

Opening Statement – Senate Estimates

I would like to update the Committee on how the Australian Public Service Commission is undertaking its statutory responsibilities to strengthen the capability and integrity of the Australian Public Service, so that it can better serve the Government, Parliament and public.

In terms of the 16 referrals made to the APSC for possible code of conduct breaches related to the Robodebt Scheme, 1 investigation concluded that the individual's actions did not meet the threshold to issue a notice of suspected breach.

Of the remaining 15 for which notices of suspected breach were issued,

- 7 individuals have been issued a final determination that they have breached one or more elements of the Code. In those cases where the individual is a current public servant, employing agencies have been provided with advice regarding an appropriate sanction, and sanctions have been imposed or are in the process of being imposed,
- 1 individual has been issued a final determination that their actions did not constitute a breach of the Code, and
- the remaining inquiries are continuing.

Once all the 16 investigations have concluded, I will provide a public statement on the outcomes. I anticipate this will be in the next month or two. That statement will include a report from the Robodebt Code Taskforce on outcomes and on lessons learned.

By law, the Code of Conduct investigations are separate from other investigations like the Royal Commission, and they have their own requirements. The Commission is conducting investigations in accordance with the law, which requires procedural fairness for the individuals involved. We are mindful of the public's expectations for accountability of public servants.

With respect to integrity in the public service more generally, the Commission has developed an integrity roadmap that consolidates the gamut of integrity work underway and builds on the public service's own desire for integrity. This includes

- implementing the whole-of-service SES Performance Framework,
- implementing the new APS value of stewardship and continuing capability reviews of departments and major agencies, now that the Parliament has passed the amendments to the Public Service Act,
- working with agencies to assess conflict of interest management,
- providing integrity training, craft and leadership through the APS Academy, and
- planning integrity reforms to the Public Service Act, including strengthening performance processes for agency heads and statutory officers and creating own-motion investigation powers for the Public Service Commissioner.

Dr Gordon de Brouwer
Australian Public Service Commissioner
30 May 2024