



ACAN Submissions to a Review of the Commonwealth Modern Slavery Act

28 November 2022 - The Australian Catholic Anti-Slavery Network (ACAN) made important submissions to government in relation to a Review of the Commonwealth Modern Slavery Act (MSA) 2018. With 51 Catholic entities participating in ACAN from health and aged-care, education, community and social services, finance and investment the Catholic response to modern slavery is of national significance. An estimated \$4 billion of goods and services procured by ACAN entities are at high-risk of being produced and provided by people experiencing modern slavery. These include medical devices and supplies, construction materials and labour, technology hardware, cleaning and security services, uniforms/linens/textiles, furniture and office supplies, to name a few.

The MSA requires businesses and not-for-profit entities with an annual consolidated revenue of \$100 million to take effective measures to assess and address modern slavery risks to people in their supply chains and operations. These measures must be documented in an annual Modern Slavery Statement, approved and signed by Boards and/or Bishops. These Modern Slavery Statements are then submitted to a public Commonwealth Online Register of Modern Slavery Statements. Every annual Modern Slavery Statement must address in detail, seven mandatory reporting criteria, including measuring the effectiveness of actions taken to address risk. Continuous improvement is also an MSA requirement. ACAN entities are completing their third reporting period at the end 2022. The ACAN 2022 Compendium of Modern Slavery Statements will be submitted to the Online Register of Modern Slavery Statements by mid-2023.

Professor John MacMillan, AO is leading the MSA *Review*, supported by the Attorney-General's Department. Consultations with 281 businesses, non-profits, unions, academics and non-government organisations have taken place across Australia; including with ACAN. These consultations have helped Professor MacMillan to hear first-hand about real-world experiences of complying with the MSA. A Review Report with recommendations for improving implementation of the MSA will be provided in late March 2023.

ACAN submissions are based on the experiences of Modern Slavery Liaison Officers (MSLOs) who have been nominated to direct modern slavery risk management within their entity. MSLOs were surveyed on a range of issues outlined in the MSA Review Discussion Paper.

It is anticipated that most reporting entities will support the following recommendations:

1. An Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner be established to drive compliance with the Act, engage and support reporting entities and community awareness of modern slavery
2. Penalties, including fines, be imposed on entities that do not comply with the MSA or fail to report

It is unclear if the Review will recommend that the revenue threshold for reporting will be reduced, thereby, covering many more entities. It is also unclear if mandatory due diligence measures will be recommended to add focus and accelerate the efforts of reporting entities.

With 50 million people trapped in modern slavery today it is clear that ACAN must urgently continue its collective efforts to create the “economy of care” that Pope Francis has called for. This economy will offer products and services for the growth of the common good and guarantee dignified working conditions for all.



Image: ACAN Staff with Professor John McMillan (centre)

For more information visit www.acan.org.au or contact antislavery@sydneycatholic.org