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President, Australian Human Rights Commission

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Chair, I would like to thank the Committee for excusing Kate Jenkins, Sex Discrimination Commissioner, because of a family bereavement with the loss of her beloved father, David Jenkins. We will answer what questions we can in her portfolio and take others on notice.

I would also like to open with two acknowledgements of the service of colleagues, for whom this will be their last appearance before this Committee.

Human Rights Commissioner, Ed Santow, acknowledgment of contributions

As this will be the final appearance of Human Rights Commissioner, Mr Edward Santow, I will take this opportunity to acknowledge his contributions over his five-year term in this role.

Soon after commencing in 2016, Commissioner Santow took on the mantle of advocating for the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture, or 'OPCAT' as it is generally called. This important treaty would see Australia commit to ensuring that monitoring of all places of detention in Australia meets obligations in relation to torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. The discussion papers and consultations held on this topic have been important in building consensus among NGOs and governments about the importance of ratification and the necessary steps to improve the protections for so many Australians in detention settings nationally.

Commissioner Santow has led the Commission's work on freedom of religion and on challenging issues such as national security legislation—identifying situations where the laws overreach and infringe civil liberties and advocating for appropriate safeguards. He has also led the Commission's work on immigration detention and asylum seeker policy, leading an annual series of immigration detention centre visits and reporting, which has provided valuable insights into the operation of the detention centre network and has contributed to improved conditions in this challenging context. Commissioner Santow has also led the Commission's LGBTIQ work and will shortly release a report on the extremely complex issue of surgical procedures on people born with variations in their sex characteristics.

As I speak now, it is somewhat appropriate that major piece of work completed by Commissioner Santow is due for tabling in the federal Parliament today. That is the final report on technology and human rights. Much of Commissioner Santow's term has been dedicated to exploring the myriad of issues that are raised in protecting

people's rights in the brave new world in which we live. The report focuses on the necessary protections to be built into artificial decision making and also to ensure accessibility for people with disability so that people are treated fairly into the future, and are able to equally participate in the technological revolution that we are experiencing. This landmark work is forward looking and will provide a singular contribution to law and policy in this complex field. I thank Mr Santow for his service to the Commission, and wish him the very best for what comes next.

Padma Raman PSM

The second acknowledgment is to the Commission's Chief Executive, Ms Padma Raman PSM. Ms Raman has served the Commission for eleven years and will be leaving us in June to take up the role of Chief Executive Officer of ANROWS, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. While I could speak at length of Ms Raman's contributions to the Commission, suffice it to say that, in 2019, her outstanding service was recognised in the award to her of the Public Service Medal, singling out her outstanding work at the Commission and previously as CEO of the Victorian Law Reform Commission.

In her role of Chief Executive, Ms Raman has been an outstanding leader to keep the 'engine room' of the Commission running strongly, liaising with key government stakeholders and assisting the Commission to keep true to its statutory mandate as Australia's national human rights institution. She has provided exceptional service in ensuring smooth transitions over three Presidents and 17 Commissioners. Ms Raman is an exemplary public servant.

Chair, I thank both Commissioner Santow and Chief Executive Raman for their contributions to the Commission and to Australia and acknowledge this before this Committee.