

AUSTRALIAN STATEMENT

Listing of Chemicals – Chrysotile Asbestos

We thank the Co-chairs for their active and persistent efforts to guide the contact group on listing of chemicals to a consensus outcome. It was appreciated.

We find ourselves in the same situation as previous CoPs, pushing a critical issue forward another two years, adding to the seven years where we have also been unable to progress this issue. Seven long years where the single consistent fact was that the procedures and criteria as assessed by our expert body the CRC were met and they have recommended listing of Chrysotile asbestos.

We have heard many arguments put forward against listing in the contact group:

- That new scientific assessment needs to be undertaken,
- That alternatives do not exist,
- That chrysotile asbestos is less carcinogenic than other forms of asbestos
- That certain countries' chrysotile is pure chrysotile asbestos
- That access to asbestos roof sheeting is critical to provide shelter for the poor

I respect the right of Parties to make these points but the arguments put forward are simply not relevant. There are no arguments made at this meeting that contest the findings or recommendations of the CRC that the procedures and criteria for annex 3 listing chrysotile asbestos has been met.

The Contact group discussed the pros and cons of listing. The costs of listing of Chrysotile are negligible. However the costs of inaction are potentially huge.

The costs of inaction are real - we know this by looking at the billion dollar costs being borne by long term users of asbestos, including chrysotile asbestos.

In the meantime, developing countries which may lack the necessary resources to conduct their own research are being denied an opportunity to manage risks of unregulated imports of a hazardous substance that has been banned in 30 OECD countries.

Let me be very clear - this deliberate delay has consequences, and these consequences are significant.

Australia is now paying dearly for its past enthusiasm for using this product, both in terms of direct and indirect costs to the economy.

As well as in terms of immense human misery

We will pay these costs across the generations to come.

In summary, the criteria for listing have been met, this is not a ban, the costs of listing a negligible but the costs of inaction are potentially huge.

The reasons given for standing in the way of this process are not tenable or defensible given what the Convention is and what it is not.

We urge that Parties reconsider their views, and, noting that given that all requirements for listing are met, chrysotile asbestos must be listed in annex 3 of the Convention to enable the process of information sharing to begin.

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