

COMMUNIQUÉ

Meeting of Work Health and Safety Ministers

18 September 2024

1. Commonwealth, state and territory Work Health and Safety (WHS) Ministers met today and discussed a number of key WHS matters, including new national strategic plans for asbestos and silica and dispute resolution processes.
2. The meeting was chaired by Senator the Hon Murray Watt, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations.
3. There are still too many deaths, injuries and illnesses arising from work. Ministers reflected on WHS statistics published by Safe Work Australia today which show in 2023, 200 workers died from a workplace injury, and in 2022-23, 139,000 workers made a workers' compensation claim for a serious injury.
4. Ministers discussed the importance of ensuring the model WHS laws provide the highest level of protection for workers. Ministers asked Safe Work Australia to prepare a proposal on how it would undertake a best practice review of the model WHS laws in the context of seeking to maintain a harmonised approach. This would involve examining alternative approaches used across jurisdictions that could be considered for adoption nationally.

Importation prohibition of engineered stone

5. On 1 July 2024, the Commonwealth, state and territory governments commenced a world-first ban on the supply, manufacture, processing and installation of engineered stone benchtops, slabs, and panels under WHS laws.
6. Ministers noted the Commonwealth Government's intention to prohibit the importation of engineered stone benchtops, panels and slabs from 1 January 2025 to complement the prohibition under WHS laws.
7. The Government will recommend proposed regulations to the Governor-General, Her Excellency the Honourable Ms Sam Mostyn AC, implementing the prohibition prior to its proposed commencement on 1 January 2025.
8. Further information on the prohibition of engineered stone under WHS laws is published on Safe Work Australia's website at www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/esban.

Asbestos National Strategic Plan 2024-2030

9. Ministers noted the *Asbestos National Strategic Plan 2024-2030* (Asbestos Plan) has been endorsed by all jurisdictions. The Asbestos Plan provides a phased approach to eliminating asbestos-related diseases in Australia and supports workers and others who have been affected by these diseases.
10. The Asbestos Plan, developed by the Asbestos and Silica Safety and Eradication Agency, in consultation with states and territories, trade unions, victim support advocates, and employer bodies, builds on progress made under the 2 previous asbestos national strategic plans and focuses on practical measures to support the safe removal of ageing asbestos containing materials from the built environment.

11. Endorsement of the Asbestos Plan represents a commitment by jurisdictions to continue the important work being undertaken nationally to address Australia's deadly asbestos legacy.
12. A copy of the Asbestos Plan is available on the Asbestos and Silica Safety and Eradication Agency's [website](#).

Silica National Strategic Plan 2024-2030

13. Ministers welcomed the inaugural *Silica National Strategic Plan 2024-2030* (Silica Plan) aimed at eliminating silica-related diseases in Australia and supporting workers and others who have developed such diseases.
14. The Silica Plan, developed by the Asbestos and Silica Safety and Eradication Agency, provides jurisdictions with a range of actions they may choose to implement to help achieve the aims of the Plan.
15. The Silica Plan builds on the National Silicosis Prevention Strategy and associated National Action Plan developed by Lung Foundation Australia for the Department of Health and Aged Care.
16. Ministers have committed to seek endorsement of the Silica Plan by 11 October 2024 or as soon as practicable after that date, noting that some jurisdictions will be subject to caretaker conventions during this period.
17. Ministers requested Safe Work Australia work with the Asbestos and Silica Safety and Eradication Agency and other relevant agencies to consider relevant actions under the Silica Plan as part of its forward work plan.

Dispute Resolution

18. Ministers noted recent amendments made by the South Australian and Queensland governments to their respective WHS Acts following independent reviews conducted in their jurisdictions in 2022 - the *Independent Review of SafeWork SA* and the *Review of Queensland's Work Health and Safety Act 2011*.
19. The amendments allow for certain unresolved WHS disputes to be settled through referral to a relevant court or tribunal. The amendments seek to implement the policy intent of Recommendation 13 of the *Review of the model WHS Laws* (Boland Review) conducted in 2018.
20. Ministers discussed the importance of timely and effective resolution of WHS disputes and agreed to re-examine Recommendation 13 of the Boland Review and task Safe Work Australia to scope options to improve practical dispute resolution processes under the model WHS laws and to provide advice to WHS Ministers within 6 months.
21. WHS Ministers also agreed to request Safe Work Australia look at other relevant recommendations from the South Australian and Queensland reviews for consideration nationally.