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**Opening Statement**  
**Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee**  
**Senate Estimates**

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As members of this Committee would be aware, I have since 23 October 2017 used Estimates opening statements on occasion to keep the Committee informed as to the evolution of Home Affairs (as a Department and a Portfolio). I will briefly do so again in this opening statement.

On 20 December 2021, the Department of Home Affairs marked four years of operation since its re-establishment in 2017. The Department, and the broader Portfolio, of Home Affairs have become indispensable elements of the Government's ability to plan and prepare for, and respond to, the challenges with which Australia is being regularly presented in what has become a permanently disrupted world.

Given the state of the world, Home Affairs is a department for the times, as the nation contends with complex, concurrent and compounding strategic challenges, such as the global pandemic; extreme weather; espionage and foreign interference; ideologically- and religiously-motivated violent extremism; the on-going challenge of terrorism; disinformation, misinformation and conspiracy theories which regrettably grip the imagination of more and more; supply chain disruptions; cyber-attacks; risks to critical infrastructure; and the increasing sophistication and capability of transnational serious organised criminal groups. This list is not exhaustive.

In bringing the Portfolio together, the heads of agencies and I have been determined to ensure that the traditions and strengths of the separate agencies within the Portfolio are preserved, that their statutory independence is observed at all times, and that the professional skill and tradecraft of their workforces are valued. As a leadership team, meeting as a Portfolio Board, we have sought opportunities to pool our capabilities where this made sense, whilst always respecting independence.

One concrete example of the benefit of having the Home Affairs construct in place during these disrupted times is the creation two years ago of the National Coordination Mechanism—or NCM—which is housed within Emergency Management Australia (and which in turn is an operating group within the Department). The NCM has quickly established itself as an indispensable tool for

stabilising situations of national concern, such as disruptions to energy supplies, freight infrastructure, and to essential workforces.

Looking ahead, I am conscious of the need to ensure that the Department continues to evolve in a way that is fit for purpose. The disruptions of which I spoke earlier will only intensify and so the gains of the past four years will need to be built into the Department's foundational structures, processes, systems and workforce arrangements. At the same time, as migration and travel settings revert steadily to a post-COVID environment, I am also conscious that the Department will need to deal with the kinds of visa and travel volumes that have not been seen for two years.

I refer the Committee to the recently published ninth edition of the Department's *Administration of the Immigration and Citizenship Program* [paper \(1MB PDF\)](#).

The Digital Passenger Declaration—or DPD—capability will be released tomorrow. The DPD is the first use case to be built on the Permissions Capability Platform. It will replace the current Australia Travel Declaration—the ATD—and, in subsequent releases, the paper-based Incoming Passenger Card. While we transition from ATD to DPD, travellers arriving in Australia before 18 February 2022 should continue to submit an Australia Travel Declaration. Travellers arriving in Australia on, or after, 18 February 2022, will need to submit a DPD. The DPD will be a key tool in facilitating our re-opening at increased scale.

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