



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON
PETITIONS Rvd. 26/5/08.

THE HON STEPHEN SMITH MP

MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
PARLIAMENT HOUSE
CANBERRA ACT 2600

15 MAY 2008

Mrs Julia Irwin MP
Member for Fowler
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Chair *Julia*

Thank you for your letters dated 17 March 2008 about a petition on cluster munitions and a petition on anti-vehicle mines made to the Standing Committee on Petitions. I note that the Minister for Defence, the Hon Joel Fitzgibbon MP, has responsibility for anti-vehicle mines, and he will reply to the Committee on this issue.

Regarding cluster munitions, I note that the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade reviewed Senator Lyn Allison's Cluster Munitions (Prohibition) Bill 2006 in 2007. I draw that Standing Committee's report on cluster munitions to the attention of the Standing Committee on Petitions.

Australia strongly supports the humanitarian goal of banning cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians, and to that end participates actively in both the negotiations taking place under the "Oslo process" and the United Nations-based Certain Conventional Weapons Convention.

Australia will work to conclude the text of a treaty to ban cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians at the diplomatic conference in Dublin in May 2008. To maximise its effectiveness, the treaty must be widely supported and needs to take into account core national security concerns. The Dublin conference is to negotiate the final text of a cluster munitions treaty.

The ability to retain representative samples of cluster munitions for clearance training and to develop counter-measures is a security concern for Australia. This is to enable Australian forces to protect personnel and civilians against attacks using cluster munitions, and to facilitate battle-field and humanitarian clearance. Stocks would be minimised and not be for operational use.

Another security concern for Australia and other countries is interoperability. Australia engages in coalition operations with partners that are not “Oslo process” participants. This includes missions mandated by the United Nations to restore peace and security, and humanitarian operations. It is important that a cluster munitions treaty not jeopardise such operations.

Australia supports integrated approaches to mine action to improve the livelihoods of landmine and explosive remnants of war survivors, their families and communities, including in Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, Iraq, Laos, Uganda and Vietnam. We fund survivor assistance and mine action (\$8.5 million in 2006-07), and in addition, have provided \$2.5 million to the United Nations Mine Action Service in Lebanon.

I trust this information is of assistance to the Standing Committee on Petitions.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Smith