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NSW takes global lead as slavery numbers skyrocket

Anti-slavery Commissioner launches plan to fight modern slavery as survey shows overwhelming support for governments to do more

NSW will today take a global lead in addressing modern slavery, with the state's independent anti-slavery commissioner launching a three-year strategic plan '*Working Together for Real Freedom*' outlining concrete steps to combat the rise in modern slavery across NSW.

The estimated number of people in modern slavery in NSW has grown to over 16,400.

The action comes as new polling released today finds 78 per cent of respondents want governments to do more to protect people from modern slavery.

The polling, commissioned by the Office of the NSW Anti-slavery Commissioner and conducted by Essential Research, also reveals that many people are unaware of the severity of the issue in NSW, with six in ten Australians saying they had no idea the number of people in modern slavery in NSW was so high, and more than 40 per cent people incorrectly believing it is illegal for Australian businesses to trade with overseas companies that engage in modern slavery.

NSW Anti-slavery Commissioner, Dr James Cockayne – the first Anti-slavery Commissioner in the country and just the second globally – said the ground-breaking plan, '*Working Together for Real Freedom*' sets the stage for effective anti-slavery action in New South Wales over the next three years, positioning the state at the forefront of the global effort to combat modern slavery.

Key elements of the plan include:

- removing products of modern slavery from public procurement
- establishing a support and referral hotline for those in modern slavery
- putting modern slavery survivors at the heart of anti-slavery efforts
- fostering responsible business practices in the private sector
- equipping frontline workers to identify and report modern slavery
- establishing an expert Advisory Panel and holding an anti-slavery forum twice a year

"It might seem like a foreign concept to many, but modern slavery is all around us. It's happening right now on farms in regional NSW, in shops and construction sites in our cities – perhaps even in a house down the street."

"We see women and children made vulnerable through domestic and family violence; cleaners and security guards working in office blocks, caught in the grip of debt bondage; girls forced to marry here in NSW or overseas; and people living with disability who are exploited in segregated workplaces or in institutional care.

"Everyone has a human right to be free from slavery, but right now there are thousands of people being robbed of that right here in NSW.

Sophie Otiende, a visionary global survivor-leader and Chief Executive of the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery will provide a keynote address at the launch, emphasising the pivotal role of centring people with lived experience in the fight against modern slavery.

Email: antislavery@justice.nsw.gov.au

Website: dcj.nsw.info/antislaverycommissioner

Ms Otiende says that by embedding survivor voices in decision making process, we can effectively pave the way towards a world that is free from slavery.

Dr Cockayne said the strategic plan was developed through extensive consultation with experts, stakeholders and survivors of modern slavery. More than 2,500 people contributed to the consultation process between September 2022 and May 2023.

“This is an ambitious plan compared to business as usual, but not when compared to the size of the problem we are facing. There’s no time to waste. It’s time to take a stand to end modern slavery in New South Wales.”

The full strategic plan can be seen [here](#).

For media inquiries or further information, please contact:

Alana Mew | alana.mew@essentialmedia.com.au | Essential Media |