



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**Thursday, 24 September, 2009**

### **BUSINESS GROUPS ON THE SAME PAGE ON OHS HARMONISATION**

Leading business and industry groups have joined together in urging all governments to support one system of workplace safety laws at a crucial meeting tomorrow.

The Australian Industry Group, the Business Council of Australia, and the Minerals Council of Australia are at one in calling for our governments to press forward with a single system of laws to deliver the best safety outcomes in Australian workplaces.

Workplace relations ministers will be asked tomorrow to approve the release of the exposure draft of the model OHS Act that will enable the harmonisation of Australia's multiple different occupational health and safety systems.

It is important to recognise that the exposure draft model Act has been recommended to the ministers by the Safe Work Australia Council. The council has noted that the harmonised laws will be good for workers across all industries. The council's chair has further noted that the proposed regulatory reform will not come at the expense of the safety of Australian workers.

"Employers agree totally with the union movement that it is critically important to get safety right. We also agree that a national OHS legal framework must result in safer workplaces," Australian Industry Group Chief Executive Heather Ridout said.

"The draft Bill being considered tomorrow is the result of a very extensive review by a tripartite panel of experts, based on evidence of what delivers demonstrably safer workplaces, and the laws are designed to raise safety standards across Australia," she said.

"Ai Group urges all governments to move forward with the model which has already been agreed by COAG. This is not about reducing compliance it is about allowing companies to focus on safety outcomes rather than navigating many different systems simultaneously," Mrs Ridout said

"Harmonising our array of inconsistent workplace safety laws is one of the key issues for Australian businesses operating in more than one state," Business Council of Australia Chief Executive Katie Lahey said.

"This reform has been more than twenty years in the making and is a major piece of unfinished microeconomic reform in Australia.

“Ironing out Australia’s workplace safety laws is also a major part of COAG’s seamless national economy agenda, which the Prime Minister has identified as a priority area of reform.

“The states cannot credibly claim to be open for business and maintain different systems for something as fundamental as the safety of Australian workers.

“If our governments fail to harmonise our jumble of workplace safety laws then as far as business is concerned COAG’s seamless economy agenda will also be considered a failure,” Ms Lahey said.

“The Minerals Council of Australia (MCA) supports a single OHS Act covering all sectors and jurisdictions and industry specific national regulations where required, complemented by national codes of practice and guidelines,” MCA Chief Executive Officer Mitchell Hooke said.

“There are currently 10 principal statutes – six state, two territory and two Commonwealth – governing OHS in Australia as well as numerous regulations and codes of practice,” Mr Hooke said.

“This raft of overlapping laws, standards and requirements is confusing for workers and diverts business from the primary goal of improving workplace safety,” Mr Hooke said.

“The minerals industry is committed to zero harm – an industry free of fatalities, injuries and diseases,” he said.

The proposed new workplace safety system has the support of safety regulators and all governments have signed up to the principle of a harmonised system.

It will be critical that all state and territory governments follow through on their part of the deal.

We urge all participants in the Workplace Relations Ministers Council to support the harmonised arrangements at tomorrow’s meeting.

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