



**THE HON MICHAEL KEENAN MP**  
**Minister for Justice**

MC14/03899

Dr Dennis Jensen MP  
Chair  
Standing Committee on Petitions  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Dr Jensen

I refer to your letter of 2 January 2014 to the Attorney-General, Senator the Hon George Brandis QC, relating to a recent petition regarding the legalisation of cannabis. The Attorney-General has referred your letter to me as criminal justice issues fall within my portfolio responsibilities.

The abuse of both licit and illicit drugs is a serious problem for all Australian governments as well as the community as a whole. In Australia, responsibility for the control of illicit drugs and their precursors is shared between the Australian, State and Territory governments. The Australian Government is primarily responsible for controlling these substances at the border, as well as scheduling controlled drugs, plants and precursors in the Commonwealth Criminal Code.

The Australian Government considers cannabis to be an illicit drug due to its detrimental effects. It is a depressant that slows the central nervous system and has been linked to numerous mental illnesses including schizophrenia, psychosis, depression and anxiety. Further specific information on cannabis harms can be accessed from the National Cannabis Prevention and Information Centre <[www.ncpic.org.au](http://www.ncpic.org.au)>.

The need to control certain drugs, including cannabis, is also recognised at the international level. The Australian Government has ratified a number of international agreements that require the criminalisation of these drugs, including the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988.

For these reasons, the Australian Government does not support the legalisation of cannabis and no consideration is being given to changing its current status as a prohibited drug under Australian law.

Thank you for writing on this matter.

Yours sincerely

**Michael Keenan**