

**Witness statement**

**Royal Commission into the Home Insulation Program**

*Royal Commissions Act 1902 (Cth)*

Statement of: MARTIN PARKINSON

Address: Langton Crescent, Parkes ACT 2600

Occupation: Commonwealth Public Servant

Date: ...25/3/2014.....

I, MARTIN PARKINSON, Secretary to The Treasury, of Langton Crescent, Parkes ACT 2600, solemnly and sincerely affirm:

**Background and Qualifications**

1 This statement was prepared following an interview with representatives of the Royal Commission into the Home Insulation Program [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The statement deals with those documents made available to the Commission by the Commonwealth as at 12 February 2014.

2 I have not previously given a statement concerning the Home Insulation Program for the purposes of a review or enquiry.

3 I hold a Bachelor of Economics from the University of Adelaide. I also completed my Masters in Economics at the Australian National University in 1983 and a M.A. in 1988 and a Ph.D, in 1990, at Princeton University.

4 I was appointed Secretary of the Department of Climate Change from its establishment on 3 December 2007 and of its successor, the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency (**Department**) established on 8 March 2010.

5 The portfolio Ministers were:

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- (a) Senator Penny Wong (Senator Wong), as the Senior (and Cabinet) Minister, as Minister for Climate Change and Water (subsequently the Minister for Climate Change, Energy Efficiency and Water following the March 2010 Machinery of Government changes);
- (b) Greg Combet AM (**Mr Combet**), as the junior portfolio Minister, and as Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and subsequently Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change and Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency.

6 Subsequently, I was appointed Secretary of The Treasury on 26 April 2011, having acted in that position from March 2011.

#### **My involvement in the Home Insulation Program**

- 7 The Home Insulation Program (**HIP**) was terminated on 19 February 2010. My involvement with it began on Friday 26 February 2010, when I was advised by the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (**PM&C**), prior to public announcement, that energy efficiency programs from the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (**DEWHA**) would be transferred to my Department. My role, and the Department's role, was to manage the termination of the HIP. I had not been previously involved in the development of the policy to implement the HIP.
- 8 I was not told the reasons for transfer for the energy efficiency programs from DEWHA to the Department. I was, however, aware of media reports on fires and deaths associated with the HIP. My main focus at the time was the programs that I had inherited and the actions I needed to take.
- 9 On 28 February 2010, following that advice, I met with Malcolm Thompson (**Mr Thompson**) Deputy Secretary, DEWHA, to receive a briefing on the HIP. Prior to this, my knowledge of the HIP was confined to the information given in media reports.
- 10 I took detailed notes of the Sunday meeting, and meetings in the week following relating to the handover of the HIP. I refer to Annexure "B" (PAR.002.001.0001) which is a copy of my handwritten notes from these meetings (**Notes**). Throughout my statement, I will refer to parts of the Notes and clarify specific points.

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**Meeting with Mr Thompson on 28 February 2010**

- 11 Martin Bowles (**Mr Bowles**), previously Deputy Secretary, Department of Defence, also attended my meeting with Mr Thompson on 28 February 2010. Mr Bowles had been transferred across to assist with the closure of the HIP.
- 12 Mr Thompson provided considerable details of the energy efficiency programs transferred to the Department. I also sought to understand Mr Bowles's role, as he had been appointed by the Secretary of PM&C to lead the HIP closure, despite then-ownership of the HIP by DEWHA. Mr Bowles was in the process of transferring to DEWHA to discharge this role, and hence was transferred to DCC in light of the change.
- 13 We discussed the Government's agenda, and what action items were required to implement this, as well as the reviews underway. I had not previously been aware of the Hawke or Australian National Audit Office reviews.
- 14 We spoke at length about the structure of the new Department, the staff that were already within the Department and those who were transferring across from DEWHA, and also what resources were required from other parts of government.
- 15 In my Notes, from that initial meeting, I have written the words "*Can foil ever be safe given way rolled out*". Mr Thompson explained to us that although the HIP had been terminated, the Government had committed to a foil insulation safety inspection rectification program to inspect the 50,000 homes that had foil insulation installed. We subsequently discussed safety issues associated with foil insulation, and that electricians had indicated foil could not be rolled out safely through the HIP. We discussed dealing with the Queensland Electrical Board and Queensland Electrical Safety Office to ascertain their position, given eighty-five per cent of foil insulation had been installed in Queensland (with the majority of the remaining amount installed in northern New South Wales).
- 16 I recall querying the audit target of 15% of households to undergo inspection and the process for arriving at this target, being concerned that the audit may be too limited. We discussed the financial cost of inspection and rectification work, as well as the lengthy timeframe likely involved. PricewaterhouseCoopers had already been brought in to

