



## New Commissioner needs specific powers to lead modern slavery response

24 January 2024

Program managers of the Australian Catholic Anti-slavery Network (ACAN) are calling for an independent Australian Anti-Slavery Commissioner with the power and sufficient resources to do their job effectively.

Legislation to create the Commissioner role is currently before the Parliament.

While welcoming the new role, ACAN Program Manager Alison Rahill said the proposed job description is missing important practical powers.

“The ability for a Commissioner to ensure individuals, groups and cohorts of people impacted by modern slavery crimes are identified, and have access to best practice remediation response needs to be part of the Commissioner’s role,” Ms Rahill said. “The role that’s defined in the legislation does not do that.”

“Another major omission is the oversight of the public sector’s modern slavery response.”

“A Commissioner needs the authority to set standards and require greater due diligence in public procurement processes. The Commissioner also needs the ability to monitor and report on the effectiveness of public sector controls against modern slavery.”

Ms Rahill said ACAN staff’s recommendations were based on their extensive experience educating Catholic organisations about compliance activities.

“Since the commencement of the Modern Slavery Act five years ago, ACAN has led Australia’s most comprehensive response to the Act across a broad network.”

“We work with more than 95 Catholic entities and by the end of this next reporting period we will have submitted more than 150 Modern Slavery Statements in line with statutory reporting requirements to assess, address and mitigate the risk of modern slavery in operations and supply chains.

“We have developed and rolled out the ACAN modern slavery risk management program with shared tools and resources to drive change in procurement policy, practice and procedure.

“We engage directly with 86,000 individual suppliers across all categories of procurement, and require a high level of transparency about each individual supplier’s own operations, employment practices and supply chains.

“The Modern Slavery Statements also capture the annual activities of Catholic organisations who engage suppliers in high risk categories for modern slavery, such as construction, facilities management, cleaning, labour hire services, ICT and uniforms.

“Many of these suppliers to Catholic entities also supply to the public sector, but as yet there is not enough detailed information about the public sector’s risk management processes to assess whether public sector controls are having an impact.”



“The public sector is the largest procurer of goods and services in Australia, so for a holistic response to modern slavery to be effective, Australia needs an Anti-Slavery Commissioner with the authority and resources to demand best practice public procurement,” Ms Rahill said.

“A best practice benchmark set by the Anti-Slavery Commissioner for the public sector would complement and reinforce modern slavery risk mitigation steps already taken by ACAN entities and date and create a stronger compliance culture nationally.”

“Collaboration and accountability across government and non-government sectors will be essential if we are to eradicate forced labour and modern slavery.”

The ACAN submission to a Senate inquiry *The Modern Slavery Amendment (Australian Anti-Slavery Commissioner) Bill 2023*, recommends a number of amendments.

Recommendations include the ability for the Commissioner to develop specific codes of practice for high risk goods; the authority and resources to issue meaningful reports across all reporting entities; and the power to specify that certain goods or commercial activities be reported in Modern Slavery Statements as global issues arise.

In a statement provided as part of the ACAN submission, ACAN survivor consultant Moe Turaga hailed the creation of an Australian Anti-slavery Commissioner as an important step forward.

“People who are struggling in situations of modern slavery and the people who are trying to help them really need to feel someone from the federal government is in their corner,” Mr Turaga said.

“Based on my own work with the Office of the NSW Anti-Slavery Commissioner, I’ve seen firsthand how a public advocate can improve awareness and collaboration.

“Clearer pathways and remedies for people escaping modern slavery, greater accountability across supply chains, and giving survivors a voice are all achievable benefits of a federal Anti-Slavery Commissioner.”

Link to submission on ACAN webpage:

<https://www.acan.org.au/news/inquiry-into-the-modern-slavery-amendment-australian-anti-slavery-commissioner-bill-2023-provisions>

**ACAN Program Manager Alison Rahill emphasised the importance of an Australian Anti-Slavery Commissioner in an interview with Sky News on Monday 24 January.**

<https://vimeo.com/905386934>



### **The ACAN Program**

Over 95 Catholic entities participate in the ACAN Program with modern slavery risk management activities recorded in 41 Modern Slavery Statements. Ten of these entities submit Modern Slavery Statements despite having annual revenue below the reporting threshold, in solidarity with Catholic reporting entities, through their commitment to build strong culture and practice to assess and address the risk of modern slavery in their operations and supply chains.

ACAN is supported by peak associations, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, National Catholic Education Commission, Catholic Schools NSW, Catholic Education Western Australia, Catholic Education Commission of Victoria, Catholic Health Australia and Catholic Social Services Australia.

The protection of the dignity of workers everywhere is fundamental Catholic Social Teaching and ACAN entities are united in their commitment to act against modern slavery.

Compendium of ACAN Modern Slavery Statements:

<https://www.acan.org.au/acan-modern-slavery-statements>

To discuss your Catholic entity's participation in ACAN Program, please contact:

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