# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY** AUSTRALIA\*

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# Introduction

The Australian government has demonstrated a firm commitment to combating child exploitation at both the local and international levels. Given the country's federal parliamentary system, criminal law and child protection are largely administered by the individual states and territories. As a result, laws pertaining to the issues can vary and lack uniformity in enforcement and implementation. Additionally, the last decade has seen a marked lack of empirical studies within Australia that have considered children involved in commercial sexual activities with detailed qualitative or quantitative data.

Enough evidence exists to show that child prostitution remains a pressing and perhaps even growing phenomenon in many parts of Australia.<sup>1</sup> Homeless children in particular are vulnerable to commercial sexual activity. In the past decade, some small child prostitution rings have been identified, usually involving homeless girls who have been recruited into providing sexual services to men.<sup>2</sup>

The distribution of child pornography and abuse images has reached epidemic proportions in Australia, with exploitation material being used as currency by paedophiles to access online groups. From 2010-2011 alone, Australian arrests for child porn offences have risen by 30%.<sup>3</sup> Incidences of "sexting"<sup>4</sup> and "grooming"<sup>5</sup> children for sexual exploitation have also been on the rise.

Australia is primarily considered a destination country for children subjected to sex trafficking. It is also a source country for a small number of child victims of sex trafficking, primarily teenage girls.<sup>6</sup> Overall, trafficking in children for sexual purposes is not a significant problem in the country. High demand exists for young Asian sex workers, but not necessarily children.<sup>7</sup>

Australian nationals participating in child sex tourism maintain a significant presence in countries throughout the world, particularly in the ASEAN region. Between 2007 and 2008, Australians represented 10% of arrested offenders in the area.<sup>8</sup>

The high prevalence of child abuse amongst the indigenous population also presents a unique problem in Australia which contributes to CSEC in the country.<sup>9</sup>

# National Plan of Action (NPA)

While all of the undermentioned plans contain provisions that address contributing causes of or directly address specific manifestations of CSEC, Australia lacks an up-to-date and comprehensive National Plan of Action to combat all of child prostitution, pornography, trafficking for sexual purposes and sex tourism. In particular, none of the country's existing plans provide a multi-faceted approach to tackling child prostitution or the demand created by Australian citizens who travel with the intention to sexually exploit children abroad. *Tomorrow's Children: Australia's National Plan of Action against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children* was developed in 2000.<sup>10</sup> The NPA has been used mainly as a lobbying and advocacy tool for civil society organizations and has seen limited implementation at the federal and state levels. Other relevant frameworks include *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020*<sup>11</sup> and *Action Plan to Eradicate Trafficking in Persons*,<sup>12</sup> but none explicitly refer to issues concerning CSEC.

# Coordination and Cooperation

At the local and national level, the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children calls for the enhancement of cooperation between governments, the private sector, NGOs, families and communities. The Action Plan to Eradicate Trafficking in Persons highlights the importance of multi-sectoral collaboration in its implementation. The National Roundtable on People Trafficking represents a significant partnership between the Australian government and NGOs in the area of human trafficking.<sup>13</sup>

At the regional and international level, Australia leads various fora to combat CSEC and a commendable number of significant efforts outside its borders in areas of law enforcement, legal reform, and prevention. The government has taken a particularly firm stance against people trafficking and child sexual exploitation in the Asia-Pacific Region, most notably via the Bali Process<sup>14</sup> and the Asia Regional Trafficking in Persons Project (ARTIP).<sup>15</sup> AusAID supports a range of other NGO projects that aim to prevent trafficking, assist victims and improve child protection in South East Asia.<sup>16</sup> The Australian Federal Police (AFP) works in close concert with international figures to combat human trafficking, evidenced by its close partnerships with law enforcement and social welfare agencies in problem areas<sup>17</sup> and by its position as current chair of the Virtual Global Taskforce.18

#### Prevention

Overall, Australia has yet to develop concrete and effective strategies aimed at the prevention of CSEC. The persistence of child sex tourism committed by Australian citizens suggests that a more robust public education campaign is needed. Australia has implemented a Communication Awareness Strategy to increase awareness about people trafficking within the sex industry, although child trafficking in particular has not been identified.<sup>19</sup> Actions to inform the public and other key target groups on child prostitution are lacking, resulting in a very low level of awareness of this phenomenon.

In regards to training and education, Australia has not yet introduced mandatory education

on CSEC in its school curriculum. CSEC education is mostly delivered by NGOs and law enforcement agencies, typically in single initiatives and projects. For example, Child Wise offers a number of training packages and consultancies to inform parents and carers on CSEC issues.<sup>20</sup> Child Wise also offers training on child protection strategies to staff of international development organisations.<sup>21</sup> Most other initiatives focus primarily on child sexual exploitation generally rather than CSEC in particular.

