



Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties

Re: Minamata Convention

Suite 3, Ground Floor
60 Leicester Street
Carlton VIC 3053
0422 974 857

admin@dea.org.au
www.dea.org.au

ABN: 80 178 870 373

Healthy planet, healthy people

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Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA) is an independent, self-funded, non-government organisation of medical doctors and students in all Australian States and Territories. Our members work across all specialties in community, hospital, and private practices to prevent and address the diseases – local, national, and global – caused by damage to our natural environment. We are a public health voice in the sphere of environmental health with a primary focus on the harms to health from pollution and climate change.

Doctors for the Environment Australia welcomes the proposal to ratify the Minamata treaty. Mercury is highly toxic to the brains of babies, and also has cardiovascular and renal toxicities. This toxicity occurs at very low dose, so it is prudent to reduce human exposure to as low as possible.

The global nature of exposure pathways requires a global response. Since methyl mercury is concentrated in marine food chains and can take many years, the mercury in fish eaten by pregnant women in Australia could have been released to the environment from any Pacific rim country at any time since the industrial revolution. Mercury pollution requires a global response, such as the Minamata convention.

The regulatory impact statement quotes a health cost to Australia worth \$52.7 million dollars based on the 10,000 Kg of mercury reported to the national Pollutant Inventory. Even on the details included in the RIS this is an underestimation. Firstly it ignores the 4,000 Kg of mercury used in sugar cane pesticides, and secondly it ignores the cardiovascular toxicity. Adding these components brings the annual cost to Australia to \$406 million. This makes the benefit:cost analysis of ratification of the convention even more attractive.

The convention requires countries to implement Best Available Technology for industrial processes, and as technologies evolve over time we expect this to bring progressive reductions in mercury exposure, bringing a health benefit to people in Australia and around the world. Ratification is a positive move for Australia based on the well-known health issues and will likely have very strong public support.

We recommend that the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties proceed with ratification.