

Canberra 'Chapter' of ACRATH's 2020 Advocacy ~ Covid-style

A report on the ACRATH advocacy to Canberra – virtually

How we did it

Every year ACRATH staff, members and volunteers advocate on a range of issues. A feature of this advocacy is the annual week of meetings with MPs and others in Canberra on key issues.

This year, due to COVID-19 restrictions within ACRATH and across the country, our annual Canberra 'chapter' of advocacy had to be different. We employed a range of technologies to meet with several Ministers, Shadow Ministers and backbenchers from the Australian Federal Government; with departmental officers from three Departments; with other church groups, and with colleague NGOs.

This meant we met with people in offices and living rooms across the nation and the usual week of advocacy turned into a month with appointments being made and accepted over several weeks. This was only possible because of an amazing advocacy team including: Cindy Bohan, Noelene Simmons sm, Claire Condon sgs, Joseph Dunn, Janine Bliss fmm, Liz Morris, Emelda Davis, Peter O'Neill ssc and myself, Christine Carolan.

Importantly, we also had to prepare differently.

There were no evening training opportunities as we gathered in Canberra. Instead, we worked in the weeks leading up to September with zoom sessions led by Cindy Bohan, with accompanying resources and advocacy information.



What we asked for

We embarked on the meetings with five key issues. They were:

1. AN ACT OF GRACE FOR 'EGREGIOUSLY EXPLOITED' VANUATU WORKERS

Most are familiar with this, but if not the case is outlined in ACRATH's submission (final page) to the Senate Select Committee on Temporary Migration

https://www.apf.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Temporary_Migration/TemporaryMigration/Submissions (submission 108)

Outcome: We have, through our advocacy, been linked to the Australian High Commission in Vanuatu and they have undertaken to help. Peter O'Neill ssc and Janine Bliss fmm have 'met' by zoom with 19 of the 22 men!! We are still a long way away from the men being paid their stolen wages, but we are significantly closer than we were before this advocacy campaign started. This issue is developing by the day.

2. DE-LINKING THE SUPPORT FOR TRAFFICKED PEOPLE PROGRAM (STPP)

The STPP is a government funded program delivered by the Red Cross and is currently only available through a referral from the Australian Federal Police (AFP). With other NGOs ACRATH has advocated for access to the STPP to be enabled by either the AFP or an NGO preferably, Red Cross.



Outcome: We have been told that there is a possible point to leverage here. We have begun to network with NGO partners on this issue.



Adam Bandt MP member for Melbourne, with Christine and Cindy, is very interested in a collaborative approach to slavery-free tearooms at APH, and possibly a major shift in procurement for Parliament House.

3. FUNDING FOR NGOs

ACRATH called for the inclusion of a 3-5 year funding scheme in the Home Affairs Budget under the National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking and Slavery.

Outcome: Success! Last week's Budget announcement was for 5 year funding out of the departmental budget for NGOs working on human trafficking; the announcement acknowledged NGO advocacy on this point over the past several years. ACRATH will now develop a project-plan for funding.

4. A NATIONAL REGISTRATION SCHEME FOR LABOUR HIRE COMPANIES.

In 2019 The Migrant Workers' Taskforce, chaired by Professor Allan Fels AO made 22 recommendations aimed at improving workplace protections for vulnerable migrant workers. ACRATH called for the federal Government to implement a national labour hire registration scheme that covers all industries.

Outcome: We have been linked to six people within the Parliament who can help make this decision. We have arranged meetings, letters and emails to leverage these contacts.

5. AN INCREASE IN AUSTRALIA'S ODA

ACRATH called for an increase in Australia's contribution to overseas development assistance (ODA); in 2000 Australia committed to 0.5% of GNI as ODA. ACRATH says it is now time to deliver on this promise. ACRATH is ashamed that currently Australia gives 0.22% of GNI as aid; this is 22 cents in every \$100! We know we can do better, especially in light of the increased vulnerabilities due to COVID 19.



Maria Vamvakinou MP member for Caldwell, with her electorate officer, Mayumi Terakado meeting with Christine and Cindy. Maria shares a passion for raising awareness on forced marriage and is keen to stay in touch.

Outcome: Again the Federal budget shows a move on this. We've been advocating on this for several years.

What's in the pipeline

- We are hoping that soon Parliamentary office tearooms will be slavery-free. This looks likely to develop into a whole of Parliament push now that three senior MPs – Coalition, Labour and the Greens – are exploring a joint motion to the Parliament! ACRATH will provide any support required.
- We have 15 pages of follow up notes with many action items listed!
- Some of our ACRATH regional groups have undertaken to send our advocacy sheet and a purpose made ACRATH postcard to their local Members and to their state's 12 Senators. If you would like the sheet please contact Joseph at office@acrath.org.au

What difference did COVID-19 make

- This year we received almost immediate acceptances from MPs for an appointment, including two Ministers and three very senior Shadow Ministers; this threw us major challenges as we scrambled to field a team and tweak our focus to suit the area of influence of the person we were about to meet. But we did just that.
- We grappled with webex, avaya, zoom, googlegroups and teleconference technologies, and were challenged to devise new ways to utilise the technology and the available time, so we maximised our purpose. Improved efficiency!
- We were told by a senior Shadow Minister that our zooming advocacy may be really effective in 2020 as back benchers, and even Ministers and Shadow Ministers, have more time to meet, especially in non-sitting weeks. MPs seemed very open to meetings with us. The subsequent challenge for us is to resource these meetings, and to resource the follow-up work resulting from every meeting we have had.



Take a Bow

I don't usually name individuals because all of this happens as the work of our great team. But ... A huge tribute to Cindy Bohan, the ever patient and inventive conductor of our ACRATH advocacy 'choir'. Cindy ran four training sessions so our 2020 team were thoroughly across our key advocacy points. Cindy ensured we were all linked to our appointments, and co-ordinated engagements with grace, patience and creativity.

A further tribute to the advocacy team, listed above, who trained up in the five advocacy issues, sharing deep knowledge and advocacy strategies. The team joined in pre-planning, advocacy meetings and post meeting planning of subsequent work.

Apart from the actual advocacy team, Marguerite Buckley attended the advocacy training sessions to develop her understanding of issues.

And another acknowledgement of the many ACRATHers who emailed and texted their support for our advocacy work.

What the team had to say

"While there was not always agreement on issues being raised, ACRATH has been listened to respectfully, with appreciation for the work we do and with encouragement to continue the conversation.

It is great to see all the outcomes listed together. Certainly a lot of progress was made through these meetings.

~ Noelene Simmons

Christine Carolan
ACRATH EO

15 Oct 2020