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design an audit sample to be made up of a combination of targeted, random and owner requested inspections of households. The comment was made at the meeting (I do not recall by who) that public support would be lost if there was any death or fire under the rectification program.

- 17 On the third page of my Notes, I have referred to “*staff burnout*”. This was in the context of a discussion about the staff that would be transferred from DEWHA to the new Department. I was concerned about this issue as inevitably, when there are machinery government changes, a reasonable proportion of the staff would prefer not to be transferred. I wanted to know how many officers were being transferred, what state they were in and what capabilities they held. I had realised we would require additional capabilities to support the work to be undertaken – that DEWHA did not have these already was evidenced by the need for the transfer itself. I recall that Mr Thompson said that he felt it was necessary to have a group of SES Band 1 officers to manage the different streams of work. We discussed the appropriate structure for this and spoke about which officer, in particular, should manage each issue. We also discussed the need for a project and governance board management structure.
- 18 I also had to consider how to manage the approximately 450-500 officers transferring across – many of whom were under significant emotional stress and would continue to be working in a high-stress environment. I also understood that there had been very high turnover of staff at Senior Executive Service (“SES”) level and non-SES level. I utilized an occupational psychologist to support the transition, including through counselling and resilience training, as many staff felt that they were being unfairly scapegoated for what had happened with the HIP.

**Meeting of 28 February with Mr Combet and others**

- 19 After this initial meeting, Mr Thompson, Mr Bowles and I met with Mr Combet. This meeting was attended by the Hon Mark Dreyfus QC MP (**Mr Dreyfus**), as well as by representatives from the Prime Minister’s Office (David Fredericks (**Mr Fredericks**), Deputy Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister, Clare Penrose (**Ms Penrose**), and Andrew Jagers (**Mr Jagers**) and, from Mr Combet’s Office, Kristin Tilley (**Ms Tilley**).

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- 20 Paul Grimes (**Dr Grimes**), Associate Secretary (Domestic Policy), PM&C, and Mike Mrdak (**Mr Mrdak**) and Glenys Beauchamp (**Ms Beauchamp**), former and current Coordinators-General respectively, from PM&C, also attended.
- 21 Mr Combet explained the division of responsibilities between Ministers and that message was supported by the representatives of the Prime Minister's Office. Senator Wong would be responsible for the portfolio, but Mr Combet, assisted by Mr Dreyfus, would have day-to-day responsibility for the HIP. Senator Arbib (**Mr Arbib**) would continue to look after employment training issues.
- 22 We discussed the issues involved in co-locating the Department's staff, and associated challenges, including accommodation, human resources, IT and financial networks, and cultural issues. There was a real need for SES and Executive Level 2 staff and some risk managers to support Mr Bowles and myself in managing these matters.
- 23 We discussed the issues relating to inspections of foil insulation and how to ensure that installers did not become inspectors. We also discussed the figures relating to registered and deregistered installers; in particular that only 3,400 of 4,500 remaining registered installers would meet the minimum competency requirements implemented on 12 February 2010.
- 24 In my Notes I refer to the words "*Industry now clarified*". The Government had contemplated providing support for affected workers and whether to extend this support to businesses. I did not propose providing support, given I expected the Renewable Energy Bonus Scheme to proceed. I made a note about "*Bradford and Fletchers*", the two vocal manufacturers who wanted the Government to buy their stock. The plan was to look at what actions they wanted the Department to take and to arrange for Mr Combet to meet the manufacturers quickly.
- 25 Further along in my Notes there are two exclamation marks in the left margin. I was concerned about the length of time for completion of the 200,000 plus inspections of foil and non-foil insulation installation. I had calculated it would take between one and four years at current pace, which I thought was completely unacceptable when addressing a safety problem. My Notes refer to contacting Ron Silberberg, formerly of the Housing Industry Association, and Tony Arnel, from the Victorian Building

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Commission, to obtain further advice about how to undertake the inspections more quickly. It seemed apparent that accelerating the inspections would require the involvement of licensed electricians, their peak bodies and the unions, none of whom I understood had been involved in the design and rollout of the HIP.

