

Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration To Address Forced Labour: Exploring Stakeholder Engagement From a Multilevel Perspective

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I, Zulay Patricia Buchs, declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Management Discipline Group, UTS Business School at the University of Technology Sydney, Australia.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution. This research is supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program.

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Dedication

*To the Lord Almighty, who granted me the courage to begin, the strength to endure,
and the faith to persevere to the end.*

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"We must find time to stop and thank the people who make a difference in our lives." — John F. Kennedy

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Abstract

An estimated 49.5 million people are currently living in modern slavery, with forced labour—the focus of this study—accounting for 27.6 million individuals, a figure comparable to Australia's population. This issue is especially prevalent in global supply chains, where 17.3 million victims are exploited. While multi-stakeholder collaborations (MSCs) have emerged as a strategic approach to address long-term social issues, their application in addressing forced labour remains poorly understood. The reasons for the shortcomings of MSCs in addressing forced labour remain largely unexplored, particularly involving key stakeholders, including non-traditional actors. A deeper investigation is needed to understand the roles these stakeholders play and the dynamics within the collaboration that influence the effectiveness of these efforts. Moreover, the neglect of underrepresented stakeholders and lack of engagement in collaboration models for social issues presents a significant challenge in stakeholder theory and restorative justice. To address this, I ask: ***Why do stakeholders' voices matter, and how can they make a difference in MSC to address forced labour in the supply chain?***

The context in which I address this question—the Australian National Action Plan Against Modern Slavery 2020–25—is both socially relevant and timely. NAPs on business and human rights are an emerging phenomenon that has attracted both supporters and critics (O'Brien et al., 2022). While NAPs may vary in structure, they share common elements and typically reflect the country's comprehensive strategy for 'human rights protection against harmful actions committed (e.g., forced labour) by enterprises.' (Bordignon, 2020, p. 200). The Australian NAP seeks public submissions and engages a wide range of stakeholders to ensure the plan reflects diverse perspectives across sectors and expertise, making it an ideal framework for exploring my research question.

Although existing research has explored MSCs performance and systemic change at the macro level, there is a need to study the issue from multiple levels of analysis – the micro-level stakeholder interactions and macro-level organisational outcomes. Understanding of this dynamic is critical for developing effective interventions, shaping well-informed policy, and reducing forced labour. The inclusion of stakeholders' voices, embracing those previously underrepresented, forms the core focus of this research, highlighting the need for their active

participation in MSCs. I draw on data from public documents supplemented by semi-structured interviews with experts from the Australian anti-slavery sector. I blend three theoretical frameworks—stakeholder theory, MSCs, and restorative justice—addressing the need for a more nuanced understanding of stakeholder inclusion, MSC dynamics, and the effectiveness of these models in tackling forced labour.

Through my dissertation, I made three discoveries. The **first**, is the inadequacy of current collaborations in effectively addressing forced labour. Many organisations operate within silos, failing to account for the diversity of experiences and expertise among stakeholders. While scholars and practitioners agree that key stakeholders, including workers, should have a voice in collaboration models (Caruana et al., 2021; Foot, 2015; Van Buren & Greenwood, 2009), designed mechanisms are essential for meaningful outcomes. Unstructured frameworks often allow dominant voices to overshadow others and lack mechanisms for accountability. In interviews, participants indicated that existing collaborative practices exhibit systemic issues and demonstrate limited effectiveness, emphasising the importance of developing genuine structural models to support collective solutions. Stakeholder exclusion can often lead to tokenism, undermining the potential for genuinely transformative collaboration.

Second, this research reveals a gap between organisations' recognition of stakeholders and the psychological distance in organisational responses (New, 2015; Simpson et al., 2021). Participants indicated that, despite businesses' claims of commitment to human rights, a gap often exists between stated ethics standards and tangible outcomes. Moreover, while some organisations may acknowledge the significance of engaging with key stakeholders, including marginalised groups (Chowdhury, 2021b; Chowdhury et al., 2022), they often lack the time, capacity, and resources to engage individual stakeholders effectively. This disorganised approach contradicts the classifications and structure presented by stakeholder theory, underscoring the need for more inclusive, structured, and collaborative frameworks. Offering stakeholders a space to share their voices and expertise is not merely a requirement—it is essential for cultivating a robust response to the challenges of forced labour within the NAP.

Third, the findings highlight the interplay between trust, fear, and accountability among stakeholders in addressing forced labour. This micro-level approach helps explore these dynamics, potentially influencing organisational responses, aligning with stakeholder theory to foster meaningful MSCs at the meso level, and supporting effective remedial outcomes. My exploration of stakeholder theory and restorative justice has guided my understanding of how these theoretical frameworks intersect with the dynamics of MSCs. I found that a micro-level approach grounded in restorative justice—using dialogue-based resolutions—shifts the focus from identifying violations to promoting transparency and healing among all stakeholders (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2011; Van Ness et al., 2022; Zehr, 2002b; Zehr et al., 2022).

I contribute to understanding forced labour responses by illustrating how stakeholders who haven't had a voice to date can be given their due place in collaboration models. Additionally, it advances theories of stakeholder, restorative justice, and MSCs by linking individual stakeholders—the actors in MSCs—to joining organisational efforts to address forced labour. Ultimately, this study sheds light on the potential of MSCs to navigate complex multi-organisational environments, identifying key stakeholders while simultaneously articulating the constraints of collaboration within forced labour scenarios. In this dissertation, I seek to make a modest yet substantive contribution that fosters future collaborations, facilitating alignment between advocates and stakeholders to eradicate forced labour from global supply chains.

In this thesis, I hope to make a modest yet meaningful contribution that paves the way for impactful collaborations, inspiring stakeholders across sectors to unite in the shared vision of eradicating forced labour from global supply chains.

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List of Abbreviations

AFP	Australian Federal Police
AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission
APR	Atún de Pesca Responsable
ASPI	Australian Strategic Policy Institute
ATMG	Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group (United Kingdom)
BCI	The Better Cotton Initiative
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
FAR	Federal Acquisition Regulations (U.S.)
FFP	The Fair Food Program
FLA	The Fair Labour Association
HRDD	Human Rights Due Diligence
HRREC	Human Rights Resources and Energy Collaborative
ILO	International Labour Organisation
ISTAC	The International Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council
MSA	Modern Slavery Act
MSC	Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration
NAP	National Action Plan
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHCHR	The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OSCE	The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PEC	The Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre
PITF	U.S. President's Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons
SDGs	The Sustainable Development Goals
STPP	Support for Trafficked People Program
TIP Report	The U.S. Trafficking in Persons Report
UFLPA	The Uyghur Forced Labour Prevention Act
UN	United Nations
UNGCA	United Nations Global Compact Australia
UNGP	United Nations Principles on Business and Human Rights
WSR	Worker-Driven Social Responsibility

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Introduction: The Global Issue of Forced Labour

“Stakeholder groups need to be represented. Representative mechanisms need to be structured, and they need to be democratic; they need to be organised, because there's a lot of diversity amongst stakeholders. And so that diversity needs to be accounted for, it needs to be managed” (P4, Civil Society).

This quote from an expert in the anti-slavery field, in response to my question about collaborative efforts within Australia and the pitfalls of collaboration models to address forced labour, illuminates this dissertation's core principles. These principles can be encapsulated as follows: multi-stakeholder collaboration **(1)** is complex for the stakeholders and organisations involved, **(2)** includes tensions and navigates differing agendas, and **(3)** serves as a crucial mechanism for driving corporate responses and remediation efforts to address forced labour. Situated at the intersection of business and human rights, this research explores collaborative efforts to address forced labour from multiple lenses that transcend the traditional frontiers of government, non-profit organisations, and businesses.

These collaborations, here referred to as multi-stakeholder collaborations (MSCs), are recognised by academics and practitioners for their potential to effectively address some of the most severe global human rights abuses, including forced labour, which forms the focus of this research (Foot, 2015; George et al., 2016; Gray & Purdy, 2018; Lockyer, 2020; Nolan & Boersma, 2019). Sustainable Development Goal 17 (Partnership for the goals) (SDG 17) explicitly emphasises this need for collaboration to achieve the Goals, especially Goal 8.7, which aims to eradicate forced labour (United Nations, 2015). Despite a global consensus denouncing human exploitation, as established by the International Labour Organization's Forced Labour Convention (No.29, 1930) and the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948), forced labour continues to flourish (Crane et al., 2022) and worker conditions remain largely unchanged (Chowdhury et al., 2022; Wettstein, 2021).

