

Patricia Karvelas, Political correspondent | December 10, 2008  
Article from: The Australian

JULIA Gillard has taken the political fight to the nation's boardrooms, with a letter to Australia's top 100 companies in which she attacks Malcolm Turnbull for destroying the chances of setting up a new workplace safety regulator and harmonising occupational safety laws.

The Opposition and minor parties in the Senate have insisted on amendments to increase employer and union representatives on the new body Safe Work Australia and prevent the minister from being able to veto appointments to the body.

But Ms Gillard has rejected all of these changes and has taken the unusual step of setting the bill aside altogether.

Her letter said: "Put bluntly, there is a significant risk that the Opposition's actions in not supporting the Safe Work Australia Bill 2008 may see the opportunity to harmonise Australia's Occupational Health and Safety legislation lost for years to come.

"If you share my concerns I urge you to contact the Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP, Leader of the Opposition, about the party's failure to support such an important economic reform."

Ms Gillard argued the amendments would undermine an agreement between the states and commonwealth and delay national occupational health and safety laws.

Opposition industrial relations spokesman Michael Keenan said Ms Gillard was drunk on power and had ignored the fact that even the ACTU supported the Coalition's amendments.

"It is a telling fact that the ACTU strongly supports our amendments," he said. "In the Senate, the amendments were supported by every non-government senator -- the Greens and the independent senators. I ask you this -- how often do you see the Coalition, the Greens, Senator (Nick) Xenophon and the ACTU in agreement?"

He said the Coalition was wrongly being accused of jeopardising a harmonised national occupational health and safety system.

"We are also told that the minister will now write to the top 200 companies in the country and explain to them how the Coalition has allegedly stood in the way of a national system," he said to business leaders yesterday.

"This is kindergarten politics -- if you don't do things my way ... I am going to take my bat and ball and go home."