- 26 On the next page of my Notes I have written "*Fletchers and CSR/Bradford will start stand-down on Tuesday*", referring to the fact that they had indicated they were going to start to stand down their staff the following week – a situation the Department needed to confront.
- 27 Further along in my Notes, on the same page, under point (f) I have referred to "*compliance tail*". This was a reference to the long-term compliance issues associated with the termination of the HIP, as safety issues could continue to arise if some insulation was not removed. We needed to consider this in my view when designing the 'exit strategy'.
- 28 Further along in my Notes there is a page with the heading "*Minister Wong*". I recall that colleagues and I later spoke to Senator Wong by telephone (or video conference – I cannot recall which) as she was in Adelaide. Senator Wong indicated that while Mr Combet would look after day-to-day issues, she needed to understand the HIP termination plan.
- 29 Senator Wong requested a bundle of relevant documents which was to include a copy of all the press releases, relevant decisions and the scripts provided to the hotlines to deal with enquiries from the public. Senator Wong requested that these be provided overnight. Senator Wong made clear to us that she wanted an understanding of how termination of the HIP would work as soon as possible.
- 30 Further along in my Notes I have written that "*Greg Combet needs two people from MT's area that understand HIP but not tainted by scheme*". This refers to our discussion along the lines that Mr Combet needed people to assist him in his office who understood the HIP and its mechanics but who had not been involved in running the program to-date. It was my view that DEWHA officers who had worked in the broader energy efficiency area in DEWHA (but not the HIP) would be appropriate for this role. I

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believe I mentioned this in a discussion I had with Mr Combet after my call with Senator Wong.

**Involvement of the PM&C and Office of the Coordinator General (“OCG”)**

- 31 Staff from PM&C attended the meeting with Minister Combet and I had subsequent conversations over the next day or two with them to understand the background to the situation and their perceptions of it. I was looking to see what I should do and where I should start looking in an effort to try and shorten my learning curve.
- 32 My recollection is that there was no attempt by PM&C to control the process of dismantling the HIP in any way and that I was left to be quite autonomous in the way I wanted to manage that task. PM&C played a role broadly similar to what they would play in most policy areas where there is an issue that confronts the government. That is, I recall that members of the PM&C wanted to be kept informed of developments as the task went along, but they did not attempt to shape the way in which the Department dealt with the task or resolved these issues.
- 33 The OCG was still somewhat involved in the HIP when the Department took control of it. It was not clear whether the OCG formally existed at the time of the transition to my Department. I dealt with that office, through Mr Mrdak and Ms Beauchamp, to ascertain relevant details of the program. In the first week following handover, I did have a couple of conversations with the OCG in terms of how to transition and terminate the HIP. After that, if there were detailed conversations then it probably would have involved Mr Bowles rather than myself.

**Meetings on 1 March 2010**

- 34 On page 21 of my Notes there is a heading with the words “*Info x*” alongside a triangle. This was a note to myself to bring up these issues at my standard weekly information exchange meeting with my senior staff (Deputy Secretaries and Senior Executive Service Band 2 officers).
- 35 Further down the page is the heading “*Robyn*”. This is a reference to a conversation with Robyn Kruk (**Ms Kruk**) on the same day. My discussion with Ms Kruk was in relation to working out how to transfer the people and the dollars associated with the HIP to the