Currently, an estimated 49.6 million men, women, and children live in slavery, with 17.3 million of them subjected to forced labour in the private sector—the primary method of exploitation in global supply chains (International Labour Organization et al., 2022; Walk Free, Report 2023). Moreover, the 2023 Walk Free Global Estimates report indicates that there are approximately 41,000 victims or survivors of forced labour in Australia (Walk Free, Report 2023). This pervasive issue underlines the inadequacy of current approaches and the need for collaborative models and stakeholder inclusion, as emphasized by SDG 17. Without effectively addressing forced labour, policy interventions will fail, leading to poor policy-making and increased exploitation. Understanding the significance of stakeholders' voices in MSCs is critical for designing practical strategies to combat this pressing issue. To problematise the conversation (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011; Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997) around stakeholder voice inclusion in MSCs against forced labour and address fundamental social questions (Pratt, 2016), I ask

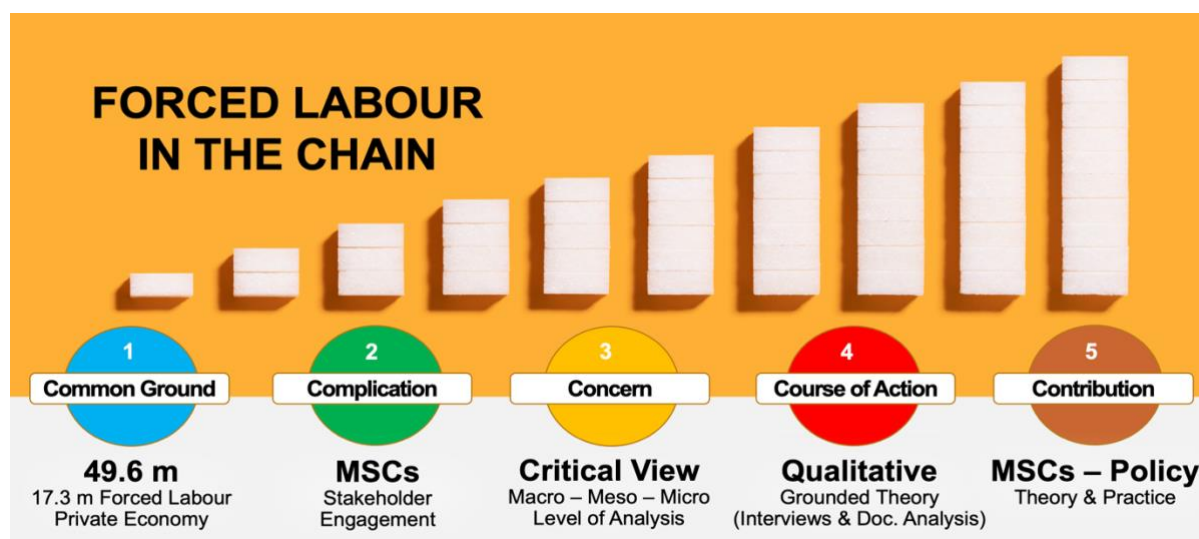
Why do stakeholders' voices matter and how can they make a difference in MSCs to address forced labour?

The context in which I address this question—the Australian National Action Plan Against Modern Slavery 2020–25—is both socially relevant and timely. National action plans (NAPs) on business and human rights are an emerging phenomenon that has attracted supporters and critics (O'Brien et al., 2022). While NAPs may vary in structure, they share common elements and typically reflect a country's comprehensive strategy for "human rights protection against harmful actions committed (e.g., forced labour) by enterprises" (Bordignon, 2020, p. 200). However, some studies argue that governments have used NAPs as a "pretext for avoiding hard regulations" (O'Brien et al., 2022, p. 93).

The Australian NAP seeks public submissions and engages various stakeholders to ensure the plan reflects diverse perspectives across sectors and expertise, making it an ideal framework for exploring my research question. My approach combines organisational-level

analysis through stakeholder theory with individual-level insights from restorative justice to explore collaboration models and contribute to a comprehensive NAP strategy for addressing forced labour. This theoretical blending is critical for three reasons. **First**, although stakeholder theory emphasises the ethical responsibilities of organisations to involve key stakeholders, it does not extend beyond the organisation. **Second**, while restorative justice focuses on the experiences of individual stakeholders, emphasising dialogue and healing, it does not reflect on collaboration. **Third**, MSCs at the meso level serve as a bridge where both perspectives are brought together and interrelated, enabling a more comprehensive exploration of collaboration models and the development of robust and sustainable solutions to address forced labour. This approach embodies a sense of responsibility as a “relational call for solidarity”, recognising that all stakeholders—whether directly connected or actively working against it—are interconnected within these unjust systems (Browne, 2023, p. 98). In this research, I adopt the five core building blocks framework developed by Lange and Pfarrer (2017) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 *Five Core Building Blocks of the Research*



Chapter 1 establishes a common ground while addressing the nuances within academic discussions on forced labour, stakeholder engagement, and MSCs. **Chapter 2** illuminates the limitations of the current conversations and the importance of exploring forced labour and MSCs' dynamics through multiple layers—macro, meso, and micro. The chapter highlights why such a multi-dimensional approach is crucial. The methodology outlined in **Chapter 3** details a novel approach to addressing forced labour, with **Chapters 4, 5, 6** and **7** presenting the findings and offering new insights into the issue. This framework leads to the research's central complication: stakeholder engagement within MSCs to address forced labour. Finally, **Chapter 8** presents the study's contribution, explaining how it advances understanding in this field.

By applying the approach of constant comparison proposed by Locke and Golden-Biddle, with a focus on coherence and problematising, I critically explored stakeholder theory, restorative justice, and MSCs to construct synthesised coherence and relationships (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997). By synthesised coherence, I mean building a bridge between conceptual conversations that share a common but unrecognised interest (Pollock, 2021) and ideas that have not been explored (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997). From a theoretical and conceptual perspective, this dissertation contributes to the expanding body of research on MSCs (further explored in **Chapter 1**), which has grown significantly in recent decades in theory (Gray & Purdy, 2018; Seitanidi & Crane, 2013; Selsky & Parker, 2005) and practice (Better Cotton Initiative, 2005; MSI Integrity, 2020; Worker-Driven Social Responsibility Network, 2015).

Specifically, my research enhances our understanding of MSCs and stakeholder voice inclusion in MSCs (Caruana et al., 2021; Foot, 2015). By stakeholder voice, I refer to the stakeholders' ability to openly communicate and assert their interests to influence decision-making processes. (Dempsey, 2017). Thus far, little attention has been given to MSCs addressing forced labour (Caruana et al., 2021; Foot, 2015) and how critical stakeholders are included in those conversations (Boersma, 2018; David & Salter, 2021). Exploring

collaboration models to address forced labour enabled me to examine how stakeholders are integrated or excluded and observe the dynamics among diverse actors and levels of influence.

Throughout my data collection, I encountered tensions and inconsistencies related to the purposes and outcomes of MSCs and the collaborative processes between actors and organisations. To examine these complexities, I drew on stakeholder theory (Chowdhury et al., 2022; Freeman, 1984) and restorative justice (Zehr, 2002b; Zehr et al., 2022) literature (further explored in **Chapter 2**), applying both macro and micro levels of analysis. This approach allowed me to bridge both theoretical frameworks through MSCs at the meso level, facilitating a triangulation of the findings. This exploration aimed to illuminate macro-level efforts in MSCs and stakeholder engagement. I also address the call for a greater focus on the micro-macro divide in management studies, connecting emerging individual-level phenomena to macro-level organisational structures and outcomes (Eckardt et al., 2019; Preuss et al., 2024). Moreover, I respond to the call for exploring structural injustice at the micro level of analysis (Van Buren III & Schrempf-Stirling, 2022) by using restorative justice as a theoretical framework. As such, by exploring the phenomenon from different angles, my theoretical contribution offers a more granular understanding of collaboration dynamics to address forced labour.

From a methodological perspective, further explained in **Chapter 3**, I employed a qualitative grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006) with abductive reasoning. This involved conducting 16 semi-structured interviews and analysing documents developed by participants, allowing me to gather extensive datasets for my research. Grounded theory is well-suited for the abductive exploration of phenomena (Suddaby, 2006) with little theoretical understanding (Corley, 2015). The abductive reasoning process supports the development of new ideas (Reichert, 2019) and leverages learning (Van de Ven, 2007) and theory construction (Tavory & Timmermans, 2019). It also addresses gaps in understanding (Van de Ven, 2007) and enables creative discovery (Thornberg & Dunne, 2019).

Management scholars can significantly contribute to developing sustainable solutions for pressing issues (Chowdhury et al., 2022; Crane, 2013; George et al., 2016; Howard-Grenville et al., 2019). Moreover, applying diverse theoretical perspectives to develop “new explanations” for understanding management phenomena and addressing challenges is crucial (Okhuysen & Bonardi, 2011). Therefore, to bring a fresh perspective to my research and its relation to management's role in stakeholder reasoning (Okhuysen & Bonardi, 2011), I ask, “What if we would think about the base assumptions and default explanations differently?” (Cornelissen & Durand, 2012). Rather than claiming conclusive statements about reality, this approach, through counterfactual reasoning (Cornelissen & Durand, 2014), seeks to produce fresh understandings (Cornelissen, 2017) about stakeholder voice inclusion in MSCs.

As an engaged scholar (Van de Ven, 2007) and former detective, I applied key principles to produce responsible science aligned with responsible research in business and management (RRBM, 2024) —further explained in **Section 3.5**. My experience as a detective investigating forced labour and its connections to other crimes, my passion for social justice, and the critical role of collaboration with various stakeholders primarily motivated this research. Throughout my research, I have leveraged my professional background and academic skills to bridge the gap between theory and practice, understanding the challenges of fighting forced labour and the immense value of MSCs. This personal and professional journey has informed my research and reinforced my dedication to supporting those who tirelessly work to address forced labour.

In this introductory chapter, I present the empirical background of my research. The first section details the research context and data sample, specifically addressing forced labour in supply chains. The second part offers an overview of this dissertation's four empirical chapters and explains their interconnections.

Forced Labour in Supply Chains

Currently, an estimated 49.6 million men, women, and children live in slavery daily (International Labour Organization et al., 2022; Walk Free, Report 2023), which is 10 million more than in 2016 (Walk Free, Report 2016). There is a misconception that forced labour only occurs in remote and underdeveloped countries, but it happens in every country, including Australia (Nolan & Boersma, 2019). Of those in modern slavery, 27.6 million are subjected to forced labour, roughly equivalent to the population of Australia, while 22 million are forced into marriage. Forced labour refers to the work that individuals perform against their will under the threat or menace of punishment (International Labour Organization, 2017c). It is the primary method of enslavement in global supply chains (Boersma et al., 2022), affecting 17.3 million victims in various sectors such as construction, mining, textiles, agriculture, and fishing, among others (International Labour Organization et al., 2022). Supply chains comprise the networks and systems in which products or services are created and delivered from suppliers to consumers (Jalbut & Sichman, 2018). Our lifestyle inevitably connects us to forced labour (Nolan & Boersma, 2019).

Organisations have taken advantage of jurisdictions with poor regulatory frameworks in a race to reduce costs, perpetuating the exploitation of workers (Boersma & Nolan, 2022)—the marginalised stakeholders (Chowdhury et al., 2022). A recent study on local responses to societal issues found that addressing complex problems is "challenging to grasp in their entirety by a single individual" (Van der Giessen et al., 2022, p. 4), underscoring the importance of MSCs. This emphasis on collaboration also prompts critical questions about the inclusion of marginalised stakeholders voice in MSCs (Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group, 2021; Foot, 2015; Lockyer, 2020), as exemplified by the UK's Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group (ATMG) (2021).

Numerous countries have implemented business and human rights laws, such as the California Transparency in Supply Chain Act 2010, the UK Modern Slavery Act 2015, and the

Australian Modern Slavery Act 2018 (MSA). However, because forced labour is a cross-border issue and forced labour laws only work within their own countries, MSCs between different sectors (government, business, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civic society organisations, community groups, and marginalised stakeholders are vital to bridge this governance gap (Nolan & Boersma, 2019). The Australian NAP is a comprehensive framework that theoretically provides strategic guidance, clear priorities, collaboration, and actionable steps across sectors. However, this research reveals that existing collaboration models often fall short in effectiveness, with limited government guidance and the exclusion of crucial stakeholders reducing their overall impact (see Chapters 5 and 6).

Effective collaboration is critical for developing robust strategies to address forced labour; however, scholars agree that it is not a guarantee of success (Gray & Purdy, 2018). These collaborative efforts often involve diverse stakeholders, each exhibiting unique skills, objectives, and cultures (Weber et al., 2021), which can cause participant tensions (Boersma 2018; Quayle et al., 2019). Moreover, MSCs tend to prioritise collective collaboration over accommodating the specific needs, demands, or approaches of individual stakeholders (Savage et al., 2010). While MSCs emphasise collective efforts, they inadvertently marginalises stakeholders, highlighting the need to balance inclusivity and outcomes.

Given the exponential increase in research around collaboration, scholars and practitioners have transitioned from questioning the relevance of MSCs to determining how these collaborations should be established, structured, managed, enhanced, and expanded (Van Tulder et al., 2016). Understanding the dynamics of collaborative efforts and stakeholder voice inclusion mechanisms to address the urgency of addressing forced labour is paramount.

It is beyond doubt that forced labour represents global health risks (Fraley et al., 2020) and international economic concerns (International Labour Organization, 2014) and breaches fundamental human rights (Baumann-Pauly, Nolan, Labowitz, et al., 2016; Nolan & Boersma, 2019)—all of which result in substantial societal repercussions. Forced labour is driven by

poverty and demand for cheap labour, creating a lucrative illicit market (Kerr, 2014; Nolan & Boersma, 2019). The absence of legal standards and voluntary reporting, questionable rating tools (Boersma & Nolan, 2022), and insufficient worker protection, especially in countries like China (Clarke & Boersma, 2017), further exacerbate the issue. These gaps enable forced labour to thrive, emphasising the need for robust and collaborative approaches. To determine the effectiveness of collaborative models, it is essential to better understand their mechanisms and impact in addressing forced labour.

The growing demand in consumer goods and the increased production across often obscure supply chain networks has given rise to major human rights threats and governance challenges (Clarke & Boersma, 2017; Harris & Nolan, 2022). As supply chains become more fragmented, organisations are expected to be more responsible for the practices and actions of their suppliers (Kim & Davis, 2016).

However, there is growing evidence of human rights violations and forced labour in global supply chains (International Labour Organization et al., 2022). For example, Xu et al. (2020) of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) reported that from 2017–2019, around 80,000 Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities were transferred from Xinjiang across the nation by Chinese authorities to factories for exploitation, a situation linked to renowned international brands in the fashion, automotive, and technology sector. Many companies often [un]intentionally overlook the risk of human rights issues in their supply chains, thus fostering a psychological distance between themselves and their suppliers. They either think these problems occur elsewhere or believe they cannot happen among their suppliers (Simpson et al., 2021). Additionally, numerous corporations are preoccupied with pursuing narrowly defined competitive advantages, overlooking human rights risks in their operations (Parmar et al., 2022).

Management scholars state that individuals often distance themselves from structural injustices due to the difficulty of connecting their actions to systemic outcomes, creating

psychological distance (Young, 2003, p. 7). As a result, the persistence of forced labour can be attributed to corporations' psychological distance, where the issue is viewed in abstract terms, often limiting stakeholders' awareness of the practical consequences of their decisions (Simpson et al., 2021, p. 993). This distance is further exacerbated by insufficient engagement with marginalised stakeholders in decision-making processes, leading to missed opportunities for meaningful interaction and the development of sustainable solutions (Chowdhury et al., 2022; Harris & Freeman, 2008).

Despite a rise in business and management research on forced labour over the past decade (Crane & LeBaron, 2019), it has not yet evolved into a substantial body of work (Caruana et al., 2021), indicating a need for further exploration (New, 2015) that carries theoretical implications (Crane, 2013). Existing research mainly focuses on the theoretical aspects of supply chain management based on standard business practices (Caruana et al., 2021), while recent studies exploring organisations' approach to complex social issues often entail terminological ambiguity and lack practical guidance for businesses (Dorado et al., 2022; Gray & Purdy, 2018; Le Ber & Branzei, 2010). Moreover, some organisations, especially in industries with significant social and environmental impacts (e.g., fashion or extraction), “use stakeholder dialogue as a symbolic smokescreen to avoid substantive action” (Acuti et al., 2024, p. 1)

This situation creates what I perceive as three significant blind spots. **First**, in-depth studies on the practical and theoretical aspects of stakeholder roles and forced labour in business are lacking (Caruana et al., 2021; Chowdhury et al., 2022; Crane, 2013). This also involves interdisciplinary research involving multiple academic disciplines (Caruana et al., 2021; Crane, 2013). This dissertation actively integrates management, business human rights, social sciences, and restorative justice, drawing on criminal law and sociology to bridge silos of knowledge. **Second**, there is a crucial need to explore more deeply how various stakeholders participate in MSCs and, consequently, how these collaborative models can help reduce the risk of forced labour (Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group, 2021; Boersma, 2018;

Foot, 2015). This interaction could subsequently improve the status and well-being of workers, thereby serving as a proactive measure against forced labour in business operations.

Third, the issue of how to adequately remedy the abuse of victims' rights is often neglected (Simmons et al., 2022), an important shortcoming and a potential opportunity for improvement. A lack of transparency has made it impossible to study the effectiveness of most company grievance mechanisms (Harrison & Wielga, 2023). To address this, both the direct and indirect effects of corporate activities on rights holders must be considered (Pryde et al., 2024). Through meaningful engagement, the rights holders can search for solutions that promote repair and reconciliation and facilitate social recovery (Braithwaite, 1999; Sered, 2019; Zehr, 2002a). This implies that right holders receive compensation and apologies, offenders accept responsibility and make restitution, and the general community builds trust and promotes collective learning (Goodstein & Butterfield, 2010).

Academics in the management field, where business and stakeholders convene, should advocate for stakeholders who are not being treated fairly rather than purely explore their situation as a research phenomenon (Van Buren & Greenwood, 2009). In this context, management scholars, in particular, can contribute significantly to amplifying the voices of stakeholders and developing sustainable solutions to societal issues (Chowdhury et al., 2022; Crane, 2013; George et al., 2016; Howard-Grenville et al., 2019). There is a need, I argue, to better understand stakeholders' voices and participation, their interaction nature, and dynamics within collaboration models to prevent forced labour.

Thus, a multilayered exploration of MSC is essential, integrating top-down principles from stakeholder theory and bottom-up restorative practices (as presented in **Chapter 2**). This approach ensures that collaboration reflects all stakeholders' diverse voices and concerns. Through the theoretical lenses of stakeholder theory, MSCs, and restorative justice, it becomes evident that while diverse stakeholder inclusion can enhance remediation efforts, careful management of conflicting agendas is essential. Moreover, prioritising the voices of

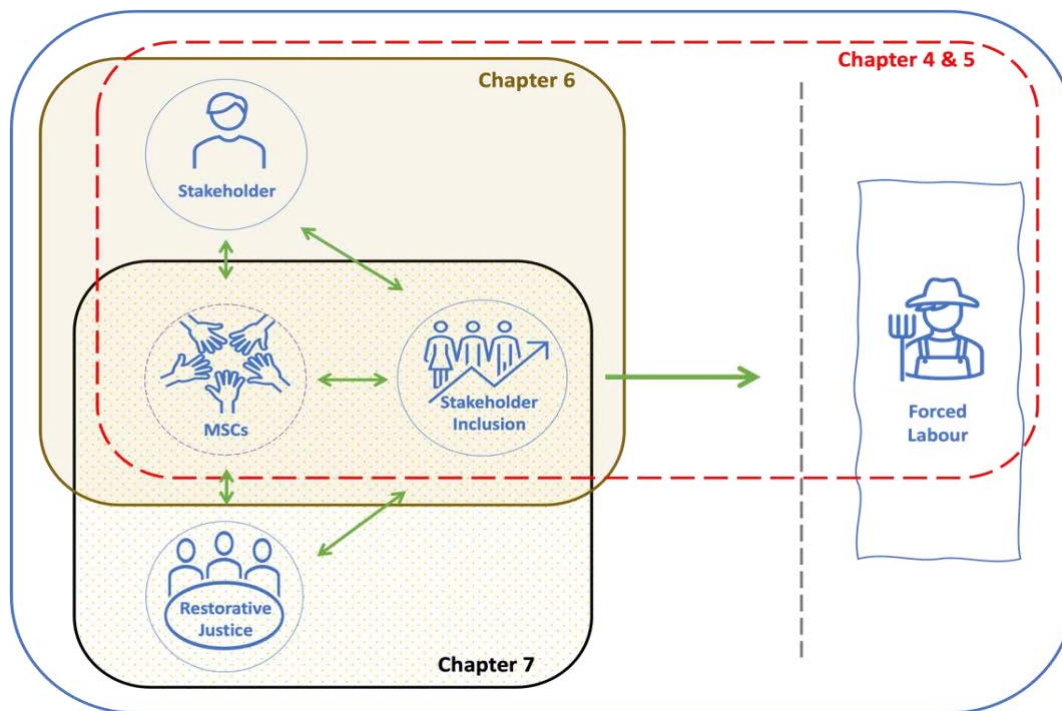
those most affected is crucial for achieving equitable and effective outcomes. This integrated theoretical perspective provides a robust framework for understanding and addressing the challenges of forced labour through MSCs, setting the stage for a deeper exploration of these themes in the subsequent chapters.

Experts in the anti-slavery field have stressed the importance of MSCs for the progress of the NAP and its contribution to the Australian MSA in the fight against forced labour. By exploring stakeholder voices in MSCs and evaluating the efficacy of strategies, this research increases our theoretical understanding of forced labour. It also offers practical implications fostering more inclusive, holistic, and sustainable solutions. By providing empirical evidence on the dynamics of stakeholder inclusion in collaboration models addressing forced labour, I hope my research encourages policymakers and practitioners to engage stakeholders across sectors more purposefully and inspires scholars across disciplines to explore further the complexities of this pervasive issue and its potential solutions.

Chapter Overview

In this section, I elaborate on each chapter and how it contributes to the research question as it explores and illuminates stakeholder voice inclusion in MSCs. The conceptual and theoretical concepts are disseminated across all chapters. Collectively, the four empirical chapters of this dissertation (Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7) contribute to answering the research question by exploring and explaining: *Why do stakeholders' voices matter, and how can they make a difference in MSCs to address forced labour?* **Figure 2** highlights the focus of each empirical chapter and its contribution to the overall research project. Chapters 1 through 3, which provide the theoretical and conceptual foundations, are not included in the figure. The figure only presents the empirical research and findings.

Figure 2 *Illustration of the Main Concepts Covered in Each Chapter*



In this research, I developed a model that explores the dynamics of MSC formation, studied in detail in Chapters 5, 6, and 7. This model combines empirical insights and theoretical frameworks to demonstrate how various stakeholders interact within collaboration models to combat forced labour. It highlights essential components, such as effective stakeholder management, establishing a common language at the macro level, and leveraging stakeholders' unique voices and expertise at the micro level. This model creates a more inclusive, communicative, and effective MSC structure by integrating human rights perspectives. This synergy paves the way for purpose-driven solutions and knowledge co-creation within NAP MSC frameworks. Importantly, this model addresses critical gaps in current stakeholder engagement practices within collaborative frameworks, offering a more integrated and sustainable approach that ultimately strengthens the Australian NAP strategy to combat forced labour across supply chains. I will now provide an overview of each chapter, presenting the structure and critical themes examined throughout this research.

Chapter 1 – **Forced Labour: What, Who, and How**

What are the current collaboration models to address forced labour in supply chains?

In this chapter, I outline the common ground by elaborating on stakeholder inclusion and the complexities around MSCs to address forced labour in the supply chains. I study how scholars have approached the phenomena by identifying the current gaps in the literature. This chapter contextualises my research by elaborating on stakeholder framing, covering the importance of including key stakeholders in current MSCs. By implementing the problematisation approach (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011), this chapter shows the importance of identifying and recognising stakeholders' roles in collaboration to address forced labour.

Chapter 2 – **Conceptual and Theoretical Approach**

This chapter explores collaboration models to address forced labour through the lens of stakeholder theory and restorative justice. Stakeholder theory (Chowdhury et al., 2022; Freeman, 1984) is a macro-level approach that emphasises the importance of the stakeholder role in value creation at the organisation level. However, it often neglects individual stakeholders' complexities and critical voices, which are essential in addressing issues like forced labour. On the other hand, restorative justice (Zehr, 2002b; Zehr et al., 2022), a micro-level approach, focuses on individual experiences, dialogues, and healing. While valuable, it inadvertently neglects collective aspects and the dynamics of stakeholder collaboration to tackle a common issue.

The intersection of these approaches reveals a critical "space in the middle" that encloses diverse and intersecting concerns, stressing the constraints of relying on a single theory. To address this gap, this chapter proposes including the MSC mechanism (Gray & Purdy, 2018; Selsky & Parker, 2005) at the meso level of analysis. This approach aims to bridge and blend the theoretical frameworks of stakeholder theory and restorative justice, offering a more comprehensive exploration of stakeholder voice in collaboration models to effectively address complex issues like forced labour.

Chapter 3 – **Methodology**

This chapter provides the rationale and methodological framework for my research. Scholars agree that qualitative methods are essential for enhancing our understanding of complex phenomena and dynamics (Köhler et al., 2023). In this study, I adopt a qualitative grounded theory approach and purposefully sample the Australian National Action Plan Against Modern Slavery as a relevant context to explore the phenomenon from the perspective of those involved (Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theory is particularly well suited for an abductive exploration of phenomena (Suddaby, 2006) with little theoretical understanding (Corley, 2015).

This approach is coherent with grounded theory research conducted in management (Suddaby, 2006). The research process involved an iterative approach, navigating various complexities and transitions by shifting between emergent data, themes, concepts, dimensions, and relevant literature (Gioia et al., 2013; Locke et al., 2022). Since I could not directly access forced labour survivors, I explored their perspectives through expert interviews, archival data, and public reports; I provide further details in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 – **Public Contributions to the National Action Plan**

Are current collaboration models giving appropriate consideration to how stakeholder voices are included in MSCs? This chapter explores the dynamic challenges underlying collaboration by presenting key stakeholders and their significance for MSCs addressing forced labour. I also contextualise stakeholders with a voice as a unit of analysis in line with the human rights approach. I explore how broader groups of participants can be involved and have a voice in such collaborations.

Reporting on who is and is not considered a stakeholder in the current models, I illustrate the complexities behind those MSCs addressing forced labour in global supply chains. Data from the public submissions to the Australian NAP 2020–25 revealed that the

involvement of multiple stakeholders in collaboration models plays a critical role in anti-slavery strategies. Moreover, developing meaningful collaborative efforts, including stakeholders as human beings with a voice, may be influential in improving a new approach to ethical and sustainable solutions.

Chapter 5 – **Australia’s Response to Forced Labour**

How has Australia’s MSA so far influenced company reporting and action? And how are government-led collaborations actively addressing forced labour? This chapter offers an in-depth review of independent and governmental evaluations, focusing on the initial impact of Australia's MSA on company reporting and actions. Building upon initial analyses, this study engaged directly with 16 experienced professionals in the Australian anti-slavery field (*refer to Chapter 3 for comprehensive details*). It extended the findings with archival data (e.g., government and research reports). This chapter explores how current models of MSC function within the Australian NAP framework to address forced labour.

Based on the findings from this chapter, I developed a preliminary model (see **Figure 10**) detailing collaboration dynamics and stakeholder engagement within MSCs to address forced labour. Findings highlight substantial discrepancies between legislative goals and actual corporate practices, revealing the Act’s reliance on reporting mechanisms as a weakness. Additionally, the government-led National Roundtable on Modern Slavery and the Australian Expert Advisory Group on Modern Slavery encounter significant challenges related to inclusivity, transparency, and effectiveness. In essence, the government’s approach has been predominantly reactive, responding to rather than setting the agenda for robust anti-slavery practices. This has failed to establish and enforce stringent standards that could drive substantive change.

Chapter 6 – **Collaboration Dynamics in Combating Forced Labour**

What collaboration models exist in Australia to address forced labour, and what are some of the barriers that hinder collaboration? This chapter explores the complexities and challenges of collaboration across sectors in Australia to combat forced labour, examining diverse perspectives on the Australian NAP's effectiveness, critical gaps, and ways to enhance stakeholder engagement. A key finding is the importance of a human-centric approach in collaborative efforts. Excluding critical stakeholders from these models and processes disempowers them and undermines the legitimacy and effectiveness of MSCs. A persistent issue identified is the disconnection among stakeholders, the need for greater information flow practices, and businesses' reluctance to collaborate with external parties due to fears of legal repercussions and competitive disadvantages. This hesitation poses a significant barrier to the effectiveness of the Australian NAP and overall collaboration.

Additionally, the chapter reveals a surprising parallel between stakeholder "volunteerism" and forced labour. Organisations struggling to survive must often attend meetings and volunteer their time and resources without compensation. This practice, especially when addressing labour exploitation, ironically perpetuates the very exploitation it seeks to eliminate. Drawing on this chapter's findings, I refined the preliminary model (see **Figure 11**) to emphasise MSCs' role in linking macro-level strategies with individual-level stakeholder concerns around forced labour. This chapter leverages the knowledge of 16 seasoned experts to study collaborative models against forced labour and the challenges to their successful implementation in Australia.

Chapter 7 – **Moving Forward: Stakeholder Inclusion in MSCs**

How can MSCs in Australia balance inclusion and expertise to bridge systemic gaps and enhance corporate responses to addressing forced labour? This chapter identifies barriers to effective collaboration in Australia, highlighting whether the government's approach to fostering inclusivity acts as a facilitator or a potential barrier. The government prioritises

individuals who support its position over experts, thereby limiting deeper understanding and allowing vague solutions. Further, the perception of government agencies operating behind closed doors and the difficulties civil society organisations face in collaboration models impede adequate participation. Additionally, the lack of structured systems for addressing forced labour impedes survivor support and increases re-victimisation risks. On the one hand, business response mechanisms need better collaboration with worker delegates, NGOs, and unions, focusing on including worker voices to address inequalities.

