Thank you Mr Chair,

I would like to congratulate you and your team for the preparations for this meeting and assure you of Australia’s full cooperation in our discussions this week.

Australia is pleased to participate in this informal meeting of experts to discuss the parameters of Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems, in the context of the objectives and purposes of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW).

Recent discussions have in particular looked at the application of existing international humanitarian law (IHL) to the potential development of Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems. As a party to Additional Protocol I of 1977 to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, Australia fully supports and has a policy to undertake a review of any proposed new weapon, means or method of warfare to determine whether its employment would, in some or all circumstances, be prohibited by international humanitarian law or any other rule of international law.

In Australia’s view, the CCW framework is an appropriate multilateral forum to explore emerging issues related to conventional weapon systems. The CCW remains an important – if not exclusive – tool for elaborating international humanitarian law rules on weapons that are excessively injurious or have indiscriminate effects.

For us, this topic has raised many more questions than answers. Consistent with Australia’s approach to other emerging technologies, like in the cyber context, Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems, if they are to be used, should only be used in accordance with existing international law. How international law, including the use of force, international humanitarian law and international human rights law, applies to Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems will need to be addressed as the technology continues to develop. We recognise that academics and civil society have raised some interesting perspectives on this topic.

Therefore, we look forward to hearing from delegations and experts in this informal exploratory discussion to allow states to develop a more informed understanding on the definition, military utility, legal and humanitarian aspects associated with this issue. Identifying common understandings, where possible, can help point the way towards more focussed discussions.

Like any other weapon, Australia notes that a Lethal Autonomous Weapon System might be employed in a defensive mode or an offensive mode. As such, Australia would like to eventually see a definition of a Lethal Autonomous Weapon System which identifies its key distinguishing aspects to enable further discussion on this topic.

Australia looks forward to participating in the thematic discussions over the coming days.

Thank you Mr Chair.