



Senator Chris Evans
Leader of the Government in the Senate
Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations

The Hon John Murphy MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Murphy *John*

Thank you for your letter of 24 November 2010 on behalf of the Standing Committee on Petitions concerning the petition on preventing the mining and export of asbestos and promoting the teaching of business ethics.

Australia has taken active steps to prevent the use of asbestos in the workplace. Asbestos carries a terrible human toll in Australia and the Government is committed to doing what it can to ensure that asbestos management arrangements in Australia minimise the risk of avoidable exposure.

As noted in the petition, Australia has prohibited the use of all forms of asbestos except for a small number of permitted circumstances, such as bona fide research. The prohibition on the use of asbestos in Australia is supplemented by the *Customs (Prohibited Imports) Regulations 1956* and the *Customs (Prohibited Exports) Regulations 1958* which respectively prohibit the importation and exportation of products containing asbestos.

I have recently announced the formation of the Asbestos Management Review. This review will look at current activities in the area of asbestos management and research and make practical recommendations for the development of a national strategic plan to improve asbestos awareness, management and removal.

As part of the harmonisation of occupational health and safety legislation, model asbestos regulations are being developed which will provide, for the first time, a uniform framework for the minimisation of exposure, the removal of asbestos, and the management of asbestos materials in workplaces.

I have also recently announced the Australian Government's intention to ratify several International Labour Organisation treaties, including the Asbestos Convention, 1986 (Convention 162). In ratifying this convention, Australia will ensure that its national laws prescribe the measures to be taken for the prevention and control of, and protection of workers against health hazards due to occupational exposure to asbestos.

In my view, there is merit in the idea of an international ban on trade in asbestos. I am advised, however, that there remains an active global trade in asbestos, and this increases the difficulty of achieving international agreement on this issue.

The Government will, however, continue to support efforts to limit international trade in asbestos, and relevant Ministers are considering whether there are any additional steps that Australia might take to achieve an international ban on trade in asbestos.

In relation to the teaching of business ethics, Australian universities are autonomous, self-accrediting institutions. They have responsibility for determining the nature of their course offerings within broad profiles agreed with the Government and in light of student and employer demand. Universities are also responsible for course curriculum and may consult with industry and professional bodies to inform their decisions on curriculum content and design. While the Government provides substantial funding to universities, it respects the autonomy of institutions and generally does not seek to intervene in these matters. I note, however, that many universities devote resources to ethics related matters.

I have forwarded a copy of this letter to the Hon Dr Craig Emerson MP, Minister for Trade; the Hon Kevin Rudd MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs; the Hon Tony Burke MP, Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities; and the Hon Nicola Roxon MP, Minister for Health and Ageing; as their portfolios may also have an interest in this issue.

I trust the information provided is helpful.

Yours sincerely

CHRIS EVANS

15/2/11