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MEDIA RELEASE

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**ASBESTOS IMPORTS REVIEW WELCOME
BUT OVERDUE**

After five months of denial and inaction, the Border Protection Minister, Peter Dutton, has finally shown interest in the importation of deadly asbestos products into Australia.

I questioned the Border Force Commissioner, Roman Quaedvlieg, at Senate Estimates in October, and called for much stronger measures to prevent and detect asbestos imports into Australia.

Commissioner Quaedvlieg assured me that everything necessary was being done. But five months later, Mr Dutton finally seems to have realised how serious and these issues are.

KGH Border Services has been appointed to conduct an independent review of asbestos border control management, including the ABF's processes and procedures.

The review is well overdue. Mr Dutton must ensure it progresses as quickly as possible so that detection and testing of products containing this deadly product can be urgently improved.

While ABF Customs officers do a committed and diligent job, it's clear that some imported asbestos products have been making it past their safeguards.

There is no such thing as safe asbestos, and no room for complacency. There's also no room for an incompetent hands-off Minister putting lives at risk.

The Asbestos Safety and Eradication has said there is no guarantee that Australian buildings constructed after 2003 are completely free of asbestos, and Commissioner Quaedvlieg has agreed with that assessment.

The manufacture, use or importation of asbestos in Australia was banned on December 31st, 2003.

However, in recent developments:

- The Asbestos Industry Association has expressed concerns that the ABF is testing fewer than five per cent of products coming into Australia, and Customs officials are over-reliant on documentation stating that products are asbestos-free.
- Authorities found traces of asbestos in imported childrens' crayons that had made it into Australia, prompting an urgent recall effort with retailers.
- Figures obtained from the ABF show there were eight *detected* instances of asbestos being imported into Australia between September 2014 and May 2015.
- A number of imported building products tested positive for asbestos in 2015, including cement compound board arriving from China in August.

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