


Mr Michael Cornish



Mr Dave Sharma MP
Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
e: Dave.Sharma.MP@aph.gov.au; jsct@aph.gov.au

Dear Mr Sharma

Re: Inquiry into the Minamata Convention on Mercury, vapour lamps exemption

I write to you as a submitter to the Inquiry into the Minamata Convention on Mercury. For additional context, I was a former Senior Adviser to the Federal Member for Mayo, Ms Rebekha Sharkie MP, with carriage at the adviser level for Centre Alliance's environment portfolio (amongst other portfolios).

I read the transcript of the inquiry hearing of 9 August 2021 with great interest. I wholeheartedly agree with your analysis and concern for the exemption to the Convention being sought by Australia until December 2023, namely, an exemption to import restrictions for high-pressure mercury vapour lamps for general lighting purposes.

This concern would no doubt be shared by the environmental NGOs who made submissions to the Committee.

I too see no good need to delay the inevitable transition away from mercury vapour lights that is, according to the account provided in the hearing, already complete or underway in all Australian State and Territory jurisdictions.

Additionally, as you and fellow Committee Members collectively noted in the hearing:

- The exemption would deny Australia "*a benefit of \$17.3 million from energy savings and around \$4.4 million from carbon savings*", i.e. an estimated opportunity cost to Australia of \$21.7 million;
- Australia would be the only OECD country to seek an exemption to the treaty, alongside small group of countries – China, India, Thailand, and a cluster of sub-Saharan African countries;
- Australia is already an international laggard in its ratification of the treaty, with ("*approximately*") 120 of 128 original signatories having already ratified;
- Seeking an unnecessary exemption may undermine Australia's negotiating position in the future direction of the Convention, a key interest that was identified in most industry submissions to the Inquiry; and
- The Lighting Council of Australia did not evidence sufficient concern on the matter to make a submission to the Inquiry.

Further, the serious underlying health and environmental concerns that drive the impetus of the Convention – and Australia's ratification of it – can only be undermined by any exemption.

In conclusion, **I strongly urge that the Committee recommend that there be no exemption for mercury vapour lighting sought in Australia's ratification of the Minamata Convention on Mercury.**

Thank you again for your time in considering my correspondence.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Cornish

25 / 8 / 2021

Cc Doctors for the Environment Australia
Cc Environmental Justice Australia
Cc Conservation Council of SA