

**February 2023 Budget Supplementary Estimates – Opening
Statement, Secretary Metcalfe
Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee**

- Chair and Senators, thank you for the opportunity to make a short opening statement this morning.
- I would like to start by acknowledging the many challenges faced by people affected by severe flooding in various parts of Australia. Our thoughts are with the many farming families and regional communities impacted by the disastrous floods.
- Since we last appeared before the Committee we continued to fully bed down the Machinery of Government changes which took effect in July. The department is now focused on making sure we can best deliver on our core significant regulatory, research, stakeholder engagement, program administration and policy advice functions. The government and Minister Watt have been very clear on their priorities, and we are of course committed to ensuring delivery of these priorities.
- Following discussions and consultations throughout the department, I'm pleased to advise I launched our new Purpose, Objectives, Priorities, Vision and Values statement in December. This is basically my department's strategic directions on a page, and it will underpin what we do and how we work; and inform more formal documents such as our Corporate Plan. I have copies of the document to provide to the Committee.

- The department's clear purpose – our job – is 'Working together to safeguard and grow sustainable agriculture, fisheries and forestry for all Australians'; and our vision – our aspiration – is 'A more sustainable and prosperous Australia through biosecurity, production and trade'.
- Importantly, it solidifies our First Nations Commitment, describing our approach to work in a genuine partnership with First Nations people both within the department and externally.
- The department is also looking at fine-tuning our structure to ensure we remain fit for purpose and can best deliver on our core regulatory and other services, and on the government's priorities.
- You would all be aware, but I feel it's worth reiterating, the breadth of work of my department. We're constantly dealing with high priority biosecurity, trade and production policy and operational issues; we have staff in 154 locations across Australia (including external territories) as well as 15 international locations.
- During my recent opportunity to accompany Minister Watt overseas, I saw first-hand the important and valuable work of our agriculture counsellors.
- Australia's agricultural exports are forecast to break records at over \$72 billion in 2022-23. The combination of high production and prices has seen Australian agricultural exports exceed \$5 billion in every month since November 2021, despite widespread reported port congestion.

- The work of the department makes a real difference for Australian businesses, for example the department accomplished over 100 market access achievements in 2022. This includes new market access for stone-fruit to Vietnam, safeguarding meat access to the Middle East and Asia, and securing grain trade to markets across Latin America and Southeast Asia.
- As another great example, through the hard work of departmental staff both in Washington D.C. and Australia, several Australian manufacturers and exporters have taken advantage of the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) temporary enforcement discretion to gain access to the coveted US market.
- So far, over 175 million full-size 8oz bottles of Australian infant formula have been made available across the US. Pleasingly one of the companies, Bubs Australia, was recognised as Australian Exporter of the Year at the 60th Australian Export Awards in November. This is great recognition for the company, and I am very proud of the efforts of the department to not only help Bubs Australia reach their export success, but the assistance provided to each and every other Australian agriculture exporter.
- In one more quick example of the excellence of our staff, we recently showcased one of our wonderful female scientists, Dr Anna Kabaila [Kah-by-la], in recognition of International Women and Girls in Science Day. Dr Kabaila is a Senior Veterinary Officer who is working to improve Australia's capacity to identify and respond to emergency animal disease threats. Dr Kabaila is one of many female scientists and veterinarians making a valuable contribution to our department's work, including in leadership positions.

- I will also note the department was recently able to consolidate our different Canberra offices into a single facility on Northbourne Avenue in Civic. This building has been designed to enable modern ways of working, to get the most of the synergies across our different groups. It's worth noting the rental of the new building is significantly less than that of our previous buildings.
- Chair, I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge and thank my leadership team and departmental staff who continue to provide valuable services to the Australian community and our key 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.
- I'm proud of our staff, who continue to display our core values of courage, excellence, diversity and working together, underpinned of course by safety and integrity.
- Thank you Chair. We are happy to respond to any questions from the Committee.

Andrew Metcalfe AO

Secretary

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry