



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 ACT Standing Commitment on Public Accounts - Inquiry into the Modern Slavery Legislation Amendment Bill

Sydney, 21st April 2023

Submitted by: The Freedom Hub Ltd.



F R E E D O M

— H U B —

About the Freedom Hub

The Freedom Hub is a non-profit organisation with the goal to ;

- To end slavery in Australia;
- Help victims of this crime rebuild their life; and
- Partner in the fight to end global slavery.

Our unique feature is that we run our business with the aim being to provide funds that support the Freedom Hub Survivor School. Through the Survivor School, people who have been victims of slavery receive long-term support throughout their rehabilitation process. We support survivors across NSW, the ACT and Queensland, and identified survivors needing services across Victoria and Western Australia.

As a social enterprise, we have become renowned for our ethical procurement policies and collaborative partnerships with businesses who have ethical values. Our strong focus is on helping others develop corporate ethical skills and run their business accordingly.

We have been running our business since 2014. Because of this success, we are proud recipients of the 2019 Sydney City Regional Business Award for Excellence in Social Enterprise and the 2022 Third Sector Awards Social Entrepreneur of the Year.

Our corporate advisory services, café, catering, and event venue not only raise funds, but also become a focal point for community involvement and awareness.

Preliminary Comments

For the purpose of this Inquiry, the Freedom Hub would like to primarily respond as a survivor service provider.

We welcome the new Act and the territory's commitment to human rights and combating modern slavery. This bill is a strong foundation for territory entities to end embed human rights due diligence into the everyday.

This bill in parallel to the NSW Modern Slavery Act set up a national coalition of reporting government entities reporting under a single reporting framework. This systematised response network can improve the consistency of reporting and data collection across Australia and allow businesses and advocates to identify emerging best practice principles.

Our Response

Two key areas of concern for our organisation are related to the quality of reporting, remediation, and survivor voice.

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In the current modern slavery statement submission processes does not include a public facing assessment criteria, which means when a statement is provided to a procurement professional they do not have a centralised reference if the statement is compliant with the Act or the quality of actions detailed in the statement. Many are relying on third party (non-profit or academic) assessments to assess the quality of statements, but these lists are not exhaustive.

In the anti-slavery commissioner role, there should be resources dedicated to ensure all territory entity submissions are compliant with the *Commonwealth Modern Slavery Act 2018* reporting criteria. In addition, the actions determined by territory entities should be vetted by the commissioner to ensure that they are in alignment with international best practice standards, including the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, to promote human rights due diligence in territory entities

The anti-slavery commissioner role should also have capacity to assess modern slavery statements supplied to territory entities for key projects as part of tender due diligence. In order to progress through the tendering process, businesses should demonstrate a baseline understanding of their modern slavery risk, and actions they will be taking over the lifetime of the project.

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The legislation states that the budgeting for the anti-slavery commissioner's office will be an administrative decision within the ACT Human Rights Commission. The Freedom Hub recommends that allocating a budget to allow for remediation activities would be impactful in the lives of victims/survivors.

We know modern slavery can occur to anyone in a position of vulnerability, and in our Survivor School program we know survivors of modern slavery who could not access crisis response services because they do not meet specific criteria, including Australian citizens who survived slavery

If the commissioner has access to resources to provide crisis support in complex cases of exploitation, it would help service providers build trust with survivors and increase the likelihood of their case proceeding to criminal prosecution.

Alternatively, territory entities could be responsible for allocating a remediation budget. This allocation could be held on to by higher risk entities to fund victim identification and incident response. Lower risk entities could use the funding to support ACT based community advocates and service providers working with survivors of slavery in the Territory.

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Finally survivors are the key stakeholder of Australia's modern slavery response, and their lived experience is vital for the evolution of effective policy. The anti-slavery commissioner should have an imperative to engage survivors.

Engaging survivors of slavery is complex, as we operate on the principle of "do no harm" and do not want to risk the retraumatisation or non-consensual public identification of a survivor. Care providers and advocacy programs can allow pathways for survivor voice and safe spaces for engagement.

It is important for survivor engagement that all non-government service providers have embedded trauma informed care principles into their processes. This can help the survivor advocate engage with the policy process in a manner that is less likely to result in triggers or retraumatisation of the individual. Our Survivor Advisory Board is designed with trauma informed care resources while maintaining survivor privacy.