Michelle Baxter: 00:06 Good afternoon everyone. It's a real pleasure to be here at the Singapore WSH Conference 2018. So, today I'm going to give you some insights into how we approach Work, Health and Safety in Australia and how we're tackling the changing face of Work, Health and Safety that's being caused by new and emerging workforce trends. So, I'm very proud of the system that we've got in Australia. It's the product of much hard work, consultation, collaboration, and innovation. And over the past 10 years there's been a steady decline in workplace fatalities and injuries, which simply inspires us to work harder to make that decline even steeper.

Michelle Baxter: 00:45 So, in about 2011 Safe Work Australia developed a single set of model work, Work, Health and Safety laws for implementation by each of the governments of Australia. Most governments in Australia have done this and it's through this that we have broadly achieved national harmonisation of Work, Health and Safety in Australia. This is no mean feat in a country that's as large and as diverse as Australia and with its multiplicity of independent systems of government. There isn't one central federal government in Australia that controls everything, there are a number of jurisdictions and each of those had to implement the model Work, Health and Safety laws through its own parliament. There are two very important principles that underpin the Work, Health and Safety act. The first is the hierarchy of risk control and the second is good work design. So, I'm sure in terms of the hierarchy of risk control, you're all very familiar with that.

Michelle Baxter: 01:35 So, in Australia the onus is placed on what's called the person conducting the business or undertaking, the PCBU. (It) used to be the employer but it's shifted slightly to select and implement measures as close to the top of the hierarchy as far as reasonably practicable, such as elimination of the hazard or substituting the hazard with a safer alternative. And then the second principle is good work design, and this really does underpin the Australian approach to Work, Health and Safety. Good work design sits at the very top of the hierarchy of risk control and it means designing work, work systems, processes, and plant so that they are inherently safe. So that hazards and risks to workers’ safety don't even enter the workplace. Failure to consider how work is designed can be a breach of Australian Work, Health and Safety laws.

Michelle Baxter: 02:22 So, in Australia, we're very proud of the laws that govern the minimum standards to achieving Work, Health and Safety compliance. But we want more than just compliance. We pursue the ideal of Best Practice to reach far beyond compliance and to ask ourselves, okay, what's the next challenge? What are the new things that we can learn? How can we further innovate? And what more can we do to protect workers? Because work is changing, so must we. So we started a process in 2012 by developing the Australian Work, Health and Safety strategy, which is a 2012 to 2022 strategy. It's a forward thinking, long-term national strategy. It's halfway through at the moment, which promotes the vision of healthy, safe and productive working lives and provides measurable targets to be achieved by 2022. It places focus on a set of priority industries and that's those that experience the highest number of fatalities and industries, injuries, I beg your pardon, and places the emphasis on designing workplaces and work so that they are inherently safe.

Michelle Baxter: 03:22 The National Strategy drives work nationally so that all of the Work, Health, Safety regulators across Australia have a common objective and a common aim to work towards. So, I said earlier, work is changing and so must we. What I'd like to do now is talk about the ageing workforce, automation, the rise of artificial intelligence, remote surveillance, telehealth, global communication, gig economy. These have all shown on us that industries, markets and workforces can change with astonishing speed. So, our works now digitised or relies heavily on digitised capability. How work is done will involve more humans interacting with more machines and technology. And this, without doubt, is going to bring new and unexpected challenges, but also opportunities for improving Work, Health and Safety. In particular, we're on the cusp of discovering exactly what impacts the changing face of work will have on the mental health of our workers. This is really important and I'll come to this a little bit later in a bit more detail. It's clear we stand at a new frontier for workplace safety.

Michelle Baxter: 04:30 So, in Australia, we did some work with a body that's called the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, CSIRO for short. And we had a look at the challenges and opportunities for Work, Health and Safety presented by this new frontier. We looked into the future and over the coming 20 years and identified six megatrends that will disrupt and change the work done in Australia. So, the big questions for everyone in this room is, if work is changing, do our Work, Health and Safety and workers' compensation systems as well, do they also need to change? Or, are the existing systems robust enough to cope with the powerful forces of change and disruption? So, the resulting Workplace Safety Futures report provides an intriguing insight into the future of Australian working life. But that was just the start of the conversation. So, as policymakers, the report gives us a context that we need to discuss what we want Work, Health and Safety and workers' compensation to look like in the future and also how to get there.

Michelle Baxter: 05:31 So, I'd like to spend just a very little amount of time at the moment looking into those six workforce megatrends that were identified in the report and the impacts that are predicted as a result on workplace safety. Before, I'm going to just give a bit more detail on one of the megatrends. So, megatrend one, advanced automotive technologies offer a plethora of challenges and opportunities to workplace safety. Robots are getting smarter, cheaper, more common. They're going to become more prevalent in our working places. The cost is going to fall, we're going to see them a lot more. But automation can make workplaces safer. A great recent example for out of Australia is that one of the State Work, Health, Safety regulators offered farmers the opportunity to access a virtual reality training package to improve their safety on quad bikes. Quad bike fatality and injury in Australia is a significant issue both in the agricultural industry and in the recreational industry.

