

Senate Estimates 15 February 2023

APVMA Board Chair, Dr Carmel (Carrie) Hillyard AM

Opening statement

Thank you Chair.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the allegations of misconduct that were identified during the Estimates hearing before this Committee in November of last year.

I would also like to acknowledge the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's statement of 10 February 2023, in which Minister Watt indicated that the interim report arising from the independent review he commissioned in November 2022, contains additional serious allegations of misconduct concerning the APVMA, including potential breaches of the public service code of conduct and other potential breaches of the law.

The Board takes these issues extremely seriously. The Board is also committed to supporting all processes that allows the allegations to be examined, including actions already taken by

Minister Watt to refer them to the appropriate authorities for consideration and investigation.

It is important that these allegations are examined thoroughly and by the appropriate authorities. While these investigations are being conducted, it is not appropriate for me, or others in the APVMA to comment.

I can confirm that Ms Croft, the APVMA's CEO, has decided to take a period of leave to allow the investigation of these allegations to take place.

Yesterday, the Board appointed Ms Nicola Hinder PSM as Interim CEO of the APVMA.

Ms Hinder's appointment will allow the APVMA's focus to remain on ensuring that Australians are provided with timely access to safe and effective AgVet chemical products that support agricultural productivity and provide improved animal health and biosecurity outcomes, while working with the Board to support APVMA staff and engage with stakeholders.

The issues identified in November of last year and in the interim report take place against the background of the Board having been established for a little less than twelve months.

Importantly, since the establishment of the current Board – we have not waited to focus on our people, our governance, and the culture of the organisation.

A first step has been the development of a strategic plan which lays out a clear roadmap for the APVMA. Importantly, staff across all levels of the organisation have been involved in the development of the plan.

Other important initiatives underway, some of which pre-date the establishment of the Board, has seen the APVMA:

- appoint an experienced Director of People and Governance;
- develop its People Strategy 2022-25.
- put in place a Workplace Respect policy, along with a series of new initiatives and training for staff; and
- After the Census data was received, a consultancy firm was appointed to work with staff on culture.

And I would be happy to provide more details about these activities should the Committee wish.

While much has been achieved, we acknowledge that we still have a lot of work to do.

The Board is looking forward to working with Ms Hinder to continue the program of improvements in governance, workplace culture and behaviour at the APVMA, while continuing to focus on the important regulatory obligations of the organisation.

APVMA stakeholders, and the broader Australian public, should have full confidence that the valuable work of the APVMA continues, carried out by a professional and dedicated team of people who care deeply about what they do, and who we want to feel rewarded, valued and supported at all times.

We are listening, we are learning, and we will continue to take action.

Thank you.