



Chair, I would like to make a short statement

Thank you. It was only ten weeks ago, at the height of the pandemic, with images from overseas of hospital systems overrun and makeshift morgues, the Prime Minister asked me to head a National COVID-19 Coordination Commission, to help minimise the immediate impact of the COVID-19 virus and bring a business perspective to the longer-term economic recovery. I felt honoured but equally daunted at the job ahead.

I was pleased to learn I would be joined in this challenge by Greg Combet AM, Jane Halton AO PSM FAICD FIPPA, Paul Little AO, Catherine Tanna and David Thodey AO and the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Phil Gaetjens, and Home Affairs Secretary Michael Pezzullo – all highly regarded leaders, appointed to the Commission's Board. Former Productivity Commissioner Peter Harris AO was also brought on as CEO for his wealth of public sector experience and to support me.

Together, we bring significant experience and networks from a broad cross-section of our economy and community, ranging from health, public sector governance, innovation, logistics, resources, energy, agriculture, small business, industrial relations, construction, telecommunications, and not-for-profits.

The Prime Minister announced the Commission on 25 March and we held our first board meeting two days later.

Commissioners immediately started tackling the most urgent problems. We used our networks and experience to help address shortages in personal protective equipment for our frontline workers; help unblock supply chains and move food supplies to regional and remote areas; navigate freight and transport challenges, including the movement of goods through ports; and connect laid-off staff with other work, such as redeploying airline staff in the health sector. This work was constant for around five weeks.

Thanks to that outstanding effort of all Australians, and with the rate of spread under control, the Government announced its plans for a gradual and progressive easing of restrictions.

Having contributed to the initial troubleshooting phase, our focus shifted from problem solving to our second phase of work – working with industry on COVIDSafe plans,

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developing an online planning tool to help businesses re-open and be COVIDSafe, and advocating risk-based approaches to operating within the changing restrictions. To date, our business planning tool has been downloaded over 21,000 times.

Now that the immediate crisis has subsided and many businesses are progressively reopening, we are turning our attention to our third phase of activity: the longer-term economic recovery, where the Commission will play a strategic advisory role to Government.

As I have said, the Commissioners and I were appointed by the Government for our wide range of expertise, experience and networks that have allowed us to connect business to business and business to government, and to mobilise efforts across public, private and jurisdictional lines.

We have been talking with more than a thousand individuals and organisations in a range of forums and will continue our outreach to inform our advice to Government as the economy recovers.

Across the Commission, we've engaged in different ways with the education sector, chambers of commerce and businesses of all sizes, from a wide range of industries including tourism, hospitality and retail, transport, infrastructure, education, the services industries and the financial sector. We also liaise across government to ensure that we do not duplicate effort.

There has been a public focus on the Commission's interests in the energy sector, specifically gas. I am on the public record and stand by my view that we should be looking at competitive gas supply for its potential as a raw material for both existing and new manufacturing industry to preserve and create jobs. Australia has an abundance of energy sources and I agree with the Chief Scientist, Dr Alan Finkel, whose view is that there is a role for gas in firming up renewables as we transition to lower emissions.

That said, I am also very aware of my governance responsibilities under the Corporations Act and in my role with the Commission. To avoid all perceived and actual conflicts of interest I have not attended a board meeting of Strike Energy since I joined the Commission and I have not voted on any operational or strategic matters and will not while I am at the NCCC. This is in addition to the Government's standard conflict of interest arrangements covering all Commissioners.

The early and unofficial release of the draft report from Andrew Liveris' manufacturing taskforce, is ahead of other work we are developing on long term recovery. This work

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centres on several broad themes for reform, including infrastructure, energy, the not-for-profit sector and structural reform - especially enhancing digital capability for small business.

All of this is in the context that we are an advisory body to Government - not a decision making body. We are providing our advice in real time as the response to the pandemic evolves, and working closely with departments, especially the taskforces in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and Treasury. If Commissioners have differing views, the range of views is brought forward to Government. Our role is to maximise the wealth of business experience on our board and provide the breadth of this advice to Government.

We have provided this advice in our regular engagement with the Prime Minister and other Ministers, as well as Premiers and Chief Ministers' departments in the course of our work.

I am proud of the contribution the Commission has made so far in helping businesses retain and restore jobs through the pandemic. Now, it is for us to provide our best advice to government to facilitate the fastest possible recovery of people's livelihoods, and to improve the longer term prosperity, productivity and resilience of the Australian economy.

Thank you.