

RRAT Senate Committee Hearing 30-31 May 2024
Opening Statement – Adam Fennessy PSM
Secretary, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

- Acting Chair and Senators, thank you for the opportunity to make a short opening statement.
- I will briefly touch on the recent Federal Budget, our ongoing transformation program and efforts to improve biosecurity, market access and sustainable agriculture.
- First, the 2024-25 Federal Budget contained positive outcomes for our department, building on the diligent work of staff at the department throughout the budget process.
- The department secured \$789 million in new budget funding over 8 years to help farmers and producers adapt to climate change, build their resilience and maintain Australia’s position as a trusted, reliable trading partner.
- The new investments build on \$3.1 billion previously invested by the government in agriculture, fisheries and forestry over 6 years, which includes more than \$1.8 billion of additional biosecurity funding since May 2022.
- The budget will ensure well-planned and well-funded policies are in place to help producers prepare for the impacts of climate change, especially drought, and continue to raise their productivity and profitability.

- These will help ensure Australians can access safe, affordable and sustainable food in the years and decades ahead, and maintain our strong performance in the export of Australian agricultural produce.
- Second, since my last appearance before this committee in February, the department has been implementing recommendations from the Australian Public Service Commission Capability Review and financial sustainability review of the department.
- The focus to date has been on leadership and culture, collaboration, delivery, people and resourcing, and enhancement of risk capabilities.
- I would like to put on the record a few achievements that have resulted from the dedicated work by many departmental staff.
- As part of a significant transformation program, we have engaged staff internally to lift our capabilities and commenced implementation of more centralised corporate functions, stronger strategic policy development and a consistent regulatory posture.
- Strengthening these areas will see us better meet Australian Government priorities and, importantly, the needs of the Australian public and the Australian agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors.
- Biosecurity is a shared responsibility – both across states, territories and with international partners.
- In March this year, I spent time with plant biosecurity colleagues from Papua New Guinea, Timor Leste and the Solomon Islands to discuss co-delivery of biosecurity activities with our near neighbours – to preserve

and safeguard plant biosecurity in both Australia and neighbouring countries.

- Despite increasingly complex biosecurity challenges, we continue to expand and diversify market access - particularly into South East Asia and India.
- As one example, in 2023 the value of Australian agricultural exports to India was up 152% on the previous three-year average.
- We are also approaching the first anniversary of the UK Free Trade Agreement, an agreement that has transformed our trading relationship with the world's 6th largest economy and large net food importer.
- Consistent with the Minister's update in his opening statement, I confirm that over night we got confirmation of the very positive news that China's Customs agency will lift trade-related suspensions for five Australian meat export establishments.
- I want to acknowledge the dedicated work of our China based agriculture trade counsellors and our Australian-based trade and technical market access negotiators who have been diligently progressing negotiations for a number of years, alongside our Government and industry colleagues, all of whom play an important role in this excellent outcome for the Australian beef industry.
- We will continue to work with Chinese authorities on the lifting of trade-related suspensions on three remaining Australian meat export establishments, and other commodities still impacted by trade impediments.

- We also conducted a successful consultation process for the Agriculture and Land Sectoral Plan at a summit in Toowoomba last week, with the confirmation of \$63.8 million in new funding from the 2024-25 Budget to target emissions reductions across agriculture.
- Lastly, Acting Chair – I am pleased to say that since the last Estimates Committee hearing I have finalised appointing my leadership team of Deputy Secretaries, who will join us at the table throughout the day.
 - Mr Matt Lowe was appointed as the Deputy Secretary Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Policy Group on 19 February 2024;
 - Ms Tina Hutchison was promoted to the role of Deputy Secretary Agriculture Trade and Regulation Group on 22 April 2024; and
 - Just yesterday, Ms Justine Saunders APM was confirmed as Deputy Secretary Biosecurity, Operations and Compliance Group.
- The department has successfully recruited 11 Senior Executive Service (SES) staff since February, against current vacancies, which compares favourably to five SES commencements between 1 July 2023 and 31 January 2024.
- The new appointments are reflected in the organisation chart tabled with the Committee.
- With our senior leadership and long-term funding settled, our department will continue to work together to protect and grow more sustainable agriculture, fisheries and forestry across Australia.

- Thank you, Acting Chair – as is the usual practice, we have prepared a list of issues by Outcome to help guide your questions, and we are happy to respond to questions from the Committee.