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- Department. We identified Penny Weir as a counterpart to Malcolm Forbes that could be allocated this task.
- 36 In the same section of my Notes, there is mention of staff dissatisfaction with some members of the SES in the energy efficiency group within DEWHA. Ms Kruk indicated that some staff felt that SES had not endeavoured strongly enough to provide the resources required to deliver the project and to address issues as they arose.
- 37 Further along in my Notes I have written "*Arnel has staff who can assist*". The context of this comment is that Tony Arnel (**Mr Arnel**), who was the Victorian Building and Plumbing Commissioner, was joining Ron Silberberg and Peter Tighe (National Secretary of the Electrical Trades Union) to have a look at the HIP and whether or not we would be able to run the rectification programs in the way that had originally been proposed. Ms Kruk mentioned that Mr Arnel had staff who could assist with training for inspectors.
- 38 A couple of lines further down I have written "*Need high barriers to entry*", which recognises that there had been low barriers to entry to become an insulation installer under the HIP.
- 39 I wanted stronger entry requirements for the people who would carry out the rectification tasks.
- 40 Further along in my Notes I have written "*Mr Mrdak – exc. support*". Mr Mrdak was the Coordinator General and the 'exc' means excellent. In the same section I have noted that Ministers and Government keep announcing changes without details being resolved. The context of those comments is that Mr Mrdak had been providing Ms Beauchamp excellent support but the concern was that the Government kept announcing new or changed policy positions which was causing difficulties for DEWHA. That was the input that I was taking away from what Ms Kruk was saying at the time.
- 41 Further along in my Notes is the heading "*Finn Pratt*". This refers to a meeting with Mr Pratt on 1 March 2010 for the purposes of gathering more information about the operation of the HIP. Mr Pratt, who was the Secretary of the Department of Human Services, was focused on trying to help DEWHA with the running of payments which

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went through Medicare. I needed to understand what Mr Pratt had been doing, and what observations he had on the way things were running, so that I could make any necessary changes to existing processes.

- 42 In this meeting we discussed that Senator Arbib and Lisa Paul (**Ms Paul**), the Secretary of DEEWR, were dealing with the employment aspects of the HIP.

**Meetings from 2 March 2010**

- 43 Later in my Notes there is a heading "*Combet/Wong*", which refers to a meeting with Mr Combet and Senator Wong on 2 March 2010. By this point I was aware that it was illegal to install foil in New Zealand in the way it way it was installed under the HIP. I am not clear how I knew this information, but it may have been mentioned to me in meetings over the previous day or two. Mr Combet had met the day before with industry stakeholders.
- 44 I understood that it would be difficult to send out safety inspectors properly to ascertain the safety of the foil insulation that had been installed because it could be safe at the time they did the inspection. However, once the inspectors left, the foil insulation could again become unsafe. It was difficult to warrant against future risk. This was the reason it had been made illegal to install foil in this way in New Zealand. As noted, I cannot recall how I became aware of this. In that same meeting I have written "*Throwing 5,000 to 10,000 per installer company is*" and then I have crossed out a word beginning with "*S*". I cannot recall what this was a reference to.
- 45 Further along in my Notes I have written a number of questions to be clarified with my team. I wanted to find out:
- (a) the qualifications for those completing general insulation rectification;
  - (b) whether it was possible to check for quality in situ and what inspectors would be certifying;
  - (c) how could we avoid cartel risk and running into issues around the *Trade Practices Act*? and
  - (d) how many different products were used originally.

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**Meetings on 3 March 2010**

- 46 Further along in my Notes there is reference to a meeting on 3 March 2010, with Ms Paul, Robert Griew (**Mr Griew**), Bernadette Welch (**Ms Welch**) and Mr Bowles.
- 47 We discussed issues to do with unemployed people who were apparently initially encouraged into being installers by Senator Arbib, Jason Clare (**Mr Clare**) and DEEWR. I understood that this was part of the focus, making the HIP a GFC stimulus program delivering jobs for unskilled, unemployed people in high-risk locations. The antecedents of this are that Treasury was forecasting a massive recession and rising unemployment after the start of the GFC. In every other economic recession in Australia, the people who suffer the most tended to be unskilled workers, particularly older-aged males. The idea at the time was that the government needed to create initiatives for unskilled people. Mr Arbib and Mr Clare, I believe, assisted with projecting the message that if people were not able to find jobs elsewhere they should start their own business. It was the "any tradie with a ute" idea. I did not ever speak directly to Senator Arbib or Mr Clare about these matters.
- 48 Further along in my Notes I have written "*Malcolm T needs to talk to national skills council*". This relates to issues in implementing the new training program. This typically takes a long time to implement new training programs as State and Territory vocational education ministers must sign up to the training program and then the registered training organisations must identify whether they are competent to deliver elements of the training. Mr Thompson was going to talk to the National Skills Council to make sure this was done as expeditiously as possible.
- 49 There is also a point mentioned after that about how the electrical industry apparently believed that their concerns about past training regimes, including those for insulation installers, were not taken into account previously.
- 50 My Notes then record some action items for that day which were to ask the Australian Federal Police to investigate and to ask the Australian National Audit Office to start with the audit process in an expeditious fashion.