Based on the findings from this chapter, I have developed a model (see **Figure 12**) that outlines the crucial role of stakeholder inclusion in MSCs for creating purpose-driven solutions and co-creating knowledge to address forced labour. This chapter explores ways to improve the Australian NAP through restorative justice principles—emphasising relationships, dialogue, and remedies—to foster humane, inclusive, and sustainable outcomes against forced labour. It draws on insights from 16 experts to examine collaborative models and identifies barriers to their implementation in Australia.

Chapter 8 – **Discussion**

In this final chapter, I summarise the key findings, highlighting the critical role of collaboration and demonstrating how cooperation among diverse stakeholders across various sectors can strengthen the Australian NAP response efforts, even in the face of challenges and conflicting agendas. Instead, the involvement of different stakeholders in the collaboration dynamics allows us to explore the phenomena from multiple levels, revealing the tensions and complexities inherent in such efforts. The findings highlight the essential role of collaboration among diverse stakeholders, showing that exploring collaboration dynamics across macro, meso, and micro levels offers a deeper understanding of MSC complexities, tensions, and benefits in addressing a common issue.

This research highlights the critical role of responsibility within the Australian NAP, emphasising inclusivity, structured systems, and accountability to enhance the MSCs

effectiveness and legitimacy. It also advocates for a NAP approach that integrates human rights lenses into business operations and enhances frameworks for stakeholder participation. This responsibility, in its political sense, is "a relational call for solidarity" that extends to all who contribute to or combat structural injustices, uniting them through these shared conditions (Browne, 2023, p. 98)

Finally, the chapter discusses its practical implications and limitations, suggesting directions for future research, the need for continuous stakeholder engagement assessment, and its impact on Australian NAP's efforts to address forced labour. My research contributes to the literature on forced labour in supply chains and to stakeholder theory, MSCs, and restorative justice.

The next chapter will establish a foundation for this study by identifying the primary scholarly literature on forced labour, recognising potential stakeholders for inclusion in anti-slavery strategies, and exploring the implementation of multi-stakeholder collaboration to address forced labour in supply chains.

1 Forced Labour: What, Who and How

Modern slavery, a non-legal umbrella term, includes serious exploitative practices prohibited in international legal frameworks (Harris & Nolan, 2022). These practices include forced labour (work under the threat of punishment), bonded or indebted labour (work to pay off debt without control over working conditions), human trafficking (movement of people for exploitation), child slavery (exploitative work performed by children for gains by a third party), and domestic slavery (exploitative work in private residences) (Boersma & Nolan, 2022). Other exploitative practices include deceptive recruitment for labour and forced marriage (Boersma & Nolan, 2022; Nolan & Boersma, 2019).

It is estimated that 49.6 million individuals are living in slavery daily (International Labour Organization et al., 2022), and 27.6 million of these victims are trapped in forced labour situations, a figure that closely approximates the population of Australia. This cautious figure significantly exceeds earlier estimates from recent decades (Walk Free, Report 2016). Labour exploitation affects both global and local supply chains, impacting developing regions as well as industrialised countries (Boersma & Nolan, 2022; Clarke & Boersma, 2019; LeBaron et al., 2018). This research specifically concentrates on the prevalence and impact of forced labour within global supply chains.

Of the estimated 27.6 million people in forced labour, 17.3 million are exploited across various industries—including mining, textiles, construction, agriculture, and fishing—that are commonly linked to a higher incidence of forced labour (Baumann-Pauly & Trabelsi, 2021; Boersma et al., 2022; Crane et al., 2022; Higgins, 2023; LeBaron et al., 2018). The challenge in detecting and addressing this crime stems from the fact that perpetrators conceal the victims and the victims are unable to identify themselves as such (Farrell & de Vries, 2020).

This issue highlights the socio-economic landscape marked by growing inequalities and the degradation of rights and social security, creating fertile ground for exploitation (Nolan

& Boersma, 2019). Our consumption habits and daily actions directly support these systems of forced labour, mainly affecting vulnerable communities and perpetuating exploitation cycles. Therefore, understanding the connections, dynamics, and disguises around forced labour is critical to effectively addressing this global issue. Management research has focused on how organisations address complex social issues such as forced labour, often without fully considering how these solutions apply to business practices (Dorado et al., 2022).

Collaborations involving multiple stakeholders have emerged over the last decades as an intentional approach to addressing and fostering long-term solutions to social issues, such as forced labour (Bryson et al., 2006; George, G. et al., 2016; Baumann-Pauly, D., & Trabelsi, L., 2021). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 17 (Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development goals), underscore the importance of such collaboration, calling for engagement across various fields and with different stakeholders.

Although the study of forced labour within the fields of business and management has expanded significantly over the past decade, a pressing need remains for interdisciplinary research that unites various academic disciplines (Caruana, R., Crane, A., Gold, S., & LeBaron, G., 2021; Crane, A., 2013) and diverse stakeholders (Boersma, M., 2018) through collaborative frameworks (Foot, K., 2015). Exploring this is critical, as the exclusion of stakeholder voices —particularly those from less powerful groups—presents a moral challenge and leaves vulnerable stakeholders, such as workers, open to exploitation by organisations (Van Buren, H. J., & Greenwood, M., 2009).

This chapter establishes the foundation for exploring collaboration models employed to address forced labour in supply chains, specifically focusing on the inclusion and exclusion of key stakeholders. It contributes to the main research question: Why do stakeholder voices matter and how can they make a difference in MSCs to address forced labour? To tackle this complex issue, this research has engaged supervisors from the faculties of Law and Business

across three different universities. Additionally, it draws upon three multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks: Stakeholder Theory, pertinent to management (Freeman, 1984); MSCs, which integrate management, business, human rights, and social sciences (Gray & Purdy, 2018; Selsky & Parker, 2005); and restorative justice, rooted in criminal law and sociology (Braithwaite, 1999; Zehr, 2015). Building on this foundation, it is essential to first understand what forced labour is and how it occurs in supply chains.

1.1 What is Forced Labour in Supply Chains

Forced labour is the most used method of enslaving people in global supply chains—making it a “key concern” (Boersma et al., 2022, p. 201). It refers to “all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily” (International Labour Organization, 1930 Article 2). A more recent definition is this: “exploitation that individuals cannot leave due to threats, violence, coercion, deception, and abuse of power” (2017c, p. 9). This definition captures actions such as grooming, withholding wages, and restricting movement. However, some scholars argue that this definition omits economic coercion and involuntary labour, resulting from “the lack of viable economic alternatives” (LeBaron et al., 2018; LeBaron et al., 2021, p. 9).

Forced labour affects every region in the world. Over half of the victims of forced labour worldwide (15.1 million) are in the Asia Pacific region, followed by Europe and Central Asia (4.1 million), Africa (3.8 million), the Americas (3.6 million), and the Arab States (0.9 million) (International Labour Organization et al., 2022). The Asia-Pacific region has the highest total number of victims, while the Arab States exhibit the highest incidence per capita (Higgins, 2023). This demonstrates that forced labour occurs not only in developing nations but also in “industrialised countries” (Boersma & Nolan, 2022, p. 166). Considering these figures, one might ask: How do individuals become victims of forced labour?

Several studies have identified factors such as limited language skills, knowledge of rights, gender, financial difficulties, lack of labour protections, and migration status as

indicators for victims' likelihood of getting trapped in the net of forced labour (Higgins, 2023; LeBaron et al., 2018; Nolan & Boersma, 2019; Trodd & Nicholson, 2021). In particular, following the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exacerbated social and economic inequalities (Nolan & McCorquodale, 2022), the fragility of global supply chains (Nolan & McCorquodale, 2022) and the economic struggles of vulnerable workers (Nguyen, 2021) have been further exposed. This situation underscores the imperative for a comprehensive response to forced labour that encompasses ethical, political, legal, and economic dimensions (Walk Free, Report 2016).

According to ILO reports, forced labour generated over US\$150 billion in illegal profits annually in 2014, with an estimated US\$3,978 per victim (International Labour Organization, 2014, p. 45). However, this figure has since increased by 37%, reaching US\$236 billion, highlighting the escalating economic and social impact of this crime on society (International Labour Organization, 2024). The increasing global demand for goods and production, often spanning opaque supply chain networks, has “given rise to major human rights accountability challenges” (Harris & Nolan, 2022, p. 224).

Forced labour in supply chains is perpetuated by unwavering cost-reduction demands, insufficient labour protections, and the systematic exploitation of vulnerable populations. Supply chains refer to “the set of organisations, activities, information, and resources involved in the movement of a product or service from suppliers to consumers” (Jalbut & Sichman, 2018, p. 45). Thus, it is reasonable to say that global supply chains, constantly delivering products and services from various locations worldwide, serve as the cornerstone of the world's flourishing economies. They also influence “business models and management practices” that drive the dynamics of labour exploitation (LeBaron, 2021b, p. 29).

Instances of forced labour within the supply chain are manifold, revealing the intricate nature of an issue that impacts everyone (Nolan & Boersma, 2019; Tandon, 2018). The cosmetics we use, the coffee we drink, the clothes we wear or the computers we use have all

come through the global supply chains across nations and continents. Industries such as agriculture, technology, textile manufacturing, and mining, in which products are commercialised in the global economy, have all been linked to forced labour (Harris & Nolan, 2022; Nolan & Frishling, 2019). Therefore, organisations are expected to be more responsible for the practices and actions of their suppliers. The dark side of development in the global supply chain has harmfully impacted human rights, challenged labour standards, and promoted the black economy and money laundering¹.

There is growing evidence of human rights violations and forced labour across the world in global supply chains (International Labour Organization et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2020). In a race for profit, multinational businesses have taken advantage of jurisdictions with “weak regulatory frameworks” (Nolan & Bott, 2018, p. 61). This dynamic has also been referred to as the push and pull factors (i.e., poverty vs demand for cheap labour) (Kerr, 2014) making “workers vulnerable to exploitation” (Misra, 2007, p. 2). The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated and intensified the human cost across the globe (Boersma & Nolan, 2022; International Labour Organization et al., 2022), shaping the future of business, human rights, and supply chain management (Nguyen, 2021, p. 579). Moreover, organisations manage to evade accountability for using forced labour in their supply chains because “laws designed to combat forced labour are spottily enforced” (Higgins, 2023, p. 925).

These elements have created an environment where forced labour flourishes, creating structural injustices. In this context, “structural injustices are harms that come to people as a result of structural processes in which many people participate” (Young, 2003, p. 7). This is evident in the recent estimates of forced labour; for instance, estimates indicate that the G20 countries import products (e.g., electronics, cocoa, seafood, timber, and cotton) valued at

¹ Money laundering is the act of converting money from illegal activities into a legitimate appearance without drawing attention from the authorities (Tiwari, M., Gepp, A., & Kumar, K., 2020).

more than US\$468 billion that are at risk of being produced through forced labour (Walk Free, Report 2023). The United States imports up to US\$170 billion thereof, representing approximately 36% of the total G20 imports at risk, an increase from the US\$144 billion reported in 2018 (Walk Free, Report 2018). However, other estimates indicate that the value of goods at risk entering the United States annually approaches US\$400 billion (Higgins, 2023, p. 920).

The seafood industry is a major example of this issue. Over the past 50 years, global per capita seafood consumption has doubled, from 10 kg to 20 kg in 2014, making it a crucial part of our diet (Guillen et al., 2019). In the documentary *Human cost of seafood in Asia*, Naruemon (2020) reveals that developing countries are the primary seafood exporters and that the industry's reliance on forced labour, which generates approximately US\$80 million in trade, is increasingly recognised.

The growth in seafood consumption in wealthy countries clearly puts pressure on the supply chain and its workers, facilitating human rights violations. With the world population expected to reach nine billion by 2030 (United Nations, 2015) and ten billion by 2050 (Guillen et al., 2019), the pressure on global supply chains to meet growing food demand is expected to increase dramatically. Rising seafood demand intensifies supply chain pressures, increasing human rights risks for workers and prompting critical concerns over the human cost of meeting demand.

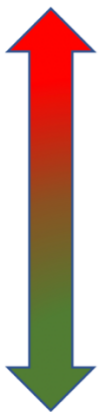
The UN and independent studies have documented serious human rights abuses, including forced labour. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) report on human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China, is an excellent example (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2022). This report highlights serious allegations of widespread human rights violations, including arbitrary detention in so-called 're-education' camps, as well as forced labour. Additionally, a report by ASPI revealed that Chinese authorities facilitated the large-scale

relocation of approximately 80,000 Uyghurs and diverse ethnic groups from Xinjiang to factories across China between 2017 and 2019 (Xu et al., 2020). Victims face challenges escaping work assignments tied to detention and political indoctrination in and beyond Xinjiang.

The ASPI report further reveals that ethnic minorities are being exploited in forced labour in supply chains that are closely connected to at least 82 renowned international brands in the fashion, automotive, and technology sectors, including Apple, Samsung, Sony, Gap, Puma, and BMW, among others (Xu et al., 2020). Despite business standards and audits, meant to eliminate forced labour multinational enterprises like Apple still face human rights abuses in their supply chains (Nolan & Boersma, 2019), while supplier protocols used in the fashion industry have not improved working conditions (Boersma & Nolan 2022).

The intricacies surrounding forced labour in the supply chain, along with the limited availability of information obstructs effective prevention efforts. Figure 3 illustrates where forced labour fits on this continuum.

Figure 3 *Continuum of Exploitation*



MODERN SLAVERY
Worker cannot refuse or cease work because of coercion, threats or deception.
Worker may also be deprived of personal freedom.
DANGEROUS OR SUBSTANDARD WORKING CONDITIONS
Worker can refuse or cease work but doing so may lead to detriment.
Worker is not paid fairly and does not receive some or all entitlements.
Worker may be required to work excessive hours.
Workplace is unsafe.
DECENT WORK
Workers' rights respected.
Worker free to refuse or cease work.
Worker paid fairly (at least the minimum wage).
Workplace is safe.

(Adapted from Department of Home Affairs, 2019, p. 9)

Some studies highlight that while major fashion brands have limited oversight of their supply chains, Australian cotton growers have even less visibility into export destinations and potential labour abuses (Boersma et al., 2022). The complexity of global supply chains

contributes to the difficulty of identifying at-risk workers, reinforcing the view of forced labour as a continuum of exploitation (Nolan & Boersma, 2019), where poor conditions escalate to forced labour (Boersma & Nolan, 2022).

In 2016, the International Trade Union Confederation examined the effects of global supply chain production on labour conditions (International Trade Union Confederation, 2016). This investigation estimated that 50 companies, positioned at the apex of the supply chain, accounted for 60% of global trade. It is noteworthy that these companies employed a mere 6% of the workforce directly, while an estimated 116 million workers were obscured within the supply chain (Boersma & Nolan, 2022). This clearly illustrates the concentrated corporate power and ownership by a few companies, which account for a large percentage of revenues and profits. Although existing literature explores supply chain transparency in buyer-supplier information exchange, research on public supply chain disclosure is limited (Doorey, 2011).

The question is not whether organisations should have less or more revenue, power, or workforce in their supply chains, but rather whether they respect workers' human rights. The issue centres on accountability; these corporations bear the responsibility to mitigate human rights violations within their supply chains. Corporate accountability, while vital, is inadequate to address this systemic issue, highlighting the need for government involvement in developing and implementing policies to uphold human rights. This raises a critical question: What government policies are currently in place to address this significant challenge?

The Role of International Law, National Laws, and Policy

To achieve social and economic justice, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) invites governments to develop policies that improve labour standards. The ILO's Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) serves as the principal international agreement against forced labour, prohibiting all forms of it, requiring state parties to criminalise such practices, and subjecting them to penal sanctions (International Labour Organization, 1930).

Businesses have recently started to pay more attention to upholding human rights, also known as “business and human rights” standards (Nolan & Frishling, 2019), but initiatives to regulate corporate labour and human rights impacts are still hindered by complex organisational frameworks, with slow progress towards a binding international agreement (Ruggie, 2013). Recognising this challenge, in 2005, the UN Secretary-General appointed Professor John Ruggie as the first-ever Special Representative on business and human rights (Nolan & Frishling, 2019) to develop a framework to effectively integrate human rights into business practices (Levine & Castles, 2021).

In 2011, the United Nations (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2011) formulated the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), introducing the "Protect, Respect and Remedy" framework, which compels governments and businesses to acknowledge their responsibility in safeguarding human rights and providing victims with efficient avenues for redress (Deva, 2021; Nolan & Frishling, 2019). Moreover, the UNGPs together with further institutional efforts like the Tripartite Declaration of Principles Concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (International Labour Organization, 2017b) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises (2011) provide valuable guidance on self-regulatory strategies and articulate the application of human rights in business contexts (Nolan, 2022).

Additionally, the UN introduced a suite of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), serving as a directive for governments to eliminate forced labour, among other societal challenges, by the year 2030 (United Nations, 2015). Although governments, organisations, and businesses are progressively expected to join UN efforts to combat forced labour by assessing their supply chains (United Nations, 2015), the specific responsibilities of businesses and the methods of collaboration to address forced labour are not clear (International Labour Organization et al., 2022). This highlights the need for strategies that implement human rights mechanisms alongside certification standards to address forced labour.

To mitigate risks to both businesses and those individuals impacted by their operations, the UNGP (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2011) introduced the concept of human rights due diligence (HRDD) (Principle 17). HRDD is highlighted as a potential regulatory mechanism to address forced labour in business activities (Muchlinski, 2021; Nolan, 2022). HRDD is a comprehensive and proactive process that mandates companies to assess, integrate, tackle, and disclose both the existing and potential effects of their operations on human rights (McGaughey et al., 2024). In essence, HRDD “under the UNGPs requires action, not just investigation and analysis” (Wielga, 2023, p. 116). It aims to prevent, identify, mitigate, and address forced labour within supply chains (Muchlinski, 2021). However, its adoption and implementation is voluntary (Salcito et al., 2015).

Nonetheless, the effectiveness of these due diligence processes in actually preventing human rights abuses remains a matter of debate (Nolan & McCorquodale, 2022). Although HRDD requires corporations to scrutinise their supply chains to identify and avert forced labour occurrences (Van Buren III et al., 2021), there is an opacity regarding the precise responsibilities expected from businesses in safeguarding human rights (International Labour Organization et al., 2022; Jovanovic, 2021). Additionally, clear guidelines about how this mutual correspondence can and should function are lacking (Deva, 2021; Nolan, 2022).

Thus, due diligence and reporting are often criticised as “cosmetic compliance” (Nolan & Bott, 2018, p. 3), with organisations adopting these policies but failing to fully implement them (Lichuma, 2023). Moreover, the UNGP have not resolved business and human rights challenges as most business organisations continue to violate human rights, while impacted stakeholders face challenges in holding them accountable (Deva, 2021). Without legally binding standard mechanisms that monitor for human rights risks, organisations ignore the scrutiny of their supply chains (Boersma & Nolan, 2022; Sparks et al., 2022) while relying on voluntary reporting and questionable rating tools to measure risks (Bantekas et al., 2021; Boersma et al., 2022). This raises the question of whether certification mechanisms could play a role in protecting workers and driving action.

Certification Mechanisms

The expansion of global sourcing and manufacturing has yielded substantial adverse repercussions on the global supply chain (Clarke & Boersma, 2019; Nguyen, 2021), yet numerous governmental policies fall short of providing comprehensive protection for workers. The traditional model of human rights protection is clearly outdated, failing to protect a large number of workers in precarious jobs from severe labour exploitation (Jovanovic, 2021). For example, in China, workers receive minimal government protection, as independent trade unions are banned and labour strikes are deemed illegal (Baumann-Pauly & Nolan, 2016; Clarke & Boersma, 2017). In this context, the ILO recently reported that the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China has endorsed the ratification of two critical documents: the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) and the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105) (International Labour Organization, 2022a). While the Conventions only become effective one year following their ratification, this action represents a progressive move by the Chinese government.

To address the critical concern of forced labour within global supply chains, various certification schemes have been developed across different sectors. While these certification schemes address forced labour as well as wider issues like environmental sustainability, fair wages, and safe working conditions, this research will specifically highlight those certification schemes that are closely connected to addressing forced labour. For instance, within the agricultural sector, non-profit organisations like Fair Trade (1988) and Rainforest Alliance (1987) have been established to promote ethical certification as a strategic approach to reduce labour exploitation (LeBaron, 2021b). In the fishing industry, the APR (Atún de Pesca Responsable) certification supports the responsible harvesting of tuna, safeguarding the oceans and guaranteeing that fishermen benefit from suitable working conditions, safety, and living standards on board (AENOR, 2020). Another example is the UTZ certification program, which supports farmers in using better farming methods in a sustainable and socially responsible way (Aronowitz, 2019).

Research indicates that ethical certifications may not significantly reduce labour exploitation, as similar patterns of exploitation have been observed at both certified and non-certified sites (Bantekas et al., 2021; LeBaron, 2021b; LeBaron et al., 2021; Rasche, 2011). To illustrate this, cocoa farms certified by Rainforest Alliance and UTZ, which merged in 2018, were linked to forced labour in 2011 (Aronowitz, 2019). Similarly a study revealed that some of the most severe instances of forced labour and abuse were discovered on tea plantations with ethical certifications (LeBaron, 2021a). These studies highlight several critical issues undermining the effectiveness of ethical certification schemes. For instance, research has identified challenges in “social and environmental auditing such as a lack of neutrality on the side of auditors, corruption and a deliberate lowering of standards in order to attract clients” (Rasche, 2011, p. 197). Despite their influence and substantial authority, these certifications are not legally binding and rely on corporate goodwill (Jovanović et al., 2023), ultimately failing to improve working conditions (Sparks et al., 2022) and significantly impeding the intended purpose of addressing labour exploitation within global supply chains.

National Laws

In response to the growing issue of forced labour, several countries have endorsed laws to address forced labour, such as the California Transparency in Supply Chains Act (CTSCA) of 2010 (State of California, 2010). This law mandates business disclosure of efforts to prevent and monitor forced labour in supply chains (Nolan & Frishling, 2019). However, it only penalises companies for failing to disclose this information, not for neglecting to perform supply chain due diligence (Farbenblum & Nolan, 2017). Similarly, the United Kingdom Modern Slavery Act (2015) mandates disclosure of forced labour risks in their supply chain but has been criticised for superficial compliance, weak enforcement, and a lack of focus on the rights of those affected by business activities (Harris & Nolan, 2022; Nolan & McCorquodale, 2022).

Other examples include the U.S. Tariff Act of 1930, amended in 2016 to prohibit the importation of goods produced with forced labour, granting the government the right to detain or ban such goods (Cornell, 2023; Syam & Roggensack, 2020). Complementary legislation includes the Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR), in effect since 1984, which require government contractors and subcontractors to certify that their supply chain is not linked to forced labour (U.S. Federal Acquisition Regulation, 1984). In essence, the FAR establish the policies and procedures for government procurement, safeguarding transparency, fair opportunity, and competition in federal purchasing. More recently, the Uyghur Forced Labour Prevention Act (UFLPA) of 2021 further strengthens the prohibition on importing goods produced with forced labour, especially from China's Xinjiang region (U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2022).

At the local level, Australia's Modern Slavery Act 2018 (MSA), effective from 1 January 2019, was introduced following similar legislation in the United Kingdom and the United States of America. At the state level, New South Wales (NSW) implemented its own modern slavery law in June 2018. The federal MSA defines slavery according to Divisions 270 and 271 of Australia's Criminal Code, encompassing various forms of exploitation including slavery, servitude, forced labour, deceptive recruitment practices, trafficking in persons, debt bondage, forced marriage, organ trafficking, and child labour.

In practice, the MSA mandates that the approximately 3,000 large organisations with an annual turnover exceeding A\$100 million—including businesses, not-for-profits, universities, and the Commonwealth government along with its agencies—must produce and disseminate annual public statements to address forced labour (Australian Government, 2019). Entities with a lower turnover based or operating in Australia may choose to report voluntarily under the MSA (Modern Slavery Act 2018). Yet, what does the reality of the situation reveal? Research has suggested that the current MSA threshold excludes medium-to-large companies and underscores the lack of penalties for non-compliance (Nolan & Frishling, 2019; Pryde et al., 2024). In contrast, the NSW statute (2018) applies to

organisations with annual revenues exceeding A\$50 million, covering a broader spectrum of organisations.

As required by the MSA, a statutory review was conducted on 31 March 2022 to evaluate the MSA's first three years. Led by Professor John McMillan AO, the report's outcomes were announced on 25 May 2023, emphasising the Act's effectiveness and areas for improvement (Report, 25 May 2023). The report included **thirty** strategic recommendations, including lowering the reporting threshold from A\$100 million to A\$50 million to incorporate a broader spectrum of organisations. However, these recommendations have so far not been applied or implemented by the government (Nolan, 2024).

While the MSA aims to protect workers, the complexity and fragmentation of supply chains pose challenges in identifying and implementing effective measures to address forced labour (Harris & Nolan, 2022). Moreover, the Australian MSA does not demand reporting entities to change their procurement practices, require contractors to address human rights risks, or provide remedies to victims (Harris & Nolan, 2022; Muchlinski, 2021; Sinclair & Nolan, 2020). NSW Anti-Slavery Commissioner James Cockayne emphasised the need to shift the focus from only repercussions for business to the risks encountered by workers and victims in supply chains (Cockayne, 2022). Similarly, scholars have criticised these laws for relying on self-regulation and lacking strong state enforcement (Harris & Nolan, 2022).

The transnational nature of forced labour, compared with the limited reach of domestic legislation primarily focused on corporate reporting, underscores a critical governance gap (Muchlinski, 2021; Nolan & Boersma, 2019). Although recent government-led advances, including the Australian MSA and HRDD, are slowly shifting discussions towards how human rights standards can guide corporate conduct (Nolan, 2022), research highlights persistent challenges. Scholars argue that while “current laws have succeeded in raising awareness of the problem, corporate responses remain largely symbolic” (Nolan, 2024, p. 1). and

governments, often complicit in human rights abuses, may be unwilling or unable to protect workers or align with international standards (Nguyen, 2021, p. 572)

To guarantee that businesses uphold human rights within their supply chains, governments are encouraged to utilise broader aspects of their regulatory powers (International Labour Organization et al., 2022). Scholars agree that an effective compliance framework should include incentives and penalties, such as fines and director disqualification, rather than relying on the market as an enforcement mechanism (Harris & Nolan, 2022, p. 239). For instance, the reliance of the Californian Act, the UK Act, and the Australian Act on market mechanisms has been identified as a significant limitation, constraining compliance and the government's enforcement capabilities, despite intensive efforts (Harris & Nolan, 2022; Petersmann, 2021).

According to some recent research studies, the industry recognises the need for additional legislative measures to drive action (Muchlinski, 2021). For instance, more recent European legislation such as the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive 2024 "requires action and compliance, not just reporting" (Nolan, 2024, p. 1).

Moreover, concerns are rising that government measures, often rigorous immigration controls labelled as anti-slavery efforts, may inadvertently allow corporations to hide extensive labour exploitation globally (LeBaron et al., 2021). In this context, organisations applying for government support should provide the integration of HRDD in their business operations (International Labour Organization et al., 2022). Echoing this, advocacy groups in Australia supported the Customs Amendment Bill 2021, introduced by Senator Rex Patrick, to ban the importation of goods made with forced labour. However, the Bill failed with the dissolution of Parliament in April 2022 (Parliament 2022). In an effort to reinforce the Australian MSA, the government introduced the National Action Plan Against Modern Slavery 2020–24. This measure suggests a comprehensive approach to alleviating forced labour, a strategy that will be discussed in the next section.

The Australian National Action Plan Against Modern Slavery

National action plans are acknowledged as tools to advance the UNGP (Cantú Rivera, 2019, p. 222). The Australian NAP plays a significant role, embodying the country's strategy to prevent and address forced labour (Australian Government, 2020). It sets out to prevent; disrupt, investigate, and prosecute forced labour; support and protect victims and survivors; collaborate across government, civil society, business, and academia; and conduct research and data analysis to build an evidence base. Engaging a wide array of stakeholders through public submissions, the government developed the plan including diverse perspectives across various sectors and areas of expertise. The vision for “a future where no one is subjected to modern slavery and the human rights of all people are valued equally” guides the latest NAP, building on past frameworks from the 2004 and 2015–19 initiatives (Australian Government, 2020, p. 18).

The Australian Institute of Criminology estimated that “for every victim and survivor detected by authorities in Australia, four remain undetected” (Australian Government, 2020, p. 18). A central element of Australia's anti-slavery strategy, including the NAP, is the Support for Trafficked People Program (STPP). Managed by the Department of Social Services and implemented across the nation by the Australian Red Cross, the STPP plays a central role in supporting victims (Australian Department of Social Services, 2020-25). It provides assistance through five streams: 45 days of initial intensive support and an additional 45 days, up to 200 days of support for forced marriage survivors, justice support until criminal investigations are finalised, and a temporary trial offering support to victims returning to Australia to give evidence. Eligibility for extended support is assessed on a case-by-case basis.

For the most part, this support program requires survivors to be identified and referred by the Australian Federal Police (AFP). This referral mechanism assists with survivor identification and referral to the correct services. However, experts from the public submission have mentioned that “*engaging with the AFP can be a traumatic experience for survivors*”

(Freedom Hub, p 1). In the United States, restorative justice research shows that many survivors find their encounters with the justice system retraumatising (Sered, 2019). Legislation with substantial weight on criminal justice hinders victims' restoration and well-being, creating human rights issues (David & Salter, 2021; Nolan & Boersma, 2019).

