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Commissioner a welcome tool in bid to end slavery

The Law Council of Australia welcomes the passage yesterday of the Modern Slavery Amendment (Australian Anti-Slavery Commissioner) Bill 2023 (Cth).

“The Law Council has long advocated for an Australian Anti-Slavery Commissioner and therefore welcomes the passing of this Bill which establishes this important statutory office,” Law Council of Australia President, Mr Greg McIntyre said.

“Australia is acknowledged as having one of the strongest government responses to slavery in the world, but we are sadly not immune from this terrible phenomenon and must continue to work to eliminate slavery.

“Establishing an Anti-Slavery Commissioner is a pivotal development in addressing and effectively countering modern slavery across the country.

“The Anti-Slavery Commissioner will help advocate for and promote action to combat modern slavery. The Commissioner’s role will include providing assistance and support for victims, assisting businesses in identifying and addressing modern slavery risk in their operations and supply chains, and ensuring our systems for preventing, detecting, investigating and prosecuting offences continue to improve.

“While the Law Council always supported establishment of an Anti-Slavery Commissioner, we did recommend some refinements to this Bill and are pleased to see these have been considered and passed by the Parliament – such as to the provisions regarding the requisite qualifications of the Commissioner.

“We continue to believe that establishment of an Anti-Slavery Commissioner should be accompanied by an expansion of appropriate legal assistance and interpreter services for victims of modern slavery and trafficking, including in rural, regional and remote locations across Australia.

“There are also important reforms yet to be achieved in this area. The Law Council retains its view that the Modern Slavery Act should be amended to introduce civil penalties for non-compliance with reporting requirements in certain circumstances, as well as additional regulatory tools to aid compliance. We call upon the Government to consider such reforms.

“Overall, however, this Bill represents an important step forward due to the potential impact that the Anti-Slavery Commissioner can have in raising awareness of, and helping to shape a national strategy against, modern slavery in Australia.”

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