Michelle Baxter: 06:32 New work's going to evolve, so while artificial intelligence and robots might be able to take on the load of repetitive, routine work that humans find boring, without doubt new types of work requiring skills will evolve. Jobs that aren't replaced by technology are going to change and humans are going to have to redevelop and redefine their skill sets. And this is going to have an impact on worker mental health. So, if machines can do the least stimulating, the least satisfying jobs in the workplace, the positions of value will increasingly be the ones involving more human-oriented traits such as interpersonal skills, creative reasoning, etcetera. But this may result in people spending a greater proportion of their working lives on higher functioning and more stressful tasks. And additionally, we anticipate that automation will enable employers to more frequently deploy automated worker surveillance and time management systems. This could also cause stress for workers.

Michelle Baxter: 07:29 In Australia, sedentary behaviors are observed across most industries and can lead to chronic disease including depression, diabetes, cardiovascular disease. Chronic disease is the leading cause of illness, disability and death in Australia. Sedentary work is increasing and will likely further increase as new technologies push humans away from physical work. As we look into the future, we see a trend towards a service-oriented economy that coincides with the growth in white collar occupations. And white collar occupations are often the most sedentary, associated with higher risks to health. Telework's increasing in popularity. This means employers increasingly have very limited visibility or control of the physical workplace. There's also a complex relationship with mental health. If it's not managed correctly, teleworking can be quite stressful. It can make the employee feel a further or greater distance from the workplace and from the employer. There can be increased workloads. There's a number of issues that come with telework.

Michelle Baxter: 08:39 The gig economy. So, we all know about the gig economy, it operates under an entirely different business model to that which we are used to. And in particular that which traditional Work, Health and Safety is used to. There's a lot of discussion about whether gig economy workers, are contractors or employees under the Australian Work Health Safety laws, that's pretty much taken care of. They're either going to be a person conducting a business or undertaking, or they're going to be somebody who is under the control and direction of a PCBU. The test for Australia will come in relation to workers’ compensation, so we are eagerly watching the US and England in particular who have had some cases come before the courts. But as with the other megatrends, there are mental health impacts for the gig economy as well. There's a precariousness inherent to gig work that we know can cause significant mental health impacts.

Michelle Baxter: 09:33 Ageing workforce. Since the 90s, there has been a steady increase in the number of older people participating in the workforce and this trend is likely to continue. There's some very interesting implications for work health and safety here. Firstly, those ageing workers in the workforce are going to need more support from the healthcare sector to keep them fit and healthy to participate in the workforce. In Australia, that accounts for 13.5% of our national workforce and it has the highest rate of workers’ compensation claims for serious disease and injury. That's the highest rate of any industry in Australia. Also, older workers are, in the main, more likely to encounter age discrimination, bullying and mental health issues. This brings me to the last, or the final, megatrend, the rising issue of workplace stress and mental health issues. So, each megatrend I've described will disrupt and change the face of Work, Health and Safety in Australia over the next 20 years and all have a potential impact on mental health in the workplace.

Michelle Baxter: 10:37 The most important thing is the work related stress and mental health issues are increasing in the Australian workforce. They cost more, it takes longer to treat people, it takes longer for people to return to work. This is a significant issue and these issues are common through the six megatrends that I've just galloped through. So, at Safe Work Australia we asked ourselves, does our current legal framework provide adequate guidance to employers regarding mental health in the workplace? The legal framework does provide guidance to employers in the workplace, but the feedback we were getting is employers wanted more information about how to comply with those duties and those responsibilities. As a result, we developed a National Guide to Work Related Psychological Health and Safety. And it sets out very clearly what the known causes of psychological injury in the workplace are, and also talks about what employers PCBU's can do in the workplace to try and prevent psychosocial injuries.

Michelle Baxter: 11:43 I talked earlier about a desire at Safe Work Australia to move beyond mere compliance and work towards embedding Work, Health and Safety best practice in all Australian workplaces. I'm emphasising this because by focussing on best practice over compliance, we keep the most important thing front and centre, and that's the inalienable right of a worker, regardless of their occupation or how they're engaged to a healthy and safe working environment. So I've talked a lot today about challenges and opportunities of the changing face of work. I think we all now stand on the threshold of one of the greatest opportunities for Work, Health and Safety. We know that designing work safely from the outset is the most robust way of ensuring workers safety and it makes workplaces more efficient and more productive. And work is right now, as we speak, being redesigned. What an unparalleled, unique and exciting opportunity for us, as Work, Health and Safety professionals here in this room, to actively guide in this change and collectively redesign how work is done, ensuring that worker safety is always placed front and centre. And that's the challenge for everyone here today. Thank you.