

MINING & ENERGY UNION



14 August 2023

Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs
Legislation Committee

Emailed: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Re: Inquiry into the National Occupational Respiratory Disease Registry Bill 2023 and the National Occupational Respiratory Disease Registry (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2023

Thank you for the invitation to make a submission to the inquiry. In the industries our members work in, occupational respiratory diseases are a major risk to workers' health, and the Mining and Energy Union appreciates the opportunity to contribute our views and expertise to assist the work of the Committee.

Despite decades of progress in occupational health and safety, too many workers in Australia's coal industry continue to develop debilitating respiratory diseases due to their exposure to respirable dust at work. In recent years, the coal industry has had to reckon with new diagnoses of black lung – coal workers' pneumoconiosis – among its workforce. In addition to coal dust, poor management of dust exposure in the coal mining industry also exposes workers to silica dust, diesel particulates, and welding fumes and particulates.

A robust and comprehensive national registry of occupational respiratory diseases, as envisaged by the Bills and recommended by the National Dust Disease Taskforce, would facilitate more stringent monitoring of occupational exposures, and provide information to support preventative action.

We welcome the introduction of the Bills to parliament and encourage their swift passage. Nonetheless, we have identified areas in which the broader Bill package could be improved and wish to direct the attention of the committee to the submission made by the ACTU which we support. In addition, we are attaching the submission we provided last year to the Department of Health on the draft bill package to assist the Committee. This submission provided some broader contextual information relevant to the coal industry.

Regards,

Grahame Kelly
General Secretary