

**Opening Statement by
General David Hurley, AC, DSC
Chief of the Defence Force
19 October 2011**

Good morning Chair, Senators, thank you for the opportunity to make an opening statement. I would like to begin this morning by offering my condolences to the families of four Australians killed on operations since June. Sapper Rowan Robinson was a member of the Incident Response Regiment. He was killed by insurgent small arms fire on 6 June. Sergeant Todd Langley of 2nd Commando Regiment was killed on 4 July during an engagement with insurgents. Private Matthew Lambert, 2nd Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment died as a result of wounds sustained when an IED detonated on 22 August and Craftsman Beau Pridue who was killed as a result of injuries sustained in a motor vehicle accident on 15 September while serving with the 8th Combat Service Support Battalion on operations in East Timor. On behalf of the ADF and the wider Australian Defence Community I offer our deepest sympathy to the family, friends and mates who were closest to these men. I also want to reassure these families that the ADF will honour our commitment to continue to support them in the months and years ahead.

When I assumed this appointment in July, I outlined my objectives for the next three years. At the top of this list is to achieve our operational objectives: In Afghanistan, this is to train the Afghan National Army in Uruzgan and to support the development of a long term relationship with the Afghan Government. We must also achieve our objectives to support peace and stability in East Timor and the Solomon Islands and we must look to enhance and build on our strategic and regional engagement achievements. These priorities must be addressed in parallel with our preparation for the introduction into service of two transforming capabilities for the ADF – a new air combat capability built around the Joint Strike Fighter and an amphibious capability of proportions and complexities that we have not experienced before.

My objectives acknowledge the need to address the sustainment issues that have affected Navy over the past year. There are two aspects to this; firstly to rebuild the Navy's engineering capability and capacity in order to sustain the fleet and secondly to rectify the sustainment issues with the Collins Class submarines. Both are already trending in the right direction but there is much hard work still to do. With regard to Army, we need to implement the initial phase in building a new force structure that is better suited to the demands of future conflict.

Caring for our people is one of my key priorities as Chief of the Defence Force. Among my top eight priorities is to ensure that our culture, the ADF's culture, gives confidence to the Australian people and to the Australian Government, that we are a just, inclusive and fair minded organisation. Closely associated with this is the need to ensure that we have a valued, committed, sustainable workforce, both in uniform and in the public service.

As I said, the successful conduct of our operations is my highest priority. Let me now update you on Operation SLIPPER, our operation in Afghanistan. To achieve our objective in Afghanistan we must stabilise the security situation while mentoring and training the Afghan National Security Forces to a level that enables them to assume the lead for providing security in Uruzgan Province. Earlier this month I was in Afghanistan, to visit our Australian troops in Uruzgan Province; and engage our

Afghan and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) partners in Kabul and Kandahar. Afghanistan remains a challenging and dangerous environment and our troops continue to perform admirably.

The Coalition efforts in 2011 have seen the Taliban's momentum halted in many parts of the country and the insurgency's access to support infrastructure such as safe houses, caches, medical support and IED making facilities has been severely disrupted. As a result the insurgency's freedom of movement is more restricted. They influence less territory and are less capable than they were in 2010. This means the Taliban's home ground advantage has been degraded in many of the key population centres in Afghanistan, particularly in the South – in places such as Helmand and Kandahar, and most importantly for us, Uruzgan. It is very clear that none of the Taliban's operational level objectives for 2011 have been achieved, that is, the Taliban's 2011 offensive has failed.

Our progress means we face a degraded and increasingly desperate insurgency, which seeks to undermine international confidence in Afghanistan. This has and will continue to manifest itself in the form of sustained efforts by the insurgency to launch operationally insignificant but spectacular attacks in an attempt to derail the progress being made. I stress, that these sensation-seeking attacks are a sign of desperation not a demonstration of strength.

I also accompanied Minister Smith to the NATO/ISAF Defence Ministers' Meeting in Brussels earlier this month. The ISAF military leadership remains cautiously optimistic about prospects in Afghanistan, including our ability to transition provinces to Afghan control in the lead up to 2014. There is also a consensus that we are seeing results from our clear strategy, appropriate resources and realistic timeline. This highlights the importance of the international community remaining committed to operations in Afghanistan. I am pleased to report that our ISAF partners continue to hold Australia's commitment to Afghanistan in the highest regard: both in the quality of our personnel; and in our steadfast support for the mission.