The Australian government has pursued several notable partnerships with the private sector in regards to CSEC, for example with Microsoft

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in the ThinkUKnow Programme<sup>22</sup> and the Australian Bankers' Association in developing the "Protect your kids online" guide.<sup>23</sup> There is also collaboration between law enforcement agencies and other actors to counteract online sexual exploitation of children.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, the government has committed to introducing legislative amendments to require all Internet Service Providers to block material on ACMA's Refused Classification Content list, which includes child pornography.<sup>25</sup>

Although the Australian government has undertaken a number of large expenditures to decrease child vulnerability, measures implemented to date—particularly those aiming to reduce the exposure of children to CSEC are limited. In the context of child protection generally, while all Australian jurisdictions consistently emphasise the significance of early intervention services, approaches in the delivery of such child protection services vary by state and territory.<sup>26</sup> Even though there is a lack of information indicating the existence of child trafficking in Australia, the government continues to ardently address the perceived vulnerability of children in source countries to trafficking.<sup>27</sup>

As a deterrence measure, Australian legislation ensures that the police may monitor persons convicted of sex offences and other serious offences against children once they have served their sentences. However, these programs have been plagued by government mismanagement and a lack of adequate tracking of offenders.<sup>28</sup> Australia lacks proactive deterrence programs to reduce the demand for sex with children.<sup>29</sup>

A lack of sound, especially recent, research on CSEC in Australia remains a pressing problem. Nearly all relevant studies are over a decade old.

# Protection

# Children's rights instruments related to CSEC

The Australian government has a strong record of participation in and ratification of these mechanisms. Australia has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990; the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Trafficking Protocol) in 2005; Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (OPSC) in 2007; and the ILO Convention No. 182 on the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour in 2006. Australian law is adequately harmonised with these international instruments.

#### Legislation

Due to Australia's federal government system, its legal response to CSEC is divided between its federal and state jurisdictions. The federal government can create offences that criminalise child exploitation where there is an international element to the crime, or where offences are committed online. States and territories have wider legislative powers for offences related to sexual exploitation of children.<sup>30</sup> Due to this divided system, CSEC laws have yet to be standardised and resultantly, children remain insufficiently protected in many parts of the country.

Australia generally does an adequate job of defining and criminalizing the act of engaging children in commercial sexual activity, including regions where adult prostitution has been decriminalised. The Commonwealth *Criminal Code* criminalises sexual servitude.<sup>31</sup> Most states/territories have provisions dealing with the prostitution of children which are broad enough to encompass the full range of acts contemplated by the OPSC.<sup>32</sup> However, laws concerning grooming for the purposes of child prostitution are lacking in Australia.

Child pornography laws are primarily addressed at the state/territorial level in Australia. Commonwealth legislation applies under limited circumstances, for example if the accused committed the offence outside of the country.<sup>33</sup> The Commonwealth legislation on child pornography conforms to the OPSC definition of the offence. However, variations in state and territorial laws result in insufficient legal protections for children overall, and increase the likelihood of "forum shopping." Interestingly, mere possession of child pornography is illegal in all jurisdictions, which exceeds the requirements set out in the OPSC. The Australian Parliament has been criticised for creating lenient penalties for child pornography offences compared with those imposed in other countries.<sup>34</sup>

The federal government has enacted broad antitrafficking laws which cover both internal and cross-border trafficking.<sup>35</sup> These laws comply with the standards set out in the Trafficking Protocol. Trafficking within a state or territory is not penalised under federal law. Rather, successful eradication of domestic trafficking relies heavily on comprehensive state and territorial laws.

Australia was one of the first countries to criminalise child sex tourism in 1994. In 2010, Parliament passed the Crimes Legislation Amendment for Sexual Offences against Children Bill, which added new and amended existing provisions related to child sex tourism in the Commonwealth Criminal Code Act. Australia has set a high bar by criminalising even acts preceding the actual commission of sexual offences, targeting both predatory and situational or opportunistic offenders.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, these laws apply to corporate bodies<sup>37</sup> and do not require double criminality in order to apply.<sup>38</sup> However, the enforcement of these laws is hampered by challenges associated with extraterritorial investigations and lack of adequate policing resources.<sup>39</sup> The legislation is still regarded as one of the more comprehensive responses to child sex tourism in the world.<sup>40</sup>

# **Child Protection Units**

The AFP has dedicated teams for investigating various crimes. Child sex tourism and

pornography offences are investigated by Child Protection Operations (CPO).<sup>41</sup> Human Trafficking Teams (HTT) are dedicated to combating slavery and sexual servitude, and lead investigations into human trafficking syndicates in Australia.<sup>42</sup> Specialised teams also operate at the territorial and state level, particularly in the area of online sexual offences.<sup>43</sup> Australia still needs to apply a more proactive rather than reactive approach in regards to child prostitution.

