

## **May 2023 Budget Estimates – Opening Statement**

**Andrew Metcalfe AO**

**Secretary, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry  
Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee**

- Chair and Senators, thank you for the opportunity to make a short opening statement this morning.
- Notwithstanding flooding and other natural disasters that have impacted some parts of rural and regional Australia this financial year, the agriculture sector as a whole is thriving off the back of three successive record production years with high international prices.
- In 2022-23, ABARES estimates that the agriculture sector gross value of production is expected to be another record, hitting \$90 billion (\$96 billion with fisheries and forestry).
- This year's agricultural exports are expected to reach their highest level on record at close to \$75 billion (\$79 billion with fisheries and forestry). That is, we export over \$200 million of products each and every day to over 165 markets – trade supported by my department.
- Chair, I'm sure that the Committee will join with me in congratulating the President of the National Farmers' Federation, Ms Fiona Simson, who was elected earlier this week to be a Director of the World Farmers' Federation; representing the Oceania constituency. Her election is due recognition of the major contribution Fiona has made to advancing agriculture in Australia and overseas.
- Chair, this financial year the department has maintained, gained and improved access to 109 markets, worth a potential \$5.47 billion, including new access for avocados to India and Thailand, improved access for poultry to Singapore, and safeguarding our meat trade to key Asian markets. And of

course, the new Australia-UK FTA and the Australia-India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement will provide new and diversified trade opportunities for Australian farmers, producers and agricultural importers and exporters.

- I am proud to be able to say that the department continues to deliver every day – we deal with high priority biosecurity, trade and production policy and operational issues.
- When we faced the increased threat posed by foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) and Lumpy Skin Disease (LSD) in Indonesia last year, we immediately ramped up our biosecurity operations. That work continues both in Australia and in our region, everyday. This surge of activity naturally impacted our resources across the department.
- It is important to note Australia remains free of FMD and LSD, diseases that would have disastrous consequences across the country were they to become established here. Indeed it is not exaggerating to say that we are actively dealing with the biggest biosecurity threats to Australian agriculture in living memory.
- I therefore very much welcome the long term sustainable, predictable biosecurity funding announced in the 2023-24 Budget, which will support a strong biosecurity system – a system that is critical to keeping our agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries and unique environment healthy and strong.
- Chair, while speaking of biosecurity, I would also like to briefly mention ‘Operation Avoca’. This whole investigation was initiated because one of our departmental staff noticed something not quite right during an inspection, and acted on it.
- Our staff have now identified, managed and contained over 38 tonnes of biosecurity risk material, some of which can carry diseases that could have had catastrophic consequences to the

agricultural sector. The materials impounded included turtle meat, frog meat, pork, beef, avian products and raw prawns.

- Chair, Australia's Chief Veterinary Officer, Dr Mark Schipp, is currently leading the Australian delegation's participation in the annual World Organisation for Animal Health General which will focus on high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI). While HPAI is Australia's most frequently occurring emergency animal disease, recent outbreaks overseas - caused by a different virus (H5N1) - are unprecedented in their scale, geographic reach, persistence and impacts on poultry as well as wildlife, including threatened wild bird species.
- Australia is currently free from HPAI, and together with Antarctica remain the only continents on which the virus of current concern has not been detected. Opportunities to learn from overseas experiences and influence global approaches remain critical to ensuring Australia's preparedness, and protecting our poultry and bird industries, and unique wildlife and ecosystems.
- In addition to biosecurity, the Budget this year also funds other important government initiatives in our portfolio in areas such as animal welfare, sustainable agriculture including through the Natural Heritage Trust, and data capability. Funding is also provided to other portfolios, including to improve the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility program, which will also benefit the agriculture sector.
- Chair, as I have highlighted before, I am very proud of the significant work we are undertaking to plan, engage, consult, listen and work together with First Nations people.
- As part of our First Nations commitment, we are partnering with the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation to develop an Indigenous Agricultural Product Framework. This framework will provide an evidence base to establish Indigenous

agricultural product credentials that verify provenance, support prosperity for First Nations people and secure economic benefit through value-added domestic and exported Indigenous products.

- The framework will be developed by First Nations people, for First Nations people, and it will make further improvements to agricultural traceability consistent with the objectives of the *National Agricultural Traceability Strategy 2023-2033*.
- On a sadder note Chair, I would like to acknowledge the recent passing of Dr Michael Nunn. Dr Nunn held a number of senior positions with department from 1998 to 2012, in the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer and Animal Biosecurity Division prior to providing advice to a number of organisations, including the department, as a consultant in veterinary epidemiology. He co-authored and edited the go-to handbook of exotic animal diseases, which although published in the early 90's, is still on shelves around the country today.
- Whilst I did not have the pleasure of knowing Dr Nunn personally, his death has been felt by many in the department who did know him. His strong scientific background and knowledge was greatly respected, and he was a mentor for many in the field of veterinary medicine. We extend our condolences to his family, friends and many colleagues.
- Chair, I think that you have been advised that a very close relative of our Chief Finance Officer, Mr Paul Pak Poy, died late last week. Mr Pak Poy will be attending the funeral in Sydney this afternoon. He will be available at today's hearing until 10.30am before he leaves for Sydney. We will have other officers available to cover any questions that would be covered by Mr Pak Poy in his absence.
- Chair, I would like to again take the opportunity to acknowledge and thank my leadership team and all our

departmental staff who continue to provide valuable services to the Australian community; and to our key partners and stakeholders including farmers and graziers, foresters and fishers, food and fibre production industries, exporters and importers; and the many people they employ and whose services they use.

- Finally Chair, we have, as is usual practice, prepared a list of issues by Outcome to help guide your questions. I am happy to table that document now for the convenience of the Committee.
- Thank you Chair.

Andrew Metcalfe AO  
Secretary  
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry