



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 Standing Committee on Public Accounts
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Dear Committee members in the ACT Legislative Assembly,

Re: Committee inquiry into my Modern Slavery Legislation Amendment Bill 2023

Personal history

I have ancestors who were enmeshed in the slavery and itinerant worker enterprise of the British empire. My descendents, from British India made their way to South Africa in slave-like conditions, to the country where I was born. I have been an advocate in the modern slavery sector, namely as a former board director with Be Slavery Free (BSF). With BSF I have been on a modern slavery tour through Cambodia and Thailand.

Australia tainted by slavery and growing global scourge

We know that modern slavery is part of Australia's past and present.

British government compensation schemes for slave owning families trickled down to Australia. That compensation fuelled early investments by pastoralists and merchants in the colonies. Those business people, leading figures, brought ideas and practises from across the Empire about the experience of slavery. They had unfree labourers. Further, convicts supplied slave labour after settlement. In the decades leading up to Federation, people from Pacific islands were kidnapped and forced to work on Queensland sugar plantations, often alongside stolen first Australians who worked as housekeepers. They worked and lived in slave-like conditions; for little or no money as stolen wages.

There are big markers in the human history of emancipation, such as the end of the formal slave-trade two centuries ago, in the 1830s. But since then, governments around the world have not got on top the challenge of a new and insidious wave of modern slavery. There are

significant reports of modern slavery in diverse environments, from awful forms of child labour and in the cocoa fields of west Africa, state-enforced forced labour in cotton harvesting through in Turkmenistan and Xinjiang China, as well as trafficking in the long haul fishing from Taiwan and unacceptable exploitation in [Canberra's embassies](#) and brothels.

Modern slavery is a human rights issue that includes abuses from forced labour, bonded labour and human trafficking, to servitude and child labour. There are more slaves today than at any time in history. Slavery is expanding fastest in the Indo-Pacific, the area connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans through Southeast Asia where a lot of Australian consumed goods are made.

Why act?

All jurisdictions have a moral obligation to do what they can.

Modern slavery is still largely hidden in plain sight. Practices are not hidden as such but we often don't see them at all because of systems that don't encourage business or consumer to look for modern slavery. In Australia, those most at risk are migrant workers, especially women, sent here through unscrupulous agents.

The Committee must know that there remains suggestive and damaging patterns of modern slavery, which can be disrupted by the way governments choose to spend their budget and how consumers purchase everyday goods and services.

And while there is a Commonwealth Modern Slavery Act, playing a role in providing more transparency in business supply chains, there is a role for states and territories also, certainly the ACT with its progressive electorate that would surely back moves to increase responsible procurement and business practice consistent with international human rights and the Territory's own Human Rights Act.

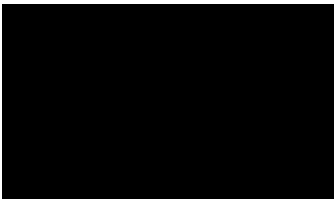
Red tape?

You will hear some in business say that new regulations will pile on red tape. But it's in every business' interest to have an effective reporting and compliance regime. What will be asked of business is minuscule compared with the reporting already required of them and can be leveraged to promote their business as ethical, responsible and sustainable. Governments, both at Commonwealth and state/territory level can and should support business to understand and report on supply chains with a view to preventing modern slavery and to learn from each other about best practice.

Conditions for local policy success

For the ACT modern slavery Act to work, there must be resources for preparing business and the public service, resources for education and training and resources to monitor and evaluate the success of the legislation. I recommend an envoy to business in the ACT, led by other business people with experience in modern slavery awareness, corporate responsibility and prevention. Ultimately there has to be sustained leadership to steer the process - animated by partnerships across politics and with other jurisdictions, and complimentary measures that reduce poverty which sees vulnerable people enslaved in the first place.

All the best with the inquiry, with my best wishes,



Toni Hassan

9th May, 2023