

Commissioner's Opening Statement (as at 7/11)

- Good morning Chair and committee members.
  
- Appearing with me today is:
  - Chief Operating Officer, Charlotte Tressler,
  - Deputy Commissioner Investigations, Ian McCartney, and
  - Acting Deputy Commissioner Operations, Lesa Gale.
  
- Today I will outline how the AFP, with our partners, are keeping Australians safe through the extensive work the AFP does offshore.
  
- **Crime originating offshore**, like illicit drug production, child exploitation, extremism and cybercrime, **can affect the quality of life of Australians at home.**
  
- **The AFP's mission is to protect Australians and our way of life**, and that's why the AFP has **199 members in 33 countries**, working closely with law enforcement agencies across the globe.

- **The AFP’s offshore operations are a key strategy in diverting crime from Australia.**
- **Put simply, investing in the AFP offshore is investing in the safety of Australians at home.**
- In the past financial year, the AFP’s International Command, with overseas law enforcement partners, **seized about 20 tonnes of illicit drugs**, some destined for Australia and our region.
- Apart from helping to stem the tide of illicit drugs in our community, this disruption is critical because the offshore illegal drug trade can also bankroll child exploitation, sexual servitude and human trafficking.
- We are also working with our partners to disrupt offshore cyber criminals, who are targeting Australians.
- The AFP has **six members** in the Netherlands, Serbia, South Africa, the UK and the US **who are focussed on combating cybercrime.**

- AFP-led Operation ORCUS, which targets ransomware threats, has disrupted **13** would-be attacks against Australian businesses **from July to September this year alone.**

### Optus data breach

- As chair of the Five Eyes Law Enforcement Group, which includes agencies from the US, UK, New Zealand and Canada, I know partnerships are crucial in combating cybercrime.
- The FBI is assisting in the AFP-led Operational Hurricane, which is focused on identifying the perpetrator or perpetrators responsible for the Optus data breach.
- The AFP is also leading Operation Guardian, which has the objective of protecting more than 10,000 Optus customers, whose identification credentials were unlawfully released online.

- Recently, a Sydney man was charged under Operation Guardian for allegedly attempting to blackmail Optus customers. He faces up to 10 years' imprisonment.
- We also launched Operation Pallidus to investigate the data breach against Medibank Private and Operation Allora to investigate the MyDeal data breach.
- The AFP has invested significant resources into these investigations, which will be long and complex.
- And apart from sending a warning to cyber criminals that the AFP will relentlessly pursue them, I also have a message to business: please alert authorities immediately when a data breach is suspected.
- It's like any crime scene. The longer it takes relevant agencies to be informed, the harder it is for perpetrators to be identified, disrupted or brought to justice.

**Child Sexual Exploitation Regional Dialogue**

- Cyber-enabled crime includes other criminality, like child exploitation, in which the AFP is a global leader in prevention.
- The AFP recently hosted the second Child Sexual Exploitation Regional Dialogue in Cambodia.
- This meeting focused on better identifying and investigating travelling child sex offenders, and how to mitigate children being targeted on social media platforms.
- A shining light in the fight against online child exploitation is the Philippine Internet Crimes Against Children Centre, which the AFP and partners established in 2019.
- Since its inception, 533 children have been removed from harm and 118 suspects have been charged.
- Some charges were laid against offenders in Australia, who from their lounge rooms, directed online child sexual abuse.

- I need to be clear about what that means. For as little as \$15, perpetrators around the world are communicating online with other perpetrators and paying them to assault children.
- If circumstances allow it, the AFP will use the *Proceeds of Crime Act* to launch civil proceedings against offenders who use their property as instruments of crime to commit serious offences.
- In late 2021, proceedings against a child sex offender resolved with him paying the Commonwealth an amount equal to half the value of his home, where he allegedly committed online child abuse offences.
- The funds were placed into the Commonwealth Confiscated Assets Account, which supports crime prevention initiatives, including child protection.
- I am proud that the AFP is helping to make the world safer for children, especially in our region.

- And that brings me to the crucial work we are doing in our region, **where the AFP has 123 members in nine Pacific countries.**
- In some of those countries, the AFP has been present for more than **20 years.**
- These relationships have enabled me to hold several productive meetings with my Pacific counterparts in recent months, including:
  - Discussions at the Pacific Island Chiefs of Police conference in Fiji where we discussed how to collectively improve the security of our region;
  - Finding solutions to shared problems with Royal Solomon Islands Police Force Commissioner Mostyn Mangau, Royal Solomon Islands Minister for Police, National Security and Correctional Services, the Honourable Anthony Veke and Karen Galokale, who is the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Police, National Security and Correctional Services for the Solomon Islands.

- I also signed a memorandum of understanding with Fiji Police Force Commissioner Brigadier-General Sitiveni Qiliho to enable our agencies to better combat transnational serious organised crime and improve police capability.
- These are symbiotic relationships built on long-standing trust and police diplomacy.
- I thank my Pacific counterparts for allowing the AFP to live and work in their communities.

**Operation AMMERSOYEN-ALSUNGA**

- Our established relationships offshore also assisted with the repatriation of four women and 13 children from detention camps in north-east Syria.



- The individuals who recently returned to Australia will continue to be assessed by the AFP and our partners through our Joint Counter Terrorism Teams.
- I have confidence in the well-established framework that enables the AFP to respond and manage extremist threats in Australia, including our Community Liaison Teams, which will work with community leaders to support these returned individuals.

### **INTERPOL**

- Crime is borderless and so is the illicit money that underpins criminality.
- Last month I attended the 90<sup>th</sup> INTERPOL General Assembly in New Delhi, with law enforcement leaders from around the world.
- The AFP is a key contributor to INTERPOL's initiatives and operations and we support them in crime types such as counter terrorism, child exploitation and cybercrime. Our knowledge, skills and best practices are in regular demand from foreign law enforcement.

- During that general assembly, the AFP held 25 bilateral meetings to further strengthen ties with our policing partners, all of which benefits Australian law enforcement and the community.
- Today I can reveal that INTERPOL is considering creating a new INTERPOL Silver Notice.
- This is to enhance criminal asset tracking and better support the exchange of intelligence about financial crime.
- Targeting the wealth of criminals is a key strategy of the AFP.
- In the past decade since its inception, the AFP-led Criminal Assets Confiscation Taskforce has restrained more than \$1.2 billion in criminal assets, including more than \$500 million in property forfeited to the Commonwealth.

**Oversight and AFP compliance matters**

- Finally, the AFP welcomes the valuable role of our oversight bodies, including Parliamentary and key committees such as this, the Commonwealth Ombudsman, and the Auditor-General.
- The Ombudsman’s most recent report relevant to the AFP was tabled in September, and related to records in the 2019-20 financial year.
- The AFP works collegiately with the Ombudsman’s office to address identified issues and I am confident the findings in this report have been addressed, including through a new fully digitised request process rolled out in early 2022.
- Law enforcement agencies are often only as effective as the trust that they earn and we will continue to work **proactively, and in partnership** with oversight bodies to ensure we comply with our obligations.
- Thank you and we are now am happy to take questions.