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Statement
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee

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I want to start by acknowledging the significant shock all of us in the Home Affairs Portfolio experienced four weeks ago, when Secretary Pezzullo was asked to stand aside pending an investigation into media allegations reported the previous evening. I am conscious there will be enormous interest in these events, and I will do my best to assist the Committee, noting that the investigation is ongoing, and I will therefore be unable to answer any questions that could prejudice its fair process.

This has been an incredibly difficult time for all of us in the organisation, a tough four weeks in the face of sustained and often distressing media reporting. I pay tribute to the Home Affairs leadership team for stepping up so strongly to sustain the organisation through this period. Most importantly, though, I want to acknowledge and express deep appreciation for the resilience, commitment and professionalism of our 15,000 odd staff, who have pulled together in extraordinary circumstances to deliver their critical functions without missing a beat. They have been simply fabulous.

So what I'd like to do very quickly is outline some of their achievements since the last Estimates. I know Commissioner Outram will cover those from within the ABF, so I'll focus briefly on the Department's key outcomes. At the outset I acknowledge our Corporate and Executive teams, the wind beneath our wings, whose support ensures that we deliver on the priorities of Government.

Firstly the response to the devastating conflict in the Middle East. Our staff have both supported DFAT's consular and repatriation efforts, and led the development of practical measures to contribute to social cohesion in Australia. We have worked with colleagues across the Commonwealth, States and Territories, peak groups, and most critically with affected communities, to inform and support the Government's response. I give a particular shout out to the extraordinary efforts of our community liaison officers whose networks and reporting have been fundamental to the development of those options.

Turning to Immigration related matters, we have led work across the Commonwealth, and with external stakeholders, to develop a strong and focused policy response to the findings of the *Rapid Review into the Exploitation of Australia's Visa System* conducted by Christine Nixon AO. We're establishing a new division to drive an integrated approach to the integrity of our migration system. This team will target the organised abuse of migration programs, work to resolve the immigration status of people whose onshore visa options have been exhausted, and improve protections for vulnerable migrants.

Key to our efforts to enhance the integrity of our migration system is the reform of our refugee protection system. We have redesigned our operational approach to protection visa applications to break the business model of those who abuse the system by capitulating on long delays at each stage of the process. This will ensure a faster, fairer and more efficient protection system for those genuinely in need of Australia's protection. These integrity measures are absolutely fundamental to the success of our migration strategy.

In the cyber security space, we have made fantastic progress on the development of a *2023-2030 Australian Cyber Security Strategy* that the Minister has indicated will be released by the end of 2023. On 12 September 2023, 220 submissions to the Strategy were released on the Department's website demonstrating the significant engagement being undertaken. The Strategy will be underpinned by domestic and international best-practice actions to build Australia's cyber resilience.

The Department - now through the National Cyber Security Coordinator - has also supported a National Cyber Security Exercise Program. This includes successful exercises with every state and territory government in Australia, cross sectoral exercises, telecommunications, financial services, aviation and support for ASD's logistics exercise.

We also kicked off the Critical Infrastructure Risk Management Program on 17 August this year, after significant engagement with industry over the preceding six months. Over 50 critical infrastructure entities have already voluntarily provided a report to the Department on their progress ahead of the formal reporting requirement in 2024. And following the declaration of an additional 87 Systems of National Significance (SONS) on 9 August 2023, the Department is working with the 168 SONS on incident response planning and exercise obligations. It's a big and really important body of work.

On national security matters, the Department's Counter Foreign Interference and Legal teams led the work on the Home Affairs Act 2023 which terminated the Government of the Russian Federation's lease over a site in Yarralumla. The legislation passed both Houses of Parliament and received Royal Assent, all on the same day, 15 June 2023. A huge team effort.

There are also a couple of milestones that deserve recognition – including one that is close to your hearts! The Parliamentary Liaison Network recently marked 50 years of operation, and our new business model seems to be meeting with success. I'm sure I'll hear about it today if that's not that case.

And Australia marked another half century milestone on 11 August, celebrating 50 Years of Multiculturalism. This was the anniversary of the 1973 Report *A Multi-cultural Society for the Future*, which led to the birth of contemporary multicultural Australia. On 2 June the Department launched its *Multicultural Framework Review*, to consider whether Australian Government policy settings and institutional arrangements remain fit for purpose. For the first time, submissions were invited in any language. Of the 661 submissions received, 126 of those were in languages other than English.

One final milestone: the Adult Migrant English Program celebrated 75 years this year. AMEP has helped more than 2 million people with free English language lessons. Its network of service providers currently operates at more than 300 sites across Australia, as well as through the AMEPOne platform.

Let me finish by welcoming two new colleagues to the leadership team. Since we last appeared at Senate Estimates, Air Marshal Darren Goldie AM CSC has been appointed by Government as Australia's inaugural National Cyber Security Coordinator. In this role, Air Marshal Goldie leads national cyber security policy, the coordination of responses to major cyber incidents, whole of Government cyber incident preparedness efforts and strengthening of Commonwealth cyber security capability. He leads this work in collaboration with the Government's key policy, operational and security agencies. And Nathan Smyth has been appointed to the role of Deputy Secretary, National Security and Resilience. Mr Smyth's position also incorporates the roles of the Commonwealth's Counter-Terrorism Coordinator and Counter Foreign Interference Coordinator.

We look forward to assisting Senators with their questions.