

Parliament of Australia
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Foreign Affairs and Aid Sub-Committee



13 April 2017

Re: Inquiry into national legislation on modern slavery

To: The Foreign Affairs and Aid sub-committee of the Australian Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

The Freedom Fund fully supports the introduction in Australia of national legislation comparable to the UK's Modern Slavery Act (2015), including provisions aimed at preventing modern slavery in domestic and global supply chains. The inclusion in the UK's Modern Slavery Act of a supply chains clause marked a significant step forward in promoting transparency and accountability in business, and received strong support from many in the corporate sector. It has been followed by other national legislation such as the French Corporate Duty of Vigilance Law, and the Dutch Child Labour Due Diligence Law – currently awaiting approval from the Dutch senate – which goes further to require businesses to submit a plan of action to combat child labour should they suspect it in their production chain. Such legislation helps consumers, investors, and the broader public to engage with businesses on modern slavery, and provides senior management with the incentives to take action to ensure slavery has no place in their supply chains.

Progressive businesses have welcomed such efforts to increase transparency, not least because it gives recognition to those companies who are actively seeking to eliminate slavery from their supply chains, and annual reporting means stakeholders can recognize those companies who are demonstrating consistent year-on-year improvements. Transparency legislation not only offers an effective way of shining a light on what remains a very hidden crime, but drives changes in corporate behavior that can benefit an entire sector, particularly when paired with civil society action as in the UK. Here, civil society has not only been instrumental in shaping the UK Modern Slavery Act, but has proven essential in monitoring its proper implementation.

As more states look to introduce legislation on supply chain transparency, business leaders have emphasised that a coherent and consistent regime across jurisdictions will greatly aid in ensuring that reporting obligations do not become burdensome. Any new legislation, therefore, should ideally complement or build upon existing legislation elsewhere so that reporting requirements may be aligned.

The Freedom Fund is part of an advisory committee to the Modern Slavery Registry – a repository of business transparency statements. For further details, please see annexed the statement that the committee has submitted in support of legislation in Australia.

Kind regards,

Nick Grono
CEO
The Freedom Fund