

CHAPTER 2

Review of annual reports

2.1 This chapter examines selected annual reports from three statutory agencies in greater detail, and provides the Senate with information that may be of particular interest.

Asbestos Safety and Eradication Authority

2.2 The Asbestos Safety and Eradication Authority (ASEA) was established on 1 July 2013 under the *Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency Act 2013* (the ASEA Act). The ASEA's primary duties include encouraging, coordinating, monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the *National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Awareness and Removal 2013-2018* (the National Strategic Plan), which prescribes a national approach to asbestos eradication, handling and awareness in Australia.¹

2.3 One of the agency's first tasks, on direction from the Minister for Employment, Senator the Hon Eric Abetz, was to review and redraft the National Strategic Plan.² Concerns had been raised about certain aspects of the plan, such as the practicality of the asbestos removal deadline of 2030, the lack of clear costing and safety analysis, and the potential for duplication in regulatory processes. The ASEA worked with states, territories and other stakeholders to incorporate this feedback into a revised draft plan, which was released for comment in June 2014.³

2.4 In its first year, the ASEA undertook other necessary preparatory work in support of its aims. The agency developed and tested a range of tools and methodologies to identify, assess and grade asbestos materials in the built environment, and to map authorised disposal sites.⁴ In addition, it undertook a baseline awareness survey, established a national register of asbestos exposure and implemented online registration systems.⁵ This work was guided by the six overarching strategy goals of the National Strategic Plan:

- awareness;
- best practice;
- identification;
- removal;
- research; and

1 Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency, *Annual Report 2013-14*, p. 13.

2 Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency, *Annual Report 2013-14*, p. 15.

3 Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency, *Annual Report 2013-14*, p. 15.

4 Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency, *Annual Report 2013-14*, pp 32–33.

5 Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency, *Annual Report 2013-14*, pp 30–31 and 34.

- international leadership.⁶

2.5 The ASEA oversaw the setup of the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Council and its secretariat, with six meetings convened during the reporting period.⁷ In conjunction with Comcare, the ASEA held the first National Asbestos Forum.

2.6 The ASEA also undertook additional work to coordinate the National Taskforce – Asbestos Safety in Telstra Infrastructure (the Taskforce), which was established following reports of unsafe handling of asbestos materials during the cabling rollout of the National Broadband Network.⁸ The Taskforce ensured that employees, contractors and the public were protected from exposure to airborne asbestos fibres. Fourteen independent monitors conducted over 500 site visits involving 80 contractors, with no major incidents of asbestos exposure reported.⁹ The ASEA subsequently commenced a review of asbestos training in the utilities sector.¹⁰

2.7 The report notes the ASEA's intention to continue to build upon this work during the 2014-15 year by, for example, using the results of its initial research to address gaps in knowledge and tailor its communications, convening the inaugural International Conference on Asbestos Awareness and Management, working to remove asbestos in remote Indigenous communities, strengthening asbestos training, and developing protocols in relation to the importation of products containing asbestos.¹¹

2.8 The committee congratulates the ASEA on its first report and looks forward to learning more about its progress in future annual reports.

Safe Work Australia

2.9 Safe Work Australia (SWA) is a statutory agency established under the *Safe Work Australia Act 2008*. SWA leads the development of national work health and safety policy and workers' compensation across Australia. SWA is jointly funded by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments.¹²

2.10 Throughout the reporting period, the SWA worked to achieve the outcomes set out in both its *Strategic Plan 2013-2016* and its *Operational Plan 2013-2014*, as well as the broader action areas outlined in the *Australian Work Health And Safety Strategy 2012-2022* (the Australian Strategy).

2.11 Safe Work Australia's 2013-14 PBS outlines a single program structure with the outcome statement: 'healthier, safer and more productive workplaces through

6 Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency, *Annual Report 2013-14*, pp 30–35.

7 Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency, *Annual Report 2013-14*, p. 16.

8 Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency, *Annual Report 2013-14*, pp 39 and 44.

9 Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency, *Annual Report 2013-14*, p. 39 .

10 Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency, *Annual Report 2013-14*, p. 44.

11 Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency, *Annual Report 2013-14*, pp 42–43.

12 Safe Work Australia, *Annual Report 2013-14*, p. 10.

improvements to Australian work health and safety and workers' compensation arrangements'. Performance against this outcome is measured by six strategies and three key performance indicators (KPIs) also outlined in the PBS. SWA met all its KPIs for the fifth consecutive year.

