

July 15th, 2021

Joint Standing Committee on Treaties  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Please find attached our submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties in support of Australia becoming a party to the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

Sincerely,



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Submission from Henrik Selin (Boston University) and Noelle Eckley Selin (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, Parliament of Australia

We are writing this submission in support of Australia becoming a party to the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

We have, individually and jointly, researched mercury science and policy for over two decades. This research has resulted in a large number of peer-reviewed publications, including the recently published book *Mercury Stories: Understanding Sustainability through a Volatile Element* (MIT Press, 2020). As part of our research, we have been closely following the negotiations and implementation of the Minamata Convention. We have attended its negotiation sessions and all meetings of the Conference of Parties to date. We have also been appointed as observers to the international expert group under the guidance of the Secretariat to the Minamata Convention preparing for the first effectiveness evaluation of the Minamata Convention.

The Minamata Convention is the first global treaty that focuses on the full life cycle of mercury production, trade, use, emissions to air, releases to land, storage, and waste. The first global mercury assessment, conducted by the United Nations Environment Programme and published in 2002, established mercury as a pollutant that travels on a global scale in the atmosphere, and contaminates environments across all regions and countries of the world. These elevated environmental concentrations of mercury in turn pose major health risks, including in the form of high methylmercury concentrations in seafood. The Minamata Convention is a response to this recognition of mercury as a global pollutant – political action by all the world's countries is necessary to fully address all aspects of the mercury problem.

Australia becoming a party to the Minamata Convention, and taking the necessary national and local measures to support the effective implementation of the treaty, would benefit both the people of Australia by protecting their health and the local environment, and would strengthen global political cooperation and efforts to address all aspects of the mercury issue collectively. In ratifying the Minamata Convention, Australia would join over 130 other countries and the European Union as parties to the treaty. Becoming a party would also offer Australia a greater opportunity to shape the future of global mercury cooperation and the implementation of the Minamata Convention. Parties are able to participate in decision-making, and also have the right to nominate experts to treaty-specific bodies including those designing strategies for effectiveness evaluation and the implementation and compliance committee.

Neither of us are Australian citizens, nor are we living in Australia, but Australia is home to a vibrant multidisciplinary group of mercury researchers who are recognized for their expertise across the international community of mercury researchers. Highly skilled Australian researchers are well positioned to offer sound scientific advice to the Australian government (at federal, state, and local levels), industry, and other stakeholders on different aspects of the mercury issue. If Australia were a party to the Minamata Convention, these researchers together with government officials could also play a prominent role in international implementation processes, providing a needed voice by focusing on mercury issues important to the Southern Hemisphere. Building on the domestic research knowledge and capabilities that exist in Australia would also allow Australia to design a cost-effective strategy to implement the Minamata Convention for the health benefits of both present and future generations.