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**Meetings on 4 March 2010**

- 51 On 4 March I met with Lynelle Briggs (**Ms Briggs**), who was the head of Medicare. My notes from this meeting are under the heading "*Lynelle Briggs*".
- 52 That same day I had a phone conversation or face-to-face meeting with Mr Combet regarding 10,000 letters that had been received by DEWHA regarding compliance issues. Apparently at that time, DEWHA had not committed any staff to actually open the letters. This concerned me as people were providing feedback or making complaints to the Government on the program and but there was no staff to consider the complaints and to take action or even respond to the complaint.
- 53 Mr Combet and I also discussed the question of whether there would be an industry package in light of the worker assistance package being well in train. We canvassed measures the government could take to ensure that firms which received aid were not the people or organisations who we would otherwise be looking at for fraud investigation.
- 54 Further along in my Notes, and in the same meeting, I have written "*DEWHA people froze out DEWHA compliance team?*" This means that I was asking whether it was true that the DEWHA compliance team had not been involved in the design of the assistance for workers at the outset, so, in other words, they probably were not involved in the risk management framework. This was more of a note to myself: I think I am asking myself whether the compliance and investigations branch at my Department would be involved in compliance activities for the HIP. At that time, it was thought that this Branch would be made up of half climate change compliance work and half Australian Climate Change Regulatory Authority once the emissions trading scheme was put in place. When we designed the regulatory regime, we built in an investigations and compliance branch. It was not clear how the role of this Branch would fit with our Department when the energy efficiency group joined us, but I was intending to deploy their staff to assist in addressing potential fraud issues.
- 55 Further along in my Notes there is the heading "*Roger Beale*" dated 15 March 2010. Mr Beale is the former Secretary of DEWHA. His successor was David Borthwick and Robyn Kruk was David Borthwick's successor. Mr Beale was, at this stage, working

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for PwC and he gave me a call to say, "Look, I just want to give you some information on what the PwC inquiry is finding." PwC was called in to do a review of HIP in late 2009. He told me that PwC had found that people working on the HIP were not well equipped to understand the issues that developed and that PwC had arrived at this view in early February 2010. The point of this was to advise me to make broad changes if I was to put in place the capabilities I needed.

#### Meetings occurring later in the March 2010

- 56 On 22 March I had a meeting with Mr Moran and Dr Grimes from PM&C. My Notes reflect that Mr Moran told me that Mr Combet had told the Prime Minister's Office that he lacked confidence in the Department's capacity to develop new policy on insulation. My conversations with Mr Combet were that we could not develop an insulation component until we understood what had gone wrong with HIP, and that was still some way off. My recollection is that Mr Combet shared this view – hence the reference was not to DCCEEs inherent capability but, rather, that at the moment we were operating in an environment of great uncertainty.
- 57 At item 3 of my Notes from this meeting I have written "*PM conversation 2 Saturdays ago in Bris with installers*". This relates to information that Mr Moran told me that the Prime Minister had told installers that the industry assistance package would be ready by the end of that week. That was the first time I had heard about that deadline and it was not going to be possible to make that happen.
- 58 Further along in my Notes I refer to a discussion I had with Mr Combet on 22 March 2010. I think that this is me drafting the things that I want to raise with Minister Combet and this is how it plays out in the conversation, but I cannot recall that now. My Notes refer to the scheduling of a Meeting at item 4. The context of this that we had to submit papers on the foil industry assistance and non-foil packages to the Meeting and I was receiving those papers that day and would turn them around overnight and get them to Mr Combet the next day. Item 8 refers to "*fire/deaths*". This was a reference to how we would respond to deaths or a house fire in the rectification stage and notes the issues of what exactly we should do, what steps needed to be taken and what questions would need to be answered. This is from a conversation with Mr Combet in which I recall saying "If we had to do a flowchart of how we handle it, what would it look like?"

