

COMMUNIQUÉ

Meeting of Work Health and Safety Ministers

3 December 2021

Commonwealth, state and territory Ministers responsible for work health and safety (WHS) met today to advance priorities in support of the work health and safety of all Australians.

The meeting was chaired by Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, Commonwealth Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations.

Review of the model Work Health and Safety laws

Ministers considered the progress made by Safe Work Australia (SWA) and the jurisdictions to implement the recommendations from the review of the model WHS laws undertaken by Marie Boland that were agreed to by the Ministers at the previous meeting on 20 May 2021.

Ministers noted that implementation of the agreed recommendations is on track, with measures to be completed or substantially completed by the end of 2022. Ministers commended SWA and its Members for the progress achieved on this important work.

National Dust Disease Taskforce

Ministers discussed the WHS-related findings of the Final Report of the National Dust Disease Taskforce (the Taskforce) and noted the Attorney-General and the Minister for Health and Aged Care are engaging with state and territory governments to develop a coordinated all of governments' response.

Ministers discussed the importance of progressing measures to protect workers from occupational dust diseases, and noted the significant work undertaken by SWA and across individual jurisdictions to address the risks of exposure to respirable crystalline silica in light of the recent re-emergence of silicosis.

Ministers agreed to refer the Taskforce's Final Report to SWA for consideration as part of the regulatory impact analysis it has commenced on options to minimise worker exposure to respirable crystalline silica from a broad range of materials, processes and industries.

Rider safety in the gig economy

Ministers were provided updates on the work referred to SWA and the Heads of Workplace Safety Authorities (HWSA) in relation to rider safety in the gig economy at their previous meeting. The referral of this work demonstrated a national commitment that more needs to be done to ensure the health and safety of delivery riders in the gig economy following a number of fatalities and serious injuries in the industry.

SWA has progressed work to promote and strengthen WHS-related education for delivery riders and is working on additional guidance for the industry. Ministers welcomed advice that HWSA has agreed to a national approach and campaign to support WHS outcomes for food delivery workers and that this has been prioritised and embedded into the HWSA forward work plan.

Sexual harassment in the workplace

Ministers were updated on the work undertaken by all jurisdictions in response to the Australian Human Rights Commission's report, *Respect@Work: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces*. It was noted that the Commonwealth Government has fully implemented or fully funded 41 of 55 recommendations, and that work is underway on all remaining recommendations. No recommendations have been rejected.

Ministers also reported on current and future initiatives being undertaken in their respective jurisdictions to strengthen the WHS framework, with respect to sexual harassment in the workplace.

Inter-Governmental Agreement

Ministers discussed the review of the Inter-Governmental Agreement for Regulatory and Operational Reform in Occupational Health and Safety (the IGA). Ministers previously agreed to defer the IGA review until the Model Law Review had been finalised, which occurred when the response to the review was agreed at the previous WHS Ministers' meeting.

The review is an opportunity to shift focus from the development and implementation of the model WHS laws, to a focus on maintaining and increasing harmonisation across the jurisdictions and improving consistency of implementation and compliance with the laws, noting not all jurisdictions are harmonised.

The review process will commence in early 2022 and terms of reference will be agreed out of session.

SafeWork NSW – Centre for Work Health and Safety

Ministers were provided an update on the work being undertaken by SafeWork NSW's Centre for Work Health and Safety, and its contribution to research and innovation on work health and safety issues of national significance. It was noted that engagement from other jurisdictions on the Centre's projects is welcomed.

Next steps

Work Health and Safety Ministers agreed to continue meeting in 2022 to further progress measures to improve the health and safety of all Australians in the workplace.