

Response to the NSW Anti-Slavery Commissioner Strategic Plan Discussion Paper

Project Respect Consultation Submission

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General Comments

Project Respect is a Victorian based support and referral service for women and gender diverse people with experience in the sex industry and/or women and gender diverse people who have experienced human trafficking for sexual exploitation.

While we are primarily based in Victoria, we provide support to women throughout Australia, and work in collaboration with other organisations across sectors such as family violence, housing, and legal services to provide multifaceted care to service users.

Project Respect's purposes are to:

- Provide support to women and gender diverse people with experience in the sex industry to achieve self-directed goals, including equitable access to services;
- Provide support to women and gender diverse people who have experienced trafficking for sexual exploitation, whether current, historic, international or domestic;
- Advocate for structural change to end sexual exploitation.

We provide a platform to elevate and amplify the voices of, while also being informed and guided by, those with past and present lived experience.

Format of our Response

On 24 October 2022, the New South Wales Anti-Slavery Commissioner hosted a kick-off webinar, with input from a variety of stakeholders, to explore modern slavery risks in New South Wales.

The Executive Director of Project Respect, Carolyn Gowers, participated in this webinar, with a 5 minute presentation.

We provide the transcript of this presentation as our response to the consultation paper.

Anti-Slavery Commissioner NSW Kick-off Webinar - Developing a Strategic Plan to Combat Modern Slavery in NSW 24.10.22

Presentation – Carolyn Gowers Executive Director, Project Respect

My name is Carolyn Gowers, and my pronouns are she/her. I would like to pay my respects to the Boon Wurrung / Bunurong people of the Kulin nation who are the traditional owners of land where I am today. I would also like to acknowledge the bravery and unique experiences of victim survivors of modern slavery, and of victim-survivors of all types of violence who may be joining us today.

I am the Executive Director of Project Respect, a non-faith-based, goal-oriented support and referral organisation for women and gender diverse people with experience in the sex industry, and/or who have experienced trafficking for sexual exploitation.

While we are situated in Victoria, our phone based service is available Australia wide. I appreciate the opportunity to speak today. It's particularly exciting to see NSW leading the country in implementing a

Modern Slavery Act that goes beyond supply chain reporting, and recognises the role of an Anti-Slavery Commissioner.

Central to the development of a strategic plan is the opportunity to build strategies and systems that work for **people**. While we are talking about risks, I would also like to talk about the great opportunity you have in developing an approach that centres the needs of victim survivors and includes the following:

1. **One: The need for a gendered lens in the response, and strategy.** This is in recognition of the high proportion of the victim survivors of modern slavery being women and girls – we know that gendered issues require consideration of gendered solutions. For context, between 2009 and 17, 88% of people the AFP referred to the Support for Trafficked People Program were women and girls, 54% of whom were victim survivors of trafficking for sexual exploitation;
2. **Two: Recognition of the long term nature of trauma and developing responses that incorporate recovery, and not just short term interventions.** This needs to include access to supports for victim survivors that are not contingent on their early agreement to engage with the Federal Police. We also need to provide victim survivors the time and space to process their experience and tell their story. We hear victim survivors who've felt their stories are invalidated when they are told, too early in the telling, that their experience doesn't 'fit' a certain criteria. This itself is traumatising, and people will disengage from supports;
3. **Three: Recognising coercion as the methodology of exploitation, and addressing this in responses and prosecutions.** We need to centre education around coercion as a key tool of the exploiter, and build a system that is more responsive and brave when it comes to pursuing prosecutions. More importantly, we need to provide support and recognition of this as an experience for victim-survivors. The current work on a nationally based approach to coercive control in the family violence context isn't yet including what coercion looks like in a modern slavery context, including not considering the use of coercion in trafficking for sexual exploitation. There is an intersection here between modern slavery, family violence and sexual violence that needs to be responded to – and collaboratively find approaches that prioritises the victim survivor and proactively end the exploitative situations;
4. **Four: Sustainable funding for services, supporting collaboration, and options for victim survivors.** The service system needs to be collaborative, and funding needs to value the work of NGOs who support and work with victim survivors. There is value in a diverse set of providers that matches the diverse set of experiences. There is value in what a provider is 'not' – such as 'not' being a government authority, and for the psychological safety of victim survivors being able to maintain this distance sufficiently to build trust so that the journey of recovery can commence. The funding of NGOs needs not to perpetuate, through grant models, an environment of competition, with service providers trying to survive with little to no funding – which has the impact of keeping organisations small and busy on the wrong things, and the voices of the people they are supporting less heard;
5. **Five: Taking a big picture view on drivers/blockers/vulnerabilities, that leave gaps for exploitation.** We need to break these down with systems work - which needs to be done to address visa instability, housing instability, relief from poverty, and avoidance of criminalisation

of victim survivors. We need to continually refine approaches that recognise other needs such as language and culture barriers, breaking down the ability of an exploiter to isolate, for example in rural and regional areas, and the high reluctance of victim survivors to report through fear of authorities and fear of criminalisation.

We need to stay current and responsive as exploitation shifts to where the gaps are. Those who seek to exploit will find loopholes in legislation and systems. If coercive methods are under-recognised and under-prosecuted, exploiters will rely heavily on coercion – this isn't an accident, exploiters are self-educating on the methods of exploitation most effective to them. If we aren't recognising domestic trafficking without movement of people as an offence, this is another gap that will be exploited. We need to recognise that where multiple circumstances exist that increase the vulnerability of people, the spectrum of choice/circumstance/coercion leans in the direction of exploitation.