**Human Rights Council – 45th session**

**Interactive Dialogue on the report of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia**

**2 October 2020**

**Australian Statement**

Australia thanks the Independent Expert for her update.

While acknowledging the difficulties the COVID-19 pandemic may present, Australia urges Somalia to ensure landmark free and fair elections are held as soon as practicable.

Australia is gravely concerned with the draft bill on Sexual Intercourse Related Crimes, which, if passed, would permit child marriage and forced marriage. This is in direct contravention of Somalia’s obligations under international human rights law. The bill’s provisions are incompatible not only with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, both of which Somalia has ratified, but also the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

Australia urges Somalia to withdraw the Sexual Intercourse Related Crimes Bill and re-introduce the Sexual Offences Bill that was approved by Cabinet in 2018. This bill would provide a level of protection for women and girls befitting a nation committed to strengthening human rights in accordance with international law.

We ask how the international community can work with Somalia to ensure the rights of women and girls are promoted and protected?