by Hamas and Israel must allow aid to flow at scale, as directed by the ICJ.

Finally, senators, I want to again extend Australia's sympathies for our brothers and sisters in Papua New Guinea, following the devastating landslide on which the Prime Minister spoke on indulgence in the House today.

Australia stands with the people of Papua New Guinea. We grieve with them.

We hold out hope for the missing, and wish strength to those who are now desperately searching.

We are providing an initial \$2.5 million in humanitarian assistance, including emergency relief supplies, logistical support from the Australian Defence Force, and expertise on geohazards to inform early recovery efforts.

I made clear to my counterpart, and the Prime Minister has made clear to his, we stand ready to provide additional support at the request of the PNG Government.

Thank you.