

14 May 2009

Business  
Council of  
Australia

## An Open Letter to all Premiers and Chief Ministers



Dear Premier / Chief Minister

### **HARMONISATION OF OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY IN AUSTRALIA**

I am writing to you ahead of the meeting of the Workplace Relations Ministerial Council scheduled for 18 May 2009.

The Business Council of Australia believes that harmonisation of the array of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) regulations across states and territories should be one of the highest priorities for microeconomic reform in Australia. It is a lynchpin reform in the seamless economy reform agenda that is being pressed by business, and which has been adopted by COAG.

The Prime Minister has identified the implementation of the seamless national economy as a major goal for his government and has recognised the importance of a more cohesive system of OHS.

You will also be aware that the commitment to reform OHS has been embraced through the COAG process and specifically through the Inter-Governmental Agreement for Regulatory and Operational Reform in Occupational Health and Safety agreed in July last year.

As you know, at the last meeting of the Workplace Relations Ministerial Council, Ministers agreed to the development of a model OHS framework with a view to an exposure draft of the Act being provided in August, with any outstanding policy issues to be resolved in May.

It is therefore extremely disappointing to see that several states are now thinking about backing away from their previous commitments to a harmonised national OHS system. We understand that this includes New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia.

Any back-sliding at the next ministerial council meeting is simply incongruous given the IGA signed last year and will represent an abject failure by the states to live up to their COAG responsibilities. Moreover, a failure to progress the harmonised OHS framework will send precisely the wrong signal to business and the wider community.

Indeed for some time now, the states and territories have been keen to press the line that they are "open for business". Failure to proceed with a harmonised national system of OHS will demonstrate that this is clearly not the case.

The COAG reform process is ambitious and worthwhile. Its commitment last year to an expanded five-year productivity and deregulation agenda is comprehensive, timely and necessary. It is imperative, however, that COAG delivers on its promises, including the harmonisation of OHS arrangements. Indeed, if COAG is not able to deliver on this issue, questions will be asked on its capacity to produce results elsewhere.

I urge you to support the harmonised framework and direct your ministerial representative to vote in favour of the draft legislative framework at next week's Workplace Relations Ministerial Council Meeting.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Katie Lahey', written in a cursive style.

**Katie Lahey**