



The Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee

The Asbestos Free Tasmania Foundation (AFTF) is pleased to be able to appear before the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee to make submission concerning the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency 2013 Bill. I would like to introduce the Foundation to the Committee, make brief comment on the situation in Tasmania and support the concept of the Bill. Appearing before the Committee will be Simon Cocker and Susan Wallace.

The Asbestos Free Tasmania Foundation was formed in May 2010, with a significant contribution from now Senator Lisa Singh and the Australian Workers Union, to fill a void in the community in terms of support for asbestos victims, of development of policy for the lobbying of government for reform and to build awareness in the community of the hazards presented by asbestos containing materials. Its stated objectives are:

- a) the development of a support, referral and advisory service for asbestos disease sufferers in Tasmania and their families;
- b) the facilitation and promotion of the education and community awareness of asbestos and its dangers in Tasmania;
- c) the development and delivery of resource information and training for business, workplaces and the public;
- c) the preparation of research and development of policy on the management of asbestos and asbestos-related disease;
- d) liaison with like minded organisations that support the aims of AFTF and with existing asbestos-disease support organisations in Australia;
- d) the undertaking of fundraising activities and the procurement of donations and contributions for the purpose of supporting the aims of AFTF;
- e) advocacy on behalf of asbestos disease sufferers, their families, and other key stakeholders in the field of asbestos;
- f) the pursuit of fair compensation for sufferers of asbestos disease and their families;

The foundation is run by a volunteer Board and a part time Executive Officer. Its funding comes from government, sponsorship, membership and donations but is inadequate for the scope of the task it faces. Simon Cocker is the President and Susan Wallace the CEO.

Simon has a long history in health and safety having worked for the CPSU and Unions Tasmania for over twenty years and including membership of the ACTU OHS Committee, a

term on the Commonwealth Safety Compensation and Rehabilitation Commission, a short term as an alternate member of the National Occupational Health and Safety Commission and six years as member of Workcover Tasmania. He has been deeply involved in the policy reform and advocacy around asbestos issues for the last five years.

Susan has a work history in journalism and TV production and for the last five years in roles as campaigns manager for Unions Tasmania and CEO of the foundation been deeply involved in asbestos issues through research, policy development, advocacy and victim support.

We believe that our work at Unions Tasmania and at the AFTF has had significant impact in stimulating change to community and official apathy and turning around asbestos policy in Tasmania. At the National Asbestos Summit in 2010 Tasmania was recognised as leading the country with its reform agenda.

The AFTF is strongly supportive of creating a national agency to identify those aspects of asbestos eradication that can benefit from national coordination. The concept of doing so through implementation of a National Strategic Plan is good. The caution would be that it should be certain that agency is adding value to the work already being done, is not duplicating work already being done and is not substituting activity for action. With fiscal imbalance across government in Australia only the Commonwealth has the capacity to bring the significant new resources that are need to fix this massive Australia wide problem.

The AFTF sees the priorities for that plan as a being:

- Asbestos awareness in the community and workforce
- A policy of prioritised removal of ACM s from buildings
- Administration of asbestos content reports for residential buildings
- National standards for licensing of operators that handle, remove, transport and dispose of asbestos
- An audit of ACMs in government and commercial buildings and disposal sites and maintenance of registers
- Review of adequacy of disposal sites
- Improved mesothelioma registers and statistical collection
- Funding for medical research
- Pursuing a global ban on the use of asbestos

AFTF is supportive of creation of a Council to bring together national expertise in the area. It is noted that the proposed Council is small and while this is consistent with contemporary views on governance it is also noted that this body does not have a governance role. It is charged only with providing advice on request to the Minister and non binding advice or guidelines to the Agency. The small size is offset somewhat by the capacity of the Agency to create further advisory committees if it sees fit.

AFTF poses the questions:

- Why is supporting the Council not a function of the Agency ?
- Is the Council large enough to allow full participation and gathering of Australia wide expertise.?