

**INQUIRY INTO MODERN SLAVERY ACT 2018 AND  
ASSOCIATED MATTERS**

**Organisation:** Cleaning Accountability Framework

**Date Received:** 2 October 2019

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## ***Inquiry into Modern Slavery Act 2019 and Associated Matters***

**Submission by the Cleaning Accountability Framework**

**2 October 2019**

### **About the Cleaning Accountability Framework (CAF)**

CAF is an independent, multi-stakeholder initiative that seeks to improve labour and cleaning standards in Australia. CAF promotes the rights of cleaners, transparent and accountable cleaning supply chains, sustainable business models, and responsible contracting practices. We do this through the CAF Certification Scheme, recognising and rewarding best practice in the cleaning industry.<sup>1</sup> We work with all supply chain stakeholders to remedy and prevent labour rights abuses. CAF has been recognised as an anti-slavery mechanism by leading business and human rights experts for the work we do in relation to worker-driven compliance, robust third-party auditing, and tripartite industry-based collaboration.

### **CAF supports the implementation of the *Modern Slavery Act 2018 (NSW)***

The Cleaning Accountability Framework welcomes the inquiry into the *Modern Slavery Act 2018 and associated matters* and the opportunity to make a submission.

CAF believes the *Modern Slavery Act 2018 (NSW)* should be retained and implemented because it provides the following important components:

- NSW Government procurement coverage
- An Anti-Slavery Commissioner responsible for advocacy and victim support and regular review of the Act
- Education and awareness raising for the community and business
- Support, compensation and protection systems for those who have experienced slavery

The NSW Government's \$30 billion annual procurement footprint means that public spending is almost certainly implicated in the exploitation of unquantifiable numbers of workers both in Australia and in the global supply chains of the companies purchases are made from. It is therefore incumbent on the Government to take action and demonstrate leadership.

Cleaning has been recognised as a key risk area for modern slavery in Australia.<sup>2</sup> Withholding of wages, violence and threats, deceptive recruitment, excessive overtime, debt bondage, poor and unsafe working conditions, and confiscation of personal and travel documents are all practices that are found in the cleaning industry in Australia and in NSW more specifically. These practices start at

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cleaningaccountability.org.au/certification/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/criminal-justice/files/modern-slavery-reporting-entities.pdf>



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the point of procurement, with tendering processes that encourage undercutting resulting in contracts being awarded at prices that do not allow for minimum wages and entitlements and safe working limits. This in turn encourages pyramid subcontracting and enables worker exploitation, which can include slavery-like practices.

In NSW, there are slavery-like practices that occur in the cleaning industry. Cleaners have been and continue to be subjected to wage theft, dangerous and substandard working conditions, and immigration-related coercion and threats.<sup>3</sup> The egregious exploitation of cleaners has been highlighted in State-owned or tenanted buildings with school cleaners in Victoria found to be paid as little as \$2.63 per hour cash in hand to clean government schools.<sup>4</sup> NSW's outsourced cleaning model for government buildings leaves the state vulnerable to similar practices.

As an owner and tenant of buildings that are cleaned by a workforce that is vulnerable to exploitation and modern slavery, the NSW Government has a responsibility to ensure that cleaning services for public buildings are procured responsibly, and that adequate oversight over cleaning contractor compliance is maintained.

By committing to certifying government-owned and tenanted buildings to the CAF 3 Star Standard, the NSW Government can show leadership by taking action to prevent modern slavery and promote compliance with workplace and safety laws.

We urge the NSW Government to enact the NSW Modern Slavery Act and we would welcome the opportunity to work with the NSW Government to slavery-proof its contracted cleaning.

For more information on this submission, please contact Dr Miriam Thompson via

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/jun/08/sydney-cleaning-firm-treated-foreign-workers-as-slaves-court-told>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-11/victorian-school-cleaning-contracts-to-be-overhauled/8799372>