2.12 In her overview, Chief Executive Officer Ms Michelle Baxter noted that in the decade preceding the reporting period, work-related deaths fell by 33 per cent and serious compensation claims fell by 29 per cent.¹³ However, she also noted the troubling trend that the median time lost following compensation for an injury resulting in at least one week off work has gradually increased over the last seven years from four to five working weeks.

2.13 During the reporting period, the agency had a particular focus on the agriculture and road transport industries.¹⁴ In consultation with its members, the SWA developed the *National Agriculture Activity Plan 2014-2019* and began the development of guidance material to support rural workplaces in their safe management of plants and livestock. SWA partnered with the National Transport Commission to provide health screenings to over 1 041 truck drivers at 12 designated truck stops across four states.¹⁵ SWA also published two data reports about the transport industry and collated a number of case studies relating to activities and programs being carried out under the Australian Strategy.

2.14 The committee commends SWA on a thorough and informative report.

Workplace Gender Equality Agency

2.15 The Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) is a statutory agency established under the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012* (the WGEA Act). The Director of the WGEA, Ms Helen Conway, noted in the report that the agency receives generous financial and in-kind support from a range of individual and organisational partners.¹⁶

2.16 The WGEA exceeded three of its four KPIs:

- Percentage of women in leadership including governing board members, key management personnel and other managers;
- Percentage of relevant employers with a strategy or policy to support employees with family and caring responsibilities; and
- Number of visits to the agency website.¹⁷

The agency did not meet its remaining KPI: percentage of relevant employers conducting gender remuneration gap analyses. The report notes that many employers

13 Safe Work Australia, *Annual Report 2013-14*, p. 9.

14 Safe Work Australia, *Annual Report 2013-14*, p. 17.

15 Safe Work Australia, *Annual Report 2013-14*, p. 20.

16 Workplace Gender Equality Agency, *Annual Report 2013-14*, p. 7.

17 Workplace Gender Equality Agency, *Annual Report 2013-14*, p. 14.

who do not conduct this analysis do not do so because pay is set by awards, industrial agreements, or 'market rates'.¹⁸

2.17 The 2013-14 year marked the first full year of reporting under the WGEA Act. The WGEA will use the data collected to prepare customised, confidential benchmark reports to enable employers to compare their gender performance to their peers' performance, identify areas for improvement and track the effectiveness of their gender equality strategies over time.¹⁹ These reports will be released alongside a gender equality strategy toolkit. The data will also be available in aggregated form.

2.18 Under the new reporting framework, the WGEA began collecting data from reporting organisations against the gender equality indicators which will feed into customised and confidential benchmark reports that will be distributed to compliant reporting organisations in late calendar year. The Agency also ran workshops and teleconferences to equip employers with the information needed on how to report and comply with the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012*.

2.19 During the reporting period, the WGEA published a series of 'perspective papers' synthesising academic literature on issues contributing to gender inequality, updated eight fact sheets and published an interactive data centre.²⁰ The agency also contributed to a range of research conducted by academic and government institutions and responded to 54 external requests for information and data.²¹

2.20 The WGEA uses media engagement to raise public awareness of gender equality issues. In the 2013-14 year the agency issued seven media releases and achieved 395 media mentions. Over 93% of all media coverage was either positive or neutral. Between July 2013 and June 2014, their website received almost 250,000 visits.

2.21 The committee finds the report to be well presented and easily navigated, and particularly appreciates the inclusion of clear, informative appendices.

Comments made in the Senate

2.32 The committee is obliged, under Senate Standing Order 25(20)(d), to consider any remarks made about these reports in the Senate. The committee is satisfied that there were no such comments to include.

18 Workplace Gender Equality Agency, *Annual Report 2013-14*, p. 16.

19 Workplace Gender Equality Agency, *Annual Report 2013-14*, p. 19.

20 Workplace Gender Equality Agency, *Annual Report 2013-14*, pp 20-21.

21 Workplace Gender Equality Agency, *Annual Report 2013-14*, p. 20.

Bodies not presenting annual reports to the Senate

2.33 The committee is required to report to the Senate each year on whether there are any bodies not presenting annual reports to the Senate which should. The committee is satisfied that there are no such bodies at this time.

Senator Bridget McKenzie

Chair

