Mr Chairman,

The Australian Government considers one of its fundamental responsibilities is to safeguard Australians from the threat of WMD proliferation. There can be no doubt that this is among the gravest threats confronting not just Australia, but the entire international community.

Too often, however, international security affairs can seem remote from the day-to-day lives of citizens – the subject of discourse among academics and experts. But the reality, especially with regard to WMD proliferation, is very different. For this reason, non-proliferation education is an important element of the Australian Government’s efforts to safeguard Australians from the threat of WMD proliferation.

Last week, Australia’s Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, launched a publication titled Weapons of Mass Destruction: Australia’s Role in Fighting Proliferation. It describes the nature of the WMD threat and what the Australian Government is doing to confront it. It seeks to contribute to debate within Australia on non-proliferation issues, although delegations will surely find it useful and informative.

The need for such publications is underscored by the complexity of the themes within the Australian document. The global security environment has changed markedly since the end of the Cold War. Globalisation has increased the opportunities for states to acquire or develop WMD. Moreover, with the rise of trans-national terrorism, we confront the menace of terrorists fulfilling their desire to obtain and use WMD.

In this complex global environment, government strategies must be multidimensional and whole-of-government. This is precisely the approach taken by the Australian Government, as is explained in the publication. Internationally, Australia is working to strengthen the implementation and durability of the international system of non-proliferation treaties. And we support practical initiatives, such as the PSI, UNSCR 1540 and export control regimes which support further these treaties.

Domestically, the Australian Government has strengthened controls against the risk of WMD terrorism. And critically, the Government is stepping up its engagement with Australian business and universities to improve their awareness of proliferation risks associated with exports of sensitive materials and the transfer of know-how through person-to-person contacts.

Mr Chairman,

The international community can ill afford the perils of WMD proliferation. In tackling this threat, we must ensure greater understanding about its nature, the importance of making full use of the range of tools developed to curb the spread of WMD, and the need for strengthened international cooperation, through a concerted educative effort.