In July this year we welcomed the formal start of the transition process with the first tranche of provinces and districts across Afghanistan being handed over to an Afghan lead. The Taliban has not been able to reverse this action. President Karzai will shortly announce the second tranche of provinces and districts to begin transition. Progression to the transition phase marks an important step towards meeting President Karzai's goal: that Afghan authorities assume the lead security responsibility across Afghanistan within the projected timeframe.

The growing and increasingly capable Afghan National Security Force will enhance future progress on transition. The ANA grew to 265,136 personnel in 2010, and is on track to grow to 305,600 personnel in 2011 (on a glide path to 352,000 personnel by 2012). Australia's commitment to training the Afghan National Army 4th Brigade, in Uruzgan Province is consistent with the goals agreed by the Afghan Government and International Community at Lisbon last year and is progressing well. Our assessment is that conditions will be suitable to transition lead security responsibility to Afghan National Security Forces in Uruzgan in the period 2012 to 2014. In this regard, members of our Mentoring Task Force have expanded their partnered mentoring program and continue to live and work closely with the Afghan National Army 4th

Brigade. The mentoring model they now use is widely regarded by ISAF as the yardstick. Australia took over mentoring responsibility for the new 6th Kandak in June this year, further increasing the capability of the 4th Brigade.

We have seen solid progress in the 4th Brigade's capabilities, which is increasingly conducting operations and maintaining patrol bases with little or no Australian support. The Afghan National Army has continued to build new patrol bases which is assisting in extending the security sector in Uruzgan from the Tarin Kot bowl into the Mirabad Valley in the east, and to the Tangi Valley in the west. Our Special Forces continue to make a highly valued contribution to the broader ISAF campaign across the South. They continue to remove key insurgency leaders, capabilities and supplies from the battlefield which helps create a security environment conducive to training the 4th Brigade as well as allowing ordinary Afghans to get on with their lives.

Australia is also making an important contribution to institutional training, as the lead partner nation for the Combined Arms Artillery School in Kabul.

Now to other operations:

Senators, since the last Estimates hearing, the ADF Security Detachment in Iraq has successfully transferred responsibility for the security of the Australian Embassy in Bagdad to a more standard contract arrangement under the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Every stage of this transition was based on a careful military risk assessment by Defence and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, of the security environment. The full extraction was completed on 6 August 2011, three months prior to the original planning timeline, without incident, reflecting improvements in the security situation in Iraq.

Closer to home, East Timor is also approaching a critical juncture with next year's Parliamentary and Presidential elections. There are currently around 380 ADF personnel including approximately 140 reservists, deployed on Operation ASTUTE alongside approximately 70 New Zealand Defence personnel as part of the International Stabilisation Force. We will work with the Government of East Timor to consider our commitment post these elections. This year also marks the 10th anniversary of Australia's bilateral defence relationship with East Timor through the Defence Cooperation Program (DCP). In the 2010-11 financial year, the DCP completed a range of projects including the construction of a new headquarters for the East Timorese Defence Force engineering component. The English Language Training Facility in Metinaro has doubled its student capacity and the ADF has provided support to assist in completing the master scoping and development plan for the proposed Port Hera naval complex.

Like our mission in East Timor the ADF contribution to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade - led Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), known as Operation ANODE, is helping to provide a secure and safe environment to facilitate RAMSI efforts to support and develop Solomon Islands' institutions.

Both Operation ASTUTE and Operation ANODE are critical to our efforts to sustain peace and stability in the region directly to our north.

Finally, on 13 October I wrote to the Chair of the Committee to raise my long held concerns regarding the extent of information that has been placed on the public record relating to some of the more sensitive aspects of our submarine capability. All Defence Forces pay very close attention to submarine capabilities and I would like to emphasise to the committee the need to exercise restraint in order to maintain the appropriate level of operational security. The availability of our submarines is a key indicator of capability. Defence officials will be able to respond fully to any questions you may have relating to contract or sustainability issues, however they will refrain from commenting on more sensitive issues relating to the availability of our submarines. I will continue to make the appropriate senior officials available to members of the committee for a private briefing on submarine preparedness. This approach is not an attempt to obstruct accountability or transparency; rather it is intended to preserve the operational security of a sensitive national capability. The Chief of Navy will be available today to explain to the Committee Navy's operating cycles to help in your understanding of ship availability.

Senators that concludes my statement, I thank you for the opportunity to address the committee and I look forward to your questions.