

Thursday, 28 June 2018

## Australian-first Modern Slavery Bill celebrated

The Law Council has today welcomed the introduction of the first federal Modern Slavery Bill in Australia by the Australian Government.

The proposed Modern Slavery Bill contains provisions for supply chain reporting that encourages certain entities, with an annual consolidated revenue of more than \$100 million, to report on modern slavery risks in their supply chains.

Law Council President, Morry Bailes, said addressing modern slavery in Australia was paramount in eliminating slavery and slavery-like conditions globally.

“It is estimated that millions of people worldwide are held in slavery or in slavery-like conditions, however modern slavery is not an issue confined to the third world,” Mr Bailes said.

“There are people living in slavery-like conditions in Australia today. This may include forced labour, wage exploitation, involuntary servitude, debt bondage, human trafficking, forced marriage and other slavery-like exploitation.”

The Law Council has long-supported the establishment of a Modern Slavery Act and welcomed the inclusion of a Modern Slavery Reporting Requirement however, expressed disappointment that the Bill does not include:

- an Anti-Slavery Commissioner to provide guidance and a mechanism through which concerns regarding company operations in relation to human rights violations or modern slavery may occur;
- a proposed revenue threshold for reporting requirements, set no higher than \$60 million (rather than the proposed \$100 million);
- penalties for non-compliance with the legislation; and
- access to a national redress scheme for victims of modern slavery.

“Victims of modern slavery are often vulnerable and without appropriate support. They tend to be found in domestic work, hospitality, agriculture, construction and sadly include a number of women trafficked from Asia for sex work,” Mr Bailes said.

“A national redress scheme would provide effective remedy for victims of modern slavery and compensation for the harm they have suffered.

“The inclusion of an Anti-Slavery Commissioner in Australia would also be a useful point of contact for all matters relevant to Modern Slavery in Australia. A Commissioner could provide community outreach and education to stakeholders involved in Australia's response to modern slavery, including law enforcement, civil society and the private sector.”

Mr Bailes said the absence of enforceable penalties for non-compliance was counter-productive.

“There ought to be some guarantee, in the Law Council's view, that companies will comply with this legislation and take the steps necessary to stamp-out modern slavery in their supply chains. The most effective way to ensure that, is to include substantial penalties for non-compliance,” Mr Bailes said.

Law Council submissions to [Establishing A Modern Slavery Act in Australia](#) and [Modern Slavery in Supply Chains Reporting Requirement](#) are available online.

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