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SECRETARY
DEPARTMENT OF HOME AFFAIRS
Opening statement
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee

Tuesday, 28 May 2024

Thank you Chair.

There are three issues I will touch on briefly.

The first is our Capability Review, published by the APSC last Friday. I welcome the Review and thank the reviewers for their thoughtful and constructive conclusions, and for sharing our optimism about the future. I believe it's a fair and balanced assessment, and provides a great basis for us to continue to build the organisation's capability.

As the Review highlights, we have been progressing initiatives in line with their proposed recommendations over recent months and they acknowledge the early positive shifts in our culture, governance and financial management. I note in this regard our new whole of enterprise governance arrangements, the strengthened relationship between the ABF and rest of department leadership teams, our work together on whole of enterprise priorities, risks and budget, the strengthening of our SES cohort, our new leadership development program, and the establishment of dedicated transformation and strategic policy teams to help drive our capability uplift, cultural refresh and strategic direction and vision.

There is lots to do, and I am confident that we're off to a great start, underpinned by a workforce that is deeply committed to our mission – their dedication and resilience was one of the most persistent themes the review encountered.

The second is our budget outcome.

The department will receive total funding of \$6.1 billion in the 2024-25 financial year – \$1.2 billion more than the 2024-25 funding provisioned for in the PAES.

In departmental operating budget terms, this represents a net increase of \$285 million compared to this year's forecast spend. I am delighted to start the financial year with a sustainable operational budget, as this certainty will allow us to enforce strong budget discipline and deliver key priorities, including securing the border and ensuring community safety, countering foreign interference, building a strong and multicultural Australia, and optimising our migration system.

And finally and most importantly, I want to acknowledge as ever the achievements of the organisation since February.

ABF colleagues have implemented the full ban on e-cigarettes at our border, and are now working with the TGA and state and territory health and police colleagues to develop a national enforcement framework. They've also surged into the Kimberley Marine Park, an incredibly remote and difficult environment, to deliver on-water and on-land response and deterrence operations to illegal fishing and people smuggling.

Our cyber teams have supported the launch of the *Act Now, Stay Secure* campaign designed for Australians to protect themselves online, managed 11 cyber incidents requiring national coordination, consulted on a new Cyber Security Act, and worked with the critical infrastructure community to launch a refreshed Organisational Resilience Health Check Tool.

Our national security area has brought together Commonwealth, State and Territory colleagues to respond to the horrific incidents in Wakeley and Willerton, and is working with experts nationally on whole of society responses to youth radicalisation. Our Community Liaison Network has managed over 870 engagements with affected community stakeholders since the events of 7 October. We've also seen the commencement of the migration reforms to protect Australia's critical technology.

Our Immi team, together with the ABF, supported the crisis response in New Caledonia and is on track to deliver a program of 20,000 humanitarian visas, the largest in many years. They also worked hard to secure state and territory agreement to the new multi-year planning measure announced at budget, which will enhance whole of system planning for migration.

Our executive team delivered substantial strategic dialogues with the UK, France and the Netherlands, and set up new intelligence capabilities to support tobacco and vapes operations. And our corporate colleagues delivered an incredible 97 per cent yes vote for our new enterprise agreement, and are now working hard to implement it.

And finally, our Immi and legal teams have done superlative work managing the complex litigation caseload arising from the NZYQ High Court case, and developing legislation to facilitate removal of people who have no legal right to remain in Australia.

To return to where I started – the Capability Review called out the scale, diversity, complexity and importance of our mission. In amongst the scrutiny and controversy that will always accompany this portfolio, it is too easy to forget the amazing things that Home Affairs officers achieve every day. Today I am putting some examples of these on the record.