

Additional Comments by Senator Nick Xenophon

Buildings wrapped in petrol

1.1 I broadly support the recommendations of the Committee.

1.2 The cladding issue is a most serious public safety issue that requires urgent action. The issue was brought to the public's attention in November 2015 when the Lacrosse building in Docklands Melbourne caught fire. Since that time Government's, both Federal and State, have failed to adequately respond. This is embarrassing and pathetic.

1.3 Tragedy was avoided in the Lacrosse fire through luck alone¹. Mr Adam Dalrymple, then Director of Fire Safety, Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board (MFB), described this incident as one that alone could have 'claimed hundreds of lives if things had turned out a little differently'. Unfortunately the June 2017 Grenfell Tower fire in London proved him correct.

1.4 I note that Australian Fire Safety Engineer, Mr Tony Enright stated in a recent ABC Four Corners program examining polyethylene cladding that:

A kilogram of polyethylene will release the same amount of energy as a kilogram of petrol, and it gets worse than that because polyethylene is denser than petrol too, so that's about, a kilogram of polyethylene is like about one and a bit, one and a half litres of petrol. If you look at a one metre by one metre square section [of PE core ACP cladding] that will have about three kilograms, the equivalent of about five litres of petrol².

1.5 Governments cannot dawdle along in relation to this issue. Lives are at risk. The recommendations in this report must not only be agreed to by Government, but a time frame for implementation of them must also be laid out. In the absence of the Council of Australian Government (COAG) process dealing with this issue within 90 days, the Commonwealth must consider unilateral action using powers constitutionally available to it.

Recommendation 1

1.6 That the Government response to this report includes implementation time frames.

1 Mr Adam Dalrymple, Director, Fire Safety (now Acting Deputy Chief Officer), Metropolitan Fire Brigade, *Committee Hansard*, 13 November 2015, p. 65.

2 Debbie Whitmont, Patricia Drum, Anne Davies, 'Combustible', *ABC Four Corners*, 4 September 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/stories/2017/08/31/4726881.htm> (accessed 5 September 2017).

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