



## **Submission on the Modern Slavery Bill**

### **To: Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee**

Thank you for inviting the Lutheran Church of Australia to contribute a submission on the Modern Slavery Bill introduced to the House of Representatives on 28 June 2018.

The Lutheran Church of Australia claims no special expertise in the area of law or policy as it pertains to modern slavery. Our principal task as a Christian church is to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Our faith compels us, however, to care when fellow humans are mistreated and exploited.

The Modern Slavery Bill is a sign that we concede that slavery in various forms still exists, not only overseas but also here in Australia. We are pleased that this evil practice is being taken seriously and that many people of goodwill are working together to suppress it.<sup>1</sup>

We acknowledge with gratitude the large amount of work done in recent years on this issue, such as the [National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking and Slavery 2015-19](#), the [Inquiry into establishing a Modern Slavery Act in Australia](#) and its extensive consultations, and for that committee's report [Hidden in Plain Sight](#).

We extend our thanks to all those responsible for the Modern Slavery Bill. We recognise that this bill is the culmination of the work of many people, including our politicians and their staff.

The Lutheran Church of Australia believes and affirms that all humans should be treated with dignity because God created them in his own image. Because God is just, holy, true, faithful and loving, he calls the humans he created in his image to reflect his justice, holiness, truth, faithfulness and love towards himself and towards each other. Godly conduct rules out exploiting and humiliating others.

We also believe that God so loved the people of the world that he became a human—Jesus of Nazareth—and gave his life so that all who believe in him will have

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<sup>1</sup> The Lutheran Church of Australia is a partner in the [Australian Freedom Network](#), a multi-faith partnership supporting the goal of ending modern-day slavery. One area in which The Lutheran Church of Australia has acted in response to recommendations arising out of this work has been to cease directly supporting SE Asian orphanages because of concerns about their operations.

eternal life. God saw and still sees humans as so precious that they are worth dying for.

Jesus called us to do good to 'little ones' in particular, i.e. those without power to secure justice for themselves. He urged us all to see God's own suffering in the face of those in need, and to respond to them with kindness and generosity. He might well say to us today, "Where were you when I appeared to you in the form of a victim of modern slavery?"

## **Commendations**

We commend the many hundreds of Australians—elected representatives and others in government, researchers and scholars, interested citizens, members of the business and investment communities, civil society organisations and faith based organisations—and non-Australians as well—who have worked to bring to the fore the issue of human trafficking and modern forms of slavery and servitude. We especially commend those who give freely of their time to raise awareness of people trafficking and modern-day slavery and to help the victims and survivors.

We commend action to strengthen the Criminal Code to deter people from involvement in people trafficking and slavery.

We commend action that will motivate Australian businesses to disengage from activities covered by the bill's definition of modern slavery.

We commend the government for imposing on itself the same reporting obligations as others.

We commend action that will encourage and better enable Australian consumers and shareholders to choose 'slavery-free' goods, services and investments.

We commend the government for giving entities with revenues below the reporting threshold of \$100 million the option of voluntarily submitting modern slavery statements. We hope that many will take the opportunity to do this and benefit from doing so.

We commend the bill's drafters for building in a review process. We hope that when the review is undertaken, there will be evidence that the ethical 'race to the top' so confidently predicted is indeed occurring—and that if it is not occurring, that appropriate amendments to the law can be made to combat slavery more effectively.

We hope the Parliament passes a Modern Slavery Act with bi-partisan support before the end of the year.

*Respectfully submitted by:*

*Office of the Bishop,  
Lutheran Church of Australia Church-wide Office,  
197 Archer St, North Adelaide SA 5006.*