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- 59 In that section I make a note of “Anton/Bev” and “a specialist firm”. Anton Davis was a contractor we had who was a specialist in risk management and Bev Sims was my former Executive Officer, who had worked with Anton and had some experience in risk management. Both were working to help Mr Bowles and a specialist firm sort out the risk management issues. I also recall that Elenore Erickson would need to be involved - Elenore was the head of our communications area at the time.
- 60 Further along in my Notes I refer to a conversation with Mr Fredericks on 22 March 2010. He informed me that thought Mr Bowles was very good but, below him, a lot of the staff were still shell-shocked from the experience of working on the HIP and were having difficulty producing much in the way of substantive work. We discussed getting PM&C staff in to assist DCCEE and that I was on a mission to recruit staff from wherever I could across the Public Service, but would appreciate any support the PMO could give to encourage other agencies to provide assistance.
- 61 My Notes reflect a discussion with Dr Allan Hawke (**Dr Hawke**) on 23 March following his meeting with Mr Garrett that day. The content of our discussion was that Dr Hawke had come to the view that he was going to be quite blunt in his executive summary to say, “Do not do insulation under REBS until you’ve got to the bottom of all of this,” which is the same message I had been giving to the Government up to that point.
- 62 Further along in my Notes under the heading “Bernie” I have described a conversation on 29 March 2010 where Ms Welch informs me that we had received the first documentation in relation to a legal claim from an insulation firm(s) regarding the cost of excess insulation product (which had been purchased in reliance of the HIP continuing). Ms Welch told me that call centres were receiving phone calls from people threatening self-harm as a result of the impacts of the closure of the HIP. I was informed that we were using Child Support Agency procedures which had been developed to deal with phone calls from people threatening self-harm.

**General comments about how the HIP closure was handled**

- 63 The HIP had very significant implications in terms of people’s confidence in the industry which, in turn, had ongoing effects for the firms in the industry. A lot of the

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firms or the installers were no longer in the business by the time I was responsible for terminating the HIP - because there had been no barriers to entry, installers established, or entered opportunistically, but then moved out just as quickly as the work dried up. It was not at all clear how many workers were affected. The workers themselves had an incentive to self-identify, either to DEWHA or Centrelink, whereas it was not the same for the installation firms, some of which had been damaged significantly. In particular, damage had been done to reputable firms – these were the ones which we were trying to engage with as part of the rectification program because they were the ones we wanted to keep in the industry.

- 64 For the foil inspections the Department contracted PWC to run a program. They subcontracted to UGL who in turn used licenced electricians from the relevant areas to take the foil out (or install the safety switches in the early stages). It was very important that these were different to the people who put the foil in the first place.
- 65 Key lessons learned relate to the need to design complex and risky programs as an integrated, end-to-end business solution. This requires sufficient time to identify and mitigate risks, to licence/train (as appropriate) industry participants, and to communicate effectively with all stakeholders. Notwithstanding the economic imperative to respond to the GFC, it was never possible for this to be done while politicians were making policy on the run and demanding unrealistic timetables. It raises a further issue – DEWHA was required to absorb the cost of introducing around 100 new programs after the 2007 election. No organisation can do this without taking significant shortcuts and “robbing Peter to pay Paul” in terms of internal resourcing. For a department with already low capability, this requires senior staff to stand-up to Ministers. However, when Government’s change, Minister’s are typically sceptical of bureaucrats who served the previous Government. This sets up a dynamic of trying to impress through responsiveness – when the organisation lacks capability, resources and time, and Government is unwilling to listen, this establishes the preconditions for disasters of the sort that led to these four, unnecessary, deaths.
- 66 Unless otherwise stated, this statement is based on my own knowledge.

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**AFFIRMED** by the deponent  
at Canberra, ACT  
on Tuesday, 25 March 2014  
Before me:

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Signature of deponent



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Signature of witness

Sharon McCluskey  
Commonwealth Public Servant  
The Treasury, Langton Crescent, Parkes ACT  
2600

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