

15 April 2013

Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary

ASBESTOS SAFETY AND ERADICATION AGENCY BILL 2013

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission regarding the proposed bill.

The Chamber of Minerals and Energy of Western Australia (CME) is the peak resources sector representative body in Western Australia.

CME represents companies directly involved in the resource sector (including mining, oil and gas) or those providing services to it. CME's member companies generate 95 per cent of all mineral and energy production and employ 80 per cent of the resources sector workforce in the State.

The Western Australian resources sector is conscious of the importance of education and awareness regarding asbestos. It is important for workers to understand the risks posed by exposure to asbestos, whether exposure occurs at home or at work. Resources companies spend time educating workers about the risks of asbestos during inductions, toolbox talks, safety orientations, and planning days. If there is heightened risk of exposure to asbestos due to a change in work environments, resources companies have in place practices and procedures to eliminate or minimise risk of exposure. These procedures often embody standards and practices that are more rigorous than those required by regulations or legislation.

CME believes the creation of another regulatory body to oversee asbestos management simply adds another layer of complexity to already dense and duplicative regulation in this area. Instead of creating another body at great expense, the functions which the new body is to be responsible for could be housed in an existing Commonwealth Government department utilising existing resources. Similarly, it should be noted that the creation of a new body risks the creation of regulatory overlap or gaps which will make compliance, and ultimately the safety of workers, harder to achieve. This should be taken into account if the Commonwealth decides to continue to implement key planks of this Bill.

Finally, the thrust of the bill seems to encompass the management of constructed asbestos. Resources companies occasionally encounter naturally occurring asbestos, with the regulatory obligations surrounding such encounters being clear and well understood. These current obligations are supported by the Western Australian resources sector. CME would be opposed to any changes to the existing regulations governing naturally occurring asbestos.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the proposed bill.

Yours sincerely

Reg Howard-Smith
Chief Executive