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Mr Chris Brown
Chair, Asbestos Advisory Committee

Honourable Jay Weatherill MP
Premier of South Australia
Office of the Premier
GPO Box 2343
Adelaide SA 5001

Dear Premier

Re reform of South Australian government Boards and committees

Thank you for your letter regarding your recent decision to reform South Australian government boards and committees. I commend your endeavours to improve the way government engages with the community. Engagement between government and the community is a strong focus of the Asbestos Advisory Committee.

The Asbestos Advisory Committee was formed in 1991 at the request of the United Trades and labour Council driven by the late Jack Watkins. Since its inception the Committee has continually provided advice on numerous occasions regarding changes to State Legislation and regulations. In recent times the Committee was involved in providing advice to the State Government on the Federal Governments harmonisation of Occupational Health and Safety legislation. South Australia is considered to be the leader in the nation on legislation dealing with matters concerning Asbestos.

The Committee was the leader of the development of the South Australian Safety Action Plan 2008-12. The Plan was a cross Government initiative developed in partnership with key Government agencies, local government authorities, industry representatives, unions, the Asbestos Victims Association and Asbestos Diseases Society SA. The Plan was so unique for asbestos management in S.A. that it was subsequently modelled and adopted in other States.

The Plan outlines the State Government's commitment to reducing death and illness resulting from asbestos-related diseases. It aims to continue building awareness in the workplace and in the community about the dangers associated with exposure to asbestos fibres. The Committee is responsible for its ongoing actions and development and continues to monitor progress against the Plan and is working towards developing a new plan. The Committee sees the need for this to continue this very important work in view of the Federal Coalition Governments review of the national plan.

The Asbestos Advisory Committee consists of stakeholders from various Government Departments including SA Health, EPA, DPTI, Emergency Services and SafeWork SA. It also includes members from Masters Builders Association (MBA), SA Unions, Local Councils, Asbestos Industry Association and the Asbestos Victims Association (AVA). Each member is 'passionate' about asbestos management in SA and complements each others knowledge and experience about asbestos within their relevant work roles. As such, the Committee is considered to be specialised to provide concise and accurate information/advice to the Minister for Industrial Relations to address asbestos issues in S.A.

There are minimal costs associated with the Committee, on the basis that the majority of members are already employed by Government Departments and others attend on a voluntary basis. The main aim of the Committee is to address asbestos issues with the focus to eliminate the asbestos

hazard from Government buildings, general housing, public amenities, roads, parks etc. and hence eliminate asbestos exposure and health risks to site occupants including workers, contractors, home renovators, house owners etc who occupy buildings or work on these different sites, so that they never become 'victims' of asbestos exposure and go through the subsequent pain and suffering. This focus is consistent with the Australian Government Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency's National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Management and Awareness 2014-2018. That is, to set an aspirational goal with objectives, time lines and measures for a nationally coordinated approach to asbestos safety and eradication of asbestos.

As such, the Committee should remain intact and not be dissolved or merged with other Committees otherwise the existing members knowledge, experience and contribution of information would be lost. Furthermore, the effectiveness, momentum and drive for the implementation of strategies for asbestos management in SA with the aim to achieve the aspirational goals of the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency would also be compromised.

The Committee has made some head ways in to broadening its engagement with key community sectors and raising awareness within the community. The membership of the Committee has expanded in recent times to include the Emergency Services Sector, Health and Local Government.

These sectors were identified as crucial to both identifying and understanding issues regarding asbestos within the community and opening pathways to reach out to the community. Issues such as raising the awareness of where asbestos can be found and how it should be dealt with so as not to endanger lives. To put it bluntly asbestos kills and it is in thousands of homes and workplaces across South Australia. It is also being dumped and disposed of illegally.

Asbestos Awareness Week is an annual event that the Committee is responsible for organising. The purpose of the week is to engage with the community to highlight the dangers of asbestos. With the assistance of SafeWork SA the Committee has developed a good program which improves each year.

The Asbestos Advisory Committee recommends to the Government that the Committee be retained, independent of any other boards and committees for the following reasons:

- Its independence as a committee on providing advice to the government;
- Its role in the development of the South Australian Asbestos Safety Action Plan and its ongoing actions;
- The Committee is not convinced that a merger with another committee is the right way to go in dealing with such a sensitive issue such as Asbestos;
- The Committee has a broad membership and welcomes others to contribute to its work; and
- Engaging with the community on such a topic has proven to be difficult and the Committee is not convinced that an online medium would be effective as many are unaware that asbestos is an issue that may concern them.

I would welcome any further discussions on this matter.

Kind regards



Chris Brown

Chair, Asbestos Advisory Committee