

## Media Release: 15 February, 2018

### **ALHR welcomes Government commitment to introduce a Modern Slavery Bill by mid-2018**

Australian Lawyers for Human Rights (ALHR) applauds the Government's commitment today to introduce a modern slavery bill to Parliament by mid-2018. Speaking to stakeholders at a seminar in Canberra, Assistant Minister for Home Affairs, Alex Hawke said that, "2018 will be a landmark year in acting on modern slavery" and explained the Government aims to pass modern slavery legislation by the end of 2018.

The Walk Free Foundation estimates there are 45.8 million slaves worldwide and currently at least 4,300 slaves in Australia. This global figure is more than at any other time in human history.

These announcements follow a year-long Inquiry into establishing a Modern Slavery Act in Australia conducted by the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade throughout 2017. In December 2017, the Committee released its comprehensive Final Report, *Hidden in Plain Sight*. The Report recommended the Government introduce a Modern Slavery Act for Australia similar to the UK's *Modern Slavery Act 2015*.

Madeleine Bridgett, co-chair of the ALHR's Business and Human Rights Subcommittee said, "knowing that the Government has committed to enacting a Modern Slavery Act by mid-2018 is extremely encouraging, and is a step in the right direction to eradicating modern slavery in Australia."

ALHR is pleased to see bi-partisan support for the Report's recommendations including that the new Act should establish:

- an Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner;
- a compensation scheme for victims of modern slavery;
- increased protections for migrant workers; and
- a requirement that entities with a turnover of more than \$50 million must report annually on set criteria regarding modern slavery risks in their supply chains in Australia and overseas.

In addition, the Government today announced a 12-month trial of increased support for victims of forced marriage in Australia through funding to the Red Cross.

ALHR's Lauren Zanetti, co-chair of ALHR's Business and Human Rights Subcommittee said, "we urge the Government to continue to work with stakeholders during the drafting of the modern slavery bill. In addition, we welcome Assistant Minister Hawke's indication that his preference is that the modern slavery reporting requirements for large entities should also apply to the Government."

Today's seminar in Canberra was organised by the Salvation Army and Walk Free Foundation to ensure recommendations from the Inquiry's Report are implemented by the Government. Speakers at the seminar included Walk Free Chairman Andrew Forrest AO, Labor Shadow Minister Clare O'Neil and Committee Chair Chris Crewther, Senator Linda Reynolds, Senator Lisa Singh and Senator Janet Rice. The seminar today demonstrates the importance of civil society and businesses working together to address the issue of modern slavery. ALHR's October 2017 Submission to the Inquiry can be found [here](#).

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*ALHR was established in 1993 and is a national association of Australian solicitors, barristers, academics, judicial officers and law students who practise and promote international human rights law in Australia. ALHR has active and engaged National, State and Territory committees and specialist thematic committees. Through advocacy, media engagement, education, networking, research and training, ALHR promotes, practices and protects universally accepted standards of human rights throughout Australia and overseas.*