



Seeking the End of the Line for Human Trafficking

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Back in July 2015 we invited you to write letters to the Minister of Justice, Michael Keenan, asking him to address the risk of human trafficking in Australia. Human trafficking and forced labour occurs in industries in Australia such as construction, the meat industry, manufacturing, hospitality and people who are forced to live-in as housekeepers. We have also encouraged you to be part of the campaign to have the Australian Government require companies importing products from overseas to take all reasonable steps to ensure the products did not involve human trafficking, forced labour or slavery in their production.

A number of proposals to address human trafficking, both in Australia and in the production of imported goods, are under active consideration by the Minister. We need another demonstration of public support so the Minister can push his colleagues in Government to take action.

People coming to work in Australia from overseas expect that if they work hard they will get decent pay and conditions. Shamefully, this is not always true and our Government has not yet put a stop to the abuse and exploitation of so many of these people.

Anthony, who arrived from Vanuatu to Australia in December 2014 was told he would be working for \$21 an hour. He worked picking tomatoes in Victoria. Following both legitimate and illegal deductions from his pay by the labour hire company that employed Anthony, "We experience being left with only \$51 pay that was transferred into our accounts weekly. How is that possible? One may think. We don't have the slightest clue!! Where has half that money gone off to?"

Often at the heart of the problem are labour hire businesses. These businesses organise for workers to come to Australia and place them in jobs. However, some labour hire businesses are criminal enterprises, intimidating workers to accept low pay, making illegal deductions from their pay and maintaining physical control over them. They steal workers' wages, provide them with substandard accommodation for exorbitant fees and seek sexual favours from female workers.

Labour hire companies in Australia largely escape any government oversight. There is little stopping anyone from setting themselves up as a labour hire company. Dodgy labour hire businesses hurt the reputation of legitimate labour hire businesses as well, tainting the whole industry. A licensing requirement for labour hire businesses in industries where there is a risk of human trafficking would go a long way towards driving out the shady element from the industry.

What you can do

Write a polite and respectful letter to:

The Hon Michael Keenan MP

Minister for Justice
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Salutation: Dear Minister

Points to make in your letter:

- Express deep concern that goods produced with the involvement of human trafficking, slavery or forced labour are being imported into Australia.
- In order to encourage companies in Australia to do the right thing, ask the Government to introduce a law requiring companies in high risk industries to publish the actions they are taking to ensure the goods they are importing are free of human trafficking, forced labour and slavery. This is already a requirement of the UK *Modern Slavery Act* and the Californian *Transparency in Supply Chains Act 2010 (SB657)*.
- Ask the Australian Government to make customs data public so it is known where companies are sourcing goods from. This is already the case in places like the US and India.
- Express deep concern at the evidence of human trafficking in some Australian industries, such as farming, food processing, construction and hospitality.
- Note that labour hire businesses are often involved in the trafficking and exploitation of workers coming from overseas.
- Ask the Government to set up a licensing system of labour hire businesses in Australia in industries at risk of human trafficking and provide meaningful oversight of labour hire businesses in these industries.
- Ask that workers from overseas who are suspected to have been trafficked into Australia be given access to independent legal advice before any action is taken to remove them from Australia.
- Ask that employers be required to allow workers from overseas to have access to a non-government organization to assist the worker to understand their rights and responsibilities. This would act as a significant protective factor against human trafficking and exploitation.