



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC ANTI-SLAVERY NETWORK RELEASE
CHURCH AND STATE OUTLINE GREATER EXPECTATIONS OF MODERN SLAVERY RESPONSE

“As we confront the issue of modern slavery, we must do so through the lens of Catholic Social Teaching, ensuring that our actions are grounded in compassion, in justice and in solidarity.”

The Most Rev Brian Mascord
Bishop of Wollongong

Illawarra Business Forum, 23 April 2024

The Catholic Education Diocese of Wollongong has co-hosted a landmark business forum to build awareness with organisations about the risk of modern slavery.

The Illawarra Business Forum, facilitated by the Australian Catholic Anti-slavery Network (ACAN), shared the latest official advice and expertise of managing modern slavery risk in corporate operations and supply chains.

Procurement and governance experts from across the NSW South Coast attended, including representatives of Catholic schools and local suppliers. In opening the forum, Bishop of Wollongong, the Most Rev Brian Mascord described the issue of modern slavery as an urgent concern in an interconnected world.

“As we gather today, it’s imperative that we address this pressing issue with a comprehensive and collaborative approach,” Bishop Brian told those present.

Bishop Brian shared details of the Catholic Education Diocese of Wollongong’s work as part of the ACAN Modern Slavery Risk Management program, emphasising the importance of sharing resources to educate people about modern slavery.

“There will be people experiencing modern slavery in our local area, and we have to be honest and own that. But we also have to do something about it,” Bishop Brian said, going on explain the principles of Catholic Social Teaching to the audience.

“Human dignity, the foundational principle of Catholic Social Teaching, asserts that every person is created in the image and likeness of God and possesses an inherent worth and dignity. As such the exploitation and commodification of human beings through modern slavery are grave violations of this fundamental principle.”



A range of guest speakers covered a broad range of activities as part of the overall modern slavery response.

BlueScope Procurement Manager Noel Grant spoke of the importance of leadership in the early establishment of a responsible sourcing policy and framework, as well as code of conduct for BlueScope's many global suppliers.

Nicola Arvidson, Special Counsel at Colin Biggers & Paisley Lawyers, and an Advisory Board member at Domus 8.7 remediation service, explained the Australian Government legislative framework that entities with an annual revenue of more than \$100 million have been required to report against since 2019.

The NSW Anti-Slavery Commissioner Dr James Cockayne also gave a comprehensive presentation on his recently released *Guidance on Reasonable Steps* for more than 400 public entities in NSW, who also have a legislative obligation to address modern slavery risks in their operations and supply chains, and to report on those risks at a state level.

"It is crucial for businesses of all sizes to understand how new public procurement due diligence and reporting obligations may affect how they work with NSW government entities in the coming years," Dr Cockayne told the forum.

ACAN Program Manager Alison Rahill said that the Commissioner's *Guidance* will improve business response and management of modern slavery risk in operations and supply chains.

"Catholic organisations in ACAN have been engaging with suppliers for several years about modern slavery risk. To have the same standards now expected in public procurement policy and practice, at least across the NSW public sector, will be a significant boost to overall efforts," Ms Rahill said.

Benjamin Rieck of global compliance firm Intertek also gave an engaging presentation on how social audits are conducted and frameworks for corrective action.

"What I really want to drive home is that if you are focussing on doing right by people within your operations, within your strategic focus, this will lead to an increase in compliance levels," Mr Rieck said.

The Illawarra Business Forum on modern slavery supplier guidance was attended by a diverse range of representatives from building and construction, cleaning services, uniform, office and furniture



suppliers, including WINC, Lowes, BFX Furniture, Master Builders Association of NSW, Port Authority of NSW, Shipping Australia, Shellharbour and Wollongong Councils.

ACAN acknowledged support received from business partners and the Inside Industry Visitor Centre. The Visitor Centre is located at the North Gate entrance to BlueScope's Port Kembla Steelworks, and several attendees took advantage of the opportunity to join a guided tour of the steelworks after the forum.

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