



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Asbestos

SPEECH

Monday, 12 September 2016

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Chesters, Lisa, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (11:41): I move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) the Government's Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency's (ASEA's) Chief Executive Officer, Mr Peter Tighe, describes the emerging problem of asbestos importation as growing exponentially;

(b) the ASEA's independent review of the end-to-end border processes for the asbestos border control, resulting in the *Asbestos Importation Review Report* (KGH Border Services, March 2016), was conducted in just four weeks, had narrowly constructed terms of reference and lacked consultation with all affected parties; and

(c) at the new \$1.2 billion Perth Children's Hospital, an imported roof panel has tested positive for chrysotile, an asbestos substance banned in Australia;

(2) acknowledges that:

(a) Australia has one of the highest rates of asbestos-related death and injury in the world, with 33,000 people having already lost their lives to asbestos-related diseases; and

(b) around 700 Australians die each year from asbestos-related diseases, and without proper management, experts worry that tens of thousands of Australians could be diagnosed with asbestos-related diseases in the coming decades;

(3) condemns the Government's inaction since the completion of the *Asbestos Importation Review Report*; and

(4) calls on the Government to significantly increase the penalties available for those guilty of importing products containing asbestos.

Last week, in the media, we had more reports about asbestos entering our country and appearing on building sites. It is not a rare occasion and there is a need for urgent action. Again, the government has been caught asleep at the wheel when it comes to asbestos importation. Let us not forget that asbestos is banned in our country, and it is banned for good reason—asbestos kills. We have had too many Australians, too many workers, lose their lives to asbestos related illnesses. Rather than acting on this issue, what the government has done instead is blame the union. They have blamed the union, the CFMEU, that speaks up and speaks out against products containing asbestos entering worksites.

Australia has one of the highest rates of asbestos related death and injury in the world. We know that 33,000 people have already lost their lives to asbestos related illnesses. Around 700 Australians die each year because of asbestos related diseases and, without proper management of our borders, more and more Australian workers will lose their lives if the government does not get serious about cracking down on asbestos importation.

What happened last week that motivated the Labor side to move this motion today in parliament? Well, let us look at some of the media reports of last week. Asbestos has been found in Brisbane at a state government site in a new building. The same company was involved where asbestos was found in Perth in the children's hospital. These are two expensive projects being funded by state governments where the builders have imported products from China containing asbestos.

But it is not just these two cases. Asbestos has been found in the Sydney WestConnex project. This is a project that we hear speaker after speaker rave about in this place. Yet how alarming is it for the residents of Sydney to discover that asbestos has been found in the building products of the WestConnex Sydney project. Asbestos

has also been found in a hotel development in Hobart. Asbestos is getting through our borders. Asbestos is in our workplaces. These are just a few of the cases where the union and WorkSafe have entered in the various jurisdictions to make complaints to get products tested.

Yet we have not seen action from this government. Instead, the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection blamed the union and said it is the union's fault that asbestos is getting into this country. How laughable is it for the minister for immigration to say that it is the union's fault! Let's get this straight: the minister who is responsible for keeping this product out of our country is blaming the messenger who blew the whistle on the fact that there is asbestos in this country. To be frank, the government has completely failed in its response to stop illegal asbestos importations coming into our country. It is not spending enough on cracking down and testing this product. We all know that in China asbestos is not illegal, but it is in our country. The government needs to invest more to stop this product from getting in. We condemn the government for its inaction.

We also condemn the government for their report. It was limited, it was brief and it did nothing to really address the concerns that are being raised in this space not just by the union but also by the industry. In fact, the Master Builders Association of Tasmania actually stated in the ABC report about asbestos being found in a Macquarie Street hotel redevelopment in Hobart that asbestos was prevalent in Tasmania. The report said:

... the Master Builders Association said the incident was concerning, but asbestos was prevalent in Tasmania's building industry.

It called upon people:

... to consider where they're getting their fill from, the source of that fill, and just have a think about whether it may contain asbestos ...

This is from the Master Builders Association. This is not just the workers raising this issue; this is also the Master Builders Association raising this issue. The government should be condemned, and they should act on this issue now and seriously.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Wicks): Is there a seconder for this motion?

Mr Hammond: I am delighted to second the motion put forward by the member for Bendigo, particularly in relation to (1)(a) of the motion, and I reserve my right to speak.