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

**Monday, 13 February 2023**

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As I advised the Committee on 28 October 2022, Ms Stephanie Foster PSM had been appointed Associate Secretary of the Department. Her principal focus is on the Immigration function. She also assists me in the general running of the Department; for instance, I have recently appointed her to oversee the Legal function.

I refer the Committee to the recently published addendum to the tenth edition of the Department's report *The Administration of the Immigration and Citizenship Programs*. The report highlights the achievement of reducing the visa backlog. Between 1 June 2022 and 31 December 2022, the Department reduced the number of visa applications on hand to fewer than 600,000, a reduction of 360,000 since 1 July 2022.

The Department is ready to implement the Government's announcement to provide existing Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) and Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV) holders with a permanent visa pathway, through the Subclass 851 Resolution of Status visa, from 14 February 2023. The Department has established a detailed transition page on the Home Affairs website with details about the new visa and transition process, which includes fact sheets that have been translated into seven languages. Anyone who attempts an unauthorised boat voyage to Australia will be intercepted and returned to their country of departure or their home country, where it is safe and lawful to do so, or transferred to another country.

It has been almost nine years since the last successful people smuggling venture to Australia. The Joint Agency Task Force Operation Sovereign Borders remains postured to counter maritime people smuggling and preserve safety of life at sea. Regional processing remains a key pillar of Operation Sovereign Borders. The number of transitory persons in Nauru has been reduced to 66, as at 1 February 2023, down from 111 as at 31 August 2022. Once this caseload is resolved through third-country resettlement, the regional processing capability will remain ready to receive any new unauthorised maritime arrivals.

The designation of Nauru as a regional processing country under section 198AB of the *Migration Act 1958* was repealed by sunset on 1 October 2022. The repeal occurred as a result of human and administrative error within the Department. On 5 February 2023 the Minister redesignated Nauru as a regional processing country. The designation commenced on 7 February 2023, following the approval of Parliament as required under the Migration Act.

Beyond immigration and borders, the Minister for Home Affairs has instructed the Department to focus on three other priority areas – cyber security, national resilience in the face of security challenges, and the strengthening of our democratic resilience. Our work on national resilience also extends to dealing with the effects of climate change, in relation to which we work to the Minister for Emergency Management.

Climate change is a recognised and increasingly important part of Australia’s national resilience challenge. The mitigation and management of natural disasters, and recovery from them, are time- and resource-consuming challenges for the government and the community. To better position Australia to deal with the increasing exposure and vulnerability to nationally significant crises, including those due to climate change, the Department established the National Resilience Taskforce on 1 November 2022. Working closely with the National Emergency Management Agency, the Taskforce is charged with ensuring the Commonwealth has the necessary legislation, policy and capability settings in place to manage increasingly complex national crises. The Department has also established task forces to deal with the cyber security and democracy protection priorities of the Minister for Home Affairs.

The Counter-Terrorism Coordination Centre continues to lead efforts to both maintain existing counter-terrorism capabilities; and develop new approaches to counter evolving and complex threats, including those posed by grievance- and conspiracy-fuelled extremist groups and extremist racist groups.

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