# Support Services for Children

Most of Australia's support services for children who have been abused or are at risk of being abused target sexual abuse broadly; few services are specifically designed to address CSEC. All states and territories in Australia offer victim support services which would cover CSEC crimes.<sup>44</sup> Generally, there are few specialist centres that are dedicated to sexually exploited children, and those which do offer such services often set the minimum age of eligibility at 15 or 16, although this requirement is currently under review.<sup>45</sup>

Most of Australia's hotlines pertinent to CSEC are devoted to online child abuse material or sexual abuse generally. The National Child Abuse Prevention Helpline is the only hotline that expressly targets CSEC matters.<sup>46</sup>

# Training Law enforcement personnel

Limited evidence exists about the trafficking of children to or from Australia. As a result, government and non-government agencies that come into contact with young sex workers have difficulty in identifying and appropriately responding to possible cases of trafficking when they do occur.<sup>47</sup> Australia's main training program is the Transnational Sexual Exploitation Investigation Program. The program does not provide explicit training on the unique needs of children, however.48 Prosecutors are also trained on unique issues surrounding trafficking cases,<sup>49</sup> and law enforcement sent overseas are trained in Australia's extraterritorial laws such as those pertaining to child sex tourism.<sup>50</sup>

Australia demonstrates a firm commitment to child and youth participation in accordance with Article 12 of the CRC.<sup>51</sup> Most child and youth participation initiatives occur at the state and territorial level. While all states and territories have a youth consultation body connected to their governments, some states, notably New South Wales, have made strong efforts to establish channels for more meaningful child participation. New South Wales is the only state or territory to provide a statutory basis for its youth advisory structure via the Youth Advisory Council.<sup>52</sup>

At the federal level, the Australian Youth Forum (AYF) facilitates ongoing public discussions and uses input from young people (15-24) in the development of public policy.<sup>53</sup>

In addition to government initiatives, there

# Child and Youth Participation

are a number of NGO programmes, such as the New South Wales Youth Action & Policy Association, Australian Youth Affairs Coalition and YMCA Youth Parliaments that reinforce Australia's framework for ensuring for child and youth involvement.

The Australian government has also pursued youth involvement in regards to Internet safety issues specifically. Australia's Youth Advisory Group (YAG) on Cybersafety provides advice to the government on a range of cybersafety topics.<sup>54</sup> Recommendations from YAG members have informed a range of government cybersafety initiatives to date.<sup>55</sup>

Australia evidently values the input of the youth population but CSEC issues are not gaining coverage that is needed in government consultations with young people.<sup>56</sup>

# **Priority Actions Required**

#### National plan of action

There should be a comprehensive national plan addressing all forms of CSEC that apportions resources for its immediate implementation and ensures regular monitoring and evaluation. The plan should devote special attention to Indigenous children and child participation. The *Australian Policing Strategy to Combat Trafficking in Persons* should be amended to include programmes and policies to address the specific vulnerabilities of children.

#### Coordination and cooperation

Regional coordination should be enhanced to address child prostitution in addition to human trafficking and online sexual exploitation of children. The government should also develop a nation-wide system for ongoing collection of data pertaining to all CSEC offences, not just human trafficking. Previous collaborations between national and local law enforcement agencies on Indigenous child protection matters should be duplicated in other areas.

#### Prevention

The government should initiate a national education campaign, through the dissemination of information and collaboration with the tourism industry, to educate Australians about travelling child sex offenders and the new preparatory laws. It should ensure that activities to improve public awareness of people trafficking within the sex industry highlights child-specific concerns, particularly that of child prostitution in Australia. The sex offender registry system should be improved to facilitate the tracking of potential perpetrators throughout their travels. The government should also institute a sustained research programme into the nature and prevalence of CSEC in Australia.

#### Protection

The Model Criminal Code should be updated to include an emphasis on child sex offences. The federal government should urge states and territories to adopt uniform child protection legislation. The full range of acts related to child prostitution contemplated by the OPSC and grooming should be prohibited in all jurisdictions. All provisions resulting in the punishment of children engaged in prostitution should be abolished. The legal definition of "child" in the context of CSEC should be standardized across all states and territories to under 18 in accordance with the CRC. Child pornography offences should be made to include portrayals of children and these offences' penalties should be increased to be commensurate with those in other countries. State and territorial legislation should be amended to reflect the standards set out in the Trafficking Protocol, and intra-state trafficking should be criminalised. Law enforcement agencies should receive more resources to investigate and manage cases of child sex tourism.

# Recovery and integration

Existing funding should be reconfigured to ensure that comprehensive care and support to all CSEC victims are uniform throughout the country. The Support Program for Victims of Trafficking should be more able to handle childspecific issues. Understanding and meeting the needs of victims of Internet-facilitated child sexual exploitation should receive more resources and attention.

#### Child and youth participation

The government should support public awareness campaigns that facilitate youth participation in matters specifically related to CSEC. It should also collaborate with NGOs and the private sector to ensure that child participation initiatives are mainstreamed and institutionalised throughout all levels of policymaking. Indigenous youth should be given special attention in regards to encouraging dialogue and developing support programmes concerning sexual exploitation in their communities.

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