



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the Modern Slavery Legislation Amendment Bill 2023

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To the Committee

MODERN SLAVERY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2023

The ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS) welcomes the opportunity to respond to proposed amendments to modern slavery legislation. ACTCOSS advocates for social justice in the ACT and represents not-for-profit community organisations. Our vision is that Canberra is a just, safe and sustainable community in which everyone has the opportunity for self-determination and a fair share of resources and services. ACTCOSS is in favour of the changes to the legislation, as it is important that respect for human rights and a strong stance against labour exploitation and slavery is modelled through laws governing business operations in both the private and public sector.

A requirement for Territory entities to submit voluntary Commonwealth modern slavery statements is a positive step towards protecting the rights of workers globally and locally through improving the quality of supply chain security and promoting the elimination of worker exploitation, which unfortunately still occurs in Australia. Bringing the ACT into line with NSW through appointing an Anti-Slavery Commissioner will assist in ensuring that compliance is taken seriously and that improvements in supply chain quality are not left by the wayside as an “out of sight, out of mind” practice. A Human Rights Law Centre report titled [Broken Promises](#) found that after two years of Commonwealth mandated modern slavery statement reporting, only 6% of companies had taken proactive action to reduce the risk of supporting modern slavery through their supply chains. The report also highlights that the risk of companies supporting modern slavery is not limited to overseas suppliers, and that the Australian horticulture industry carries serious risks, largely due to the exploitation and abuse of migrant workers holding temporary visas. This is significant particularly for government-owned enterprise supply chains, as it makes clear that the use of on-shore suppliers does not guarantee compliance with anti-exploitation legislation.

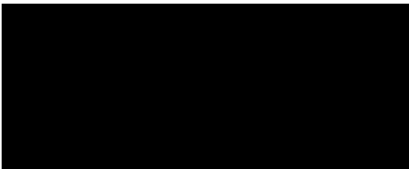
ACTCOSS is also supportive of the proposed educational and iterative approach to the legislative amendments if this approach is administered effectively. While enforcement-based approaches to reporting and compliance are generally ineffective, education must not be a simple and easily disregarded exercise. To progress the project of reducing complicity in worker exploitation, it is necessary to engage with government entities on a regular basis. It



would be prudent for the proposed Anti-Slavery Commissioner to produce regular reports to ensure that engagement with the legislation is leading to improvements in overall practice as well as with Commonwealth reporting guideline compliance, and that this information is available to the public.

We view this legislation as an opportunity to further the ACT's commitment to uphold human rights, and for the ACT Government to more closely consider their responsibilities to defend the rights of workers in procurement supply chains as a significant priority.

Yours sincerely



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