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Written statement by the Hon Clare O'Neil MP, Minister for Home Affairs

International Organisation for Migration 113th Council - High Level Segment

At the outset, allow me to commend IOM for its leadership in convening this high-level segment on the intersection between climate change, food security, migration and displacement. The links between climate change and displacement are indisputable, and unfortunately, are keenly felt in the Pacific region, which is on the frontline of the climate crisis. The Pacific is the most disaster prone, climate vulnerable region of the world and continues to face some of the highest occurrences of disaster displacement.

It is imperative that more be done to ensure an individual's decision to stay or to move remains a voluntary choice. This demands a strengthening of the resilience of the countries in our region. Australia's sizeable climate financing commitments to the Pacific supports community-led climate adaptation and mitigation measures. Our climate finance is being utilised by our Pacific neighbours to grow their resilience against climate change and food insecurity.

The use of circular migration pathways, such as the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme, demonstrate the role migration can play for climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction and improving resilience. Providing opportunities for individuals to increase remittances and diversify livelihoods while remaining in place for the long-term promotes sustainable migration that benefits the countries of origin as well as Australia.

While our goal must be to ensure migration remains voluntary, some people will have no choice but to move. We need to be prepared with solutions that facilitate safe and orderly migration and ideally help people to stay as close to home as possible.

Australia welcomes ongoing initiatives of IOM and other international organisations in support of regional and national efforts to reduce the risk and impact of disaster displacement. We commend the efforts of regional partners, including Fiji and Vanuatu, to strengthen their preparedness to respond to climate-induced threats and to manage forced displacement.

We also commend the work of the University of New South Wales and the Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law in enhancing the evidence base on planned relocation cases in the context of hazards, disasters and climate change, and encourage further research in this and related areas. Through further research, and exploring the opportunities for future action, we will strengthen our ability to be prepared for future challenges.

In September 2022 Australia was proud to co-host the Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, which focused on forced displacement from both sudden and slow-

onset disasters and the adverse effects of climate change. It highlighted that a multifaceted approach incorporating disaster risk reduction, human mobility planning, humanitarian assistance, sustainable development and climate change adaptation is necessary. It was encouraging to see these impacts acknowledged as shared challenges that need collective action in the region.

Climate change is a risk multiplier, driving displacement and protection needs not only in our region but globally. While people on the move do not have a right to migrate to the country of their choosing, their fundamental human rights are indivisible, irrespective of their migration status, and must be respected, consistent with existing international human rights law. We agree with UNHCR that there is no need for a new legal category – such as “climate refugee” - to provide a relevant protection framework in international law for persons displaced in the context of disasters and climate change.

It is important for the migration discourse to fully embrace the climate dimension, and vice versa. To this end, Australia commends the UN Network on Migration for its thematic focus on migration and climate change and encourages ongoing efforts, under the leadership of IOM and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to ensure greater system-wide cohesion in addressing the challenges of migration in a changing climate.

In closing, Australia looks forward to continuing our close cooperation with IOM, an invaluable partner. The opportunity this high-level segment affords us all is significant to being able to work together to address the challenging task at hand. Australia is committed to the mitigation and adaptation actions required to ensure migration can remain voluntary in our challenged world and stand with our Pacific partners on the current challenges they face. Immediate attention is required by all. The choices we all make today matter.