**Wednesday 28 November 2018**

**Modern Slavery laws pass Senate, need urgent priority in the House: Oxfam**

Commenting on amendments to the Modern Slavery Bill passed by the Senate this evening, Oxfam Australia Chief Executive Dr Helen Szoke said:

“The changes to the Modern Slavery Bill passed by the Senate this evening would see Australia take a meaningful step in the global fight to eradicate modern slavery, which is estimated to affect more than 40 million people around the world.

“The strengthening of the proposed legislation is to be applauded – the Senate has listened to calls for tougher laws that will significantly improve the way modern slavery is combated in the supply chains of Australian businesses and organisations.

“Changes to the Bill will ensure that the responsible Minister has additional powers to request an explanation from entities that fail to report or comply, to ask for remedial action and to publish information about failed compliance. There will also now be an annual report to the Parliament on the level of compliance with the Act, and the Government has confirmed that a list will be created of the entities that need to report.

“It is disappointing that proposals to appoint an Independent anti-slavery commissioner or advisor were not heeded – and Oxfam urges for this decision to be revisited as the Act is reviewed in the future.

 “Importantly, the Bill still does not include penalties for non-compliance, which would help ensure companies report. However, Oxfam welcomes amendments passed today that will ensure the question of the need for civil penalties is specifically reviewed as a part of the built-in three-year review of this legislation.

“Overall, the changes approved today by the Senate are real improvements that will help tackle rampant and inexcusable abuses of fundamental human rights.

“What is now crucial is that the Government does not rest on its laurels.

“The amended legislation must now to be taken back to the House of Representatives as a matter of urgency. This legislation needs to be passed before the end of the parliamentary year, so that the laws can be brought into effect.

 “There is no excuse for any continued tolerance of the scourge of modern slavery in the supply chains of Australian organisations.

“These proposed laws are a welcome opportunity for Australia to take a leading role in the global battle to stamp out systemic exploitation, which is leaving millions of people in entrenched poverty.”

**For interviews with Helen Szoke in Canberra this evening or more information, please contact** **Amanda Banks on 0411 449 653 or** amandab@oxfam.org.au