

Appointment of new Director-General of Security and nomination of new Australian Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg, the European Union and NATO

Joint media release:

Minister for Foreign Affairs, The Hon Julie Bishop MP

Attorney-General, Senator the Hon George Brandis QC

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The Governor-General has accepted the Government's recommendation that Mr Duncan Lewis AO DSC CSC be appointed to lead the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) as Director-General of Security.

Mr Lewis is currently Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg, the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation having served with distinction as the Secretary of the Department of Defence. He was previously responsible for national security in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and had a distinguished career as a senior military officer.

ASIO plays a vital role in protecting Australia and Australians from security threats including terrorism and hostile intelligence activities. Mr Lewis brings a wealth of national security experience as well as sound judgment to this important role. The Government has every confidence he will provide strong leadership to ASIO and sound advice on security matters.

Mr Lewis will commence his term as Director-General on 15 September 2014 following the retirement of Mr David Irvine AO.

The Government would like to thank Mr Irvine for a career dedicated to the national interest. In addition to his leadership of ASIO, Mr Irvine has served as Director-General of the Australian Secret Intelligence Service, Ambassador to China and High Commissioner to Papua New Guinea. We wish him well in his forthcoming retirement.

The Governor-General has also accepted the Government's nomination of Dr Mark Higbie to succeed Mr Lewis as Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg, the European Union and NATO, subject to receiving agreement.

Dr Higbie is currently Senior Adviser (International) to the Prime Minister. He is an experienced diplomat with a strong background in European affairs and international security. Before joining the Prime Minister's staff Dr Higbie was at the Office of National Assessments (ONA) where he served as the Senior Europe Analyst and prior to ONA, he was Australia's representative on the UK Joint Intelligence Committee, based in London. Between 1998 – 2001 Dr Higbie was appointed the Australia's Ambassador to Hungary and previous diplomatic appointments have included Belgrade and Vienna. Dr Higbie speaks several European languages and is well qualified to advocate Australia's interests in Brussels, including those related to the broader European Union and NATO.