



**BE SLAVERY FREE**

**FREEDOMUNITED**  
LET'S END MODERN SLAVERY TOGETHER

## For Immediate Release

### **WA Parliament called on to pass changes to Industrial Relations Laws Shaping the future with lessons from the past**

Earlier today, **Western Australian Minister for Industrial Relations Bill Johnston**, received a petition calling on the Western Australian Parliament to pass the changes in the Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Bill 2020 which brings Western Australia in line with the requirements of the International Labour Organisation's Forced Labour Protocol of 2014 (P029) and will allow the Commonwealth to ratify the Protocol. At the presentation Minister Johnston said,

*'It's remarkable that over 100,000 global citizens, including almost 13,000 Australians, have signed this petition to support the global fight against modern slavery.'*

*'This demonstrates how crucial it is that the McGowan Government's Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Bill 2020 swiftly passes Parliament.'*

*'The important Bill will help better protect vulnerable workers, modernise our employment laws and bring Western Australia in line with the requirements of the International Labour Organisation's Forced Labour Protocol of 2014.'*

The petition was organised by **Be Slavery Free** and **Freedom United** with international partners. According to the Global Slavery Index more than 40 million people are trapped in modern slavery, with approximately 25 million in forced labour. Australia imports approximately \$18 billion worth of products with risk of slavery in the supply chain. Forced labour also occurs in Australia.<sup>1</sup>

*'These changes to the Industrial Relations laws will send a clear message that Western Australia is a place where people know their work is valued. It will send a message to businesses that there is a level playing field in Western Australia, where you get ahead by doing the 'right-thing', says Carolyn Kitto from Be Slavery Free.'*

*'Forced labour is crime in Australia's Criminal Code. More than the law, is it in our Australian values and culture to give people 'a-fair-go.'*

The ILO has identified eight "fundamental" Conventions, covering subjects that are considered to be fundamental principles and rights at work. Protocol P29 is part of one of these eight Conventions specifically designed to reduce the number of people trapped on farms, in mines, factories, restaurants and homes where unpaid wages, forced labour and modern slavery often flourishes. It is an addition to the 1930 Forced Labour Convention Australia has already committed to. The Convention's purpose is to suppress the use of forced or compulsory labour in all its forms.

*'Migrants and other high-risk groups often lack the necessary information to seek help, while employers and legal officials lack the information to recognise forced labor and adequately*

*protect those in need. On both sides, there is insufficient education on the issue of forced labor and human trafficking. This creates opportunities for perpetrators to continue to exploit people unnoticed and unchallenged,' says Herrana Addisu from Freedom United. 'That is why we need more countries to ratify the Forced Labour Protocol and ensure everyone is well equipped to tackle modern slavery and human trafficking'*

The changes to the laws also fix anomalies which sanctioned injustices in the past. When WA's Industrial Relations laws were first legislated in 1912, and revised in 1941, horticultural and domestic workers received no protections. This particularly impacted Indigenous Western Australians, denying them access to basic freedoms and protection from the law.

*'During much of the period Indigenous West Australians were effectively enslaved across much of regional WA, with men working, often entirely unpaid, as station hands and women in domestic work and too often subjected to sexual harassment or rape,' states Owen Whittle, Acting Secretary, Unions WA. 'Today WA is the only State or Territory in Australia with such a grossly unfair legal barrier to protection for domestic and horticultural workers.'*

Australia is urged to get behind the convention, in step with forty-five other countries that have already signed, including New Zealand

*'With the proliferation of modern slavery around the world, every time a country signs a protocol such as this, it makes it riskier and less lucrative for slave-traders to flourish,' says Ms Kitto, 'We need to step up to ensure international standards are adhered to.'*

The petition comes at a critical time as more of the world's poor are being made vulnerable to exploitative work. The economic recession caused by coronavirus is exacerbating human trafficking as it has shrunk formal employment and increased irregular global migration.

ENDS

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/2018/findings/highlights/>