## Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency Review

**WorkSafe Victoria submission**

*Section 1. The Agency’s current role and purpose*

1. *Do ASEA’s functions, or the way those functions are performed by ASEA, duplicate effort or include activities that would be more appropriately performed by other organisations? If so what organisations?*

ASEA’s functions as set out in section 8 of the ASEA Act include administering and coordinating the National Strategic Plan (NSP), providing advice to the Minister, liaising with other relevant departments or agencies and commissioning, monitoring and promoting research. Whilst individual jurisdictions may undertake some of this activity as part of their own strategic work program such as awareness raising activities these are generally targeted to the risks/challenges faced in that jurisdiction.

Individual jurisdictions, agencies or departments whilst engaged on asbestos issues nationally, have limited capacity to drive coordinated national action on all aspects of asbestos management and awareness. ASEA has a unique role as a central agency to influence outcomes through the NSP on multiple asbestos issues including workplace health and safety, environment and public health and engage with the community at a national level. This function is not duplicated in the work of other organisations.

1. *Are ASEA’s activities well targeted to achieve its objectives?*

ASEA’s activities are well targeted to achieve its objectives however greater activity could be directed to homeowners and DIY renovators beyond education and awareness such as exploring how to increase engagement of local government. Homeowners and DIY renovators was consistently raised at the 2018 ASEA conference and it may be valuable to explore more creative solutions in future.

1. *What are the Agency’s strengths and key achievements? What are its weaknesses?*

The Agency effectively engages with other organisations and departments and actively identifies opportunities to support collaborative action. An example of this is the Agency’s role as secretariat of the HWSA Imported Materials with Asbestos Working Group and development of the Rapid Response Protocol. ASEA’s expertise and support in this role facilitated effective collaboration which led to the establishment of an agreed response process. In terms of imported materials containing asbestos, ASEA has played a valuable role in driving action at the source through promoting international bans and greater border controls.

ASEA’s other key achievements include improving state of knowledge and community awareness through the national asbestos awareness survey, the national website and sharing research findings. However, greater engagement with relevant stakeholders on research topics could assist in addressing gaps in data, and any emerging risks/challenges being faced across jurisdictions.

An ongoing challenge for ASEA is to ensure that the NSP and Agency’s activities on balance reflect an evidence-based approach that considers the legislative framework and regulatory environment.

1. *Is the Agency doing work outside its functions under the Act? If so, is this work valuable and should it be continued and provided for under the Act, or should it be discontinued/performed by other organisations? If so, which organisations?*

The Agency’s activities and work align with the functions provided for under the Act.

1. *Is the Agency not doing work that it should be? Are there gaps in the national framework that ASEA should fill?*

No gaps in work or the national framework have been identified.

*Section 2. The Agency’s relationship with the NSP*

1. *What should the Agency’s role and functions be in relation to the NSP?*

The Agency’s role and functions in relation to the NSP should be to extensively consult with all relevant stakeholders, organisations and agencies in the development of the plan, support stakeholders in implementation of the plan, monitor progress, review and amend the plan to meet new priorities/challenges, as well as lead reporting requirements.

1. *Is the purpose and focus of the NSP clearly defined in the Act? What amendments would be appropriate?*

The purpose and focus of the NSP is clearly defined in the Act, however greater clarity could be provided on ASEA’s role with respect to achieving this purpose; i.e. is the Agency’s role to support jurisdictions in meeting the deliverables of the NSP, or are there deliverables which ASEA will also actively work to achieve.

For example, ASEA aims to achieve improvements in education and information about asbestos by promoting new research and increasing awareness through the national website, event and annual conference. However other priority areas such as identification of asbestos material in the built environment and removal of asbestos containing material from government and commercial buildings falls within the scope of relevant authorities in each jurisdiction.

Clarification on ASEA’s role with respect to achieving NSP deliverables will create a stronger link between the Agency and the NSP, and avoid any confusion by setting clear expectations on responsibilities.

1. *Should the Act continue to prescribe the NSP ‘priority areas’? Should there be more flexibility for new priority areas?*

The Act should continue to prescribe priority areas to ensure that activity and resources are targeted to achievable outcomes. The absence of priority areas and a clear framework to address key issues may result in decreased stakeholder engagement and ambiguity on the purpose of the NSP. Greater flexibility for new priority areas could be considered to ensure that ASEA remains responsive to new and emerging issues, however this shouldn’t detract from existing priority areas and the focus of achieving change in these areas.

1. *Should the Agency’s functions be more specific in relation to, for example: information sharing, awareness raising, data collection, stakeholder engagement and coordination, international leadership?*

As mentioned above the Agency’s functions could be made clearer with respect to the extent that their activities are aimed at achieving the deliverables of the NSP or supporting other agencies and organisations in meeting the deliverables of the NSP.

*Section 3. Future challenges*

1. *What are the future challenges facing asbestos management and awareness in Australia?*

In addition to the challenges identified in the consultation document which include severe weather events, DIY renovations and fragmented supply chains other challenges include incentivised recycling and increased tip levies which create the risk of contaminated materials being reused and increased demolition from rapid urbanisation.

1. *What should the Agency’s role and functions be in relation to the future challenges?*

ASEA should continue to conduct and share research in these areas to better understand the risk and share best practice approaches with relevant agencies/organisations.

*Section 4. Agency Name*

1. *Does the title of the Agency clearly reflect its role?*

Victoria considers the title ‘Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency’ reflects the aim of the NSP which is to prevent exposure to asbestos fibres in order to eliminate asbestos-related disease in Australia.

1. *If not, what alternative title should be considered?*

N/A