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Statement on mine safety and underground dust monitoring

NSW Minerals Council CEO Dr Nikki Williams today said that the health and safety of the State's miners was and always would be the industry's top priority.

The Chief Mines Inspector has accredited a new service provider to test the quality of air breathed by underground coal miners. This is in addition to the service offered by Coal Services Australia, in which the NSW Minerals Council is a 50 percent shareholder with the CFMEU.

Dr Williams said that having other companies accredited to monitor dust in underground mines would not in principle diminish safety standards.

"The obligation to conduct testing hasn't changed and the high standard for those tests hasn't changed. Any new supplier must undertake testing in accordance with the law and in line with the standards met by other companies," Dr Williams said.

"The suggestion that this change could lead to a loss of confidence in health and safety in mining seems a long bow to draw. People have been using pathology and x-ray services from 3rd party providers for years and that hasn't caused the community to lose confidence in our public health system.

"The health and safety standards in NSW are some of the toughest in the world and we have a regulator that ensures those standards are maintained and enforced.

"Industry, unions and regulators have worked tirelessly over many years to first control and now eradicate black lung disease in NSW. We now have world-leading standards and procedures for managing dust in underground coal mines.

"The Australian minerals industry has the best safety record in the world. The latest NSW data shows that in 2009-10 there were no fatalities and a continuing downward trend for serious injuries.

"But we will not rest on our laurels. That's why industry leaders – unions, companies and regulators – agreed at a recent high-level safety summit that a vision of 'zero harm' must continue to be part of our shared commitment to the thousands of men and women working in the minerals industry.

"The industry, unions and the regulator have a strong working relationship and together we will continue to strive for a world-leading OHS culture."

Dr Williams said the NSW Minerals Council also welcomed the opportunity to finally start a dialogue with the NSW Government on the long-awaited Macken Report on the conduct of NSW DPI Mine Safety Investigators.

ENDS.

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