ACRATH, in its public submissions to the NAP, suggests to "roll out an alternative referral pathway for admission to the STPP so one NGO at least (the Australian Red Cross?) can place people on the program". This is critical as the 2023 Walk Free Global Estimates report 41,000 victims of forced labour in Australia, a significant rise from the 1,900 cases documented between 2015 and 2017 (Australian Government, 2020; Walk Free, Report 2023). In 2019, 75% of those in the STPP were women and children, primarily from Australia, Afghanistan, and Fiji, underscoring the gender and nationality dimensions of forced labour (Australian Government, 2020).

In essence, the increase of forced labour within supply chains is driven by a combination of insufficient awareness and apathy among key stakeholders: governments, corporations, and consumers. These stakeholders not only contribute to the problem through their reluctance to implement necessary regulations and standards that impact their economic growth, but they are also crucial to the solution by taking effective actions to address forced labour (Nolan & Boersma, 2019). A comprehensive NAP strategy is crucial to inform, adapt, and prevent forced labour by engaging all key stakeholders, resulting in more ethical and sustainable practices. Moreover, an international approach is vital for fostering regional collaboration and thus delivering a wider response to forced labour in global supply chains. However, the weaknesses of NAPs remain evident, particularly in their limited exploration of "regulatory options to ensure adequate human rights protection and access to justice" (Bordignon, 2020, p. 89). This is critical because, without legal reforms, NAPs may lack the necessary impact to drive substantial changes and foster genuine actions to protect human rights in business contexts.

Australia's (2022) *International Engagement Strategy on Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery: Delivering in Partnership* represents a global collaboration through active dialogues, data sharing, training, and technical support. It highlights Australia's active role in global forums, legal advocacy, and capacity-building initiatives, particularly in addressing the high prevalence of survivors in the Indo-Pacific region by tackling the root causes of forced labour. For instance, Australia's active participation in the **Alliance 8.7**, a global partnership launched by the ILO in 2017, corroborates its commitment to achieving SDG 8.7, which aims to end human trafficking and forced labour (International Labour Organization, 2017a). Australia has also co-chaired the **Bali Process** on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons, and Related Transnational Crime since its establishment in 2002 (Bali-Process, 2002). The Bali Process is a non-binding, international forum of 45 Member States and organisations (e.g., Europe, ILO, and UN), which promotes collaboration, information-sharing, and policy development on irregular migration issues in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

Australia has also contributed to **ASEAN** (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), becoming ASEAN's first dialogue partner in 1974 (ASEAN, 1967) and supporting its vision to combat forced labour and other issues through a regional framework for cooperation. Australia's active international engagement in collaborations and investments is crucial for regional cooperation, policy dialogue, and information flow to address forced labour. However, there is a disconnect between Australia's active international efforts and its domestic approach to forced labour, indicating a need for stronger internal collaboration mechanisms. These will be explored in subsequent chapters, particularly in Chapters 6 and 7.

As a researcher, I found that the Australian NAP approach involving different stakeholder voices across sectors to address forced labour supported the exploration of my research question: Why do stakeholder voices matter? And how can they make a difference in MSCs to address forced labour? The Australian NAP's approach underscores the significant, transformative impact that collaborative contributions can have on the implementation and effectiveness of policies, making the NAP particularly relevant. Engaging

multiple stakeholders from various sectors is crucial in the fight against forced labour. But who are these stakeholders? The following section will highlight some key stakeholders, demonstrating their critical roles and exploring their inclusion in anti-slavery dialogues and collaboration strategies to address forced labour in supply chains.

1.2 Who is a Stakeholder?

Stakeholder is defined as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by achieving the organisation's objectives” (Freeman, 1984, p. 246). This includes investors, employees, management, customers, suppliers, competitors, local communities, NGOs, government, citizens, and workers in supply chains (Chowdhury et al., 2022; Freeman, 2017; Kujala & Sachs, 2019; Kujala et al., 2022). Traditionally, this term has been associated with strategic management literature (Freeman, 1984). However, given the complex issue of forced labour and the need for MSCs within and across sectors, I extend the definition to encompass “all individuals, groups, or organisations that can directly influence the focal problem or issue by their actions or are directly influenced by actions others take to address it” (Gray & Purdy, 2018, p. 2). This broader scope includes diverse stakeholders across various sectors and organisations connected to a common issue, such as forced labour (Gray & Purdy, 2018).

Although the Australian NAP to address forced labour highlights the importance of MSCs between civil society, academia, business, unions, and government agencies in Australia and globally, the reality is less optimistic and collaborative. The current approach to addressing forced labour emphasises criminal justice and is characterised by a strong policy focus on prosecuting crimes, with minimal participation from civil society and key stakeholders (David & Salter, 2021; Nolan & Boersma, 2019). Statistics suggest that legal investigations and the rate of conviction remain low (International Labour Organization et al., 2022). The criminal justice approach is characterised by limited victim engagement, with a considerable number of survivors across diverse crime types refraining from reporting offences due to fear of retaliation from their captors and/or deportation (Sered, 2019; Sorokin & Stein, 2021).

Scholars highlight the importance of restorative justice, as traditional approaches often overlook the needs of victims, offenders, and communities, deepening harm and conflict (Pointer, 2021, p. 6).

The inclusion of stakeholders in collaborative conversations to address forced labour (Boersma, 2018; David & Salter, 2021)—such as those in the healthcare sector (Fraley et al., 2020; Greenbaum et al., 2017; Testa, 2020; Williamson et al., 2020), pharmacists (Palombi et al., 2019), law enforcement (Dovydaitis, 2010; Helton, 2016), businesses (Boersma, 2018), the settlement sector (David & Salter, 2021), and survivors or the impacted populations (Lockyer, 2020)—is vital for addressing forced labour. Research indicates that for some stakeholders, “participation may be restricted or even nonexistent” (Gray et al., 2022, p. 2). However, if we think counterfactually, not only are many of these stakeholders crucial in addressing forced labour but they also have supply chains within their business operations.

Researchers emphasise the importance of integrating the voices of rights holders to better understand human rights risks, such as forced labour, and improve accountability and ethical responses (Biswas-Tortajada et al., 2023). Thus, acknowledging stakeholders’ unique expertise and critical roles in combatting forced labour will encourage organisations to scrutinise their supply chains, value stakeholders’ insights, and integrate them meaningfully into their strategies. This is where my research on exploring stakeholder inclusion in MSCs is significant, as it employs an all-inclusive approach that drives stakeholders to actively reflect on their unique roles and expertise to enhance their contribution to anti-slavery efforts.

Consequently, this study extends beyond these examples to explore a broader group of stakeholders whose roles and expertise might be equally crucial. In the next segment, I will explore four stakeholder groups identified by the literature as critical in anti-slavery discussions and collaboration: the healthcare sector, law enforcement, the settlement sector, and survivors or the impacted population. It is essential to clarify that these stakeholder groups are illustrative rather than all-inclusive. I present these stakeholders as examples to illuminate the

diverse and crucial contributions that stakeholders within and across sectors can offer towards a comprehensive and holistic approach to addressing forced labour.

Healthcare Sector

Previous studies have demonstrated that healthcare providers are potentially the first point of contact for victims of modern slavery; however, most survivors and victims remain invisible when interacting with the health system due to a lack of awareness and clarity about the procedures (Fraley et al., 2020; Gibbons & Stoklosa, 2016; Lederer et al., 2017; Lederer & Wetzel, 2014). In Australia, a small study involving 22 health workers at St Vincent's Health in Melbourne has confirmed a lack of knowledge, confidence, training, and referral pathways when encountering forced labour victims (Testa, 2020). Public submissions to the NAP have also advocated for the inclusion of healthcare professionals:

Many victims of [...] modern slavery are likely to present to an Emergency Department during the course of their exploitation, making health professionals uniquely placed to identify, respond and intervene in the trafficking. Yet the research conducted as part of our project indicated that: Trafficked persons were predominantly invisible within the health setting. When practitioners did suspect trafficking, they considered themselves as lacking the professional skills and knowledge. (St. Vincent's Health Australia Ltd, 2020)

This lack of adequate training and clear step-by-step processes prevents the effective identification and referral of victims (Everitt, 2017; Fraley et al., 2020; Greenbaum et al., 2017; Testa, 2020; Williamson et al., 2020). In response, medical professionals in the United States created the Health, Education, Advocacy, and Linkage (HEAL) network in 2013 to address forced labour. This NGO provides training, resources, and practical guidance to support healthcare practitioners in identifying and referring victims and working through MSCs to address this social issue. Moreover, in 2015, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services developed the SOAR (Stop – Observe – Ask – Respond) training program, which is implemented nationally. These initiatives reveal indicators of forced labour, raise awareness,

and offer response guidance (Lederer et al., 2017). Thus, effective interventions are essential for collecting data to evaluate and measure their success (Fraley et al., 2020).

Research in the United States underscores pharmacists' potential to support survivors through their community access, though the absence of guidance emphasises the need for targeted training and interdisciplinary collaboration within the healthcare sector (Palombi et al., 2019). Approaches may also include advocacy for local and national policies that promote community health and wellness, combating social or cultural norms that contribute to forced labour and building a strong evidence base to guide future prevention programs (Greenbaum et al., 2018). From a resource-based view, organisations advocate for the

[d]evelopment of sector-specific resources for key sectors, such as health, labour and occupational health and safety inspectors, and local government on indicators, engagement strategies and referral pathways. (the Salvation Army Australia and the Uniting Church, 2020)

Additionally, experts contributing to the NAP mentioned that “maybe a focus with healthcare providers on this issue is worth exploring as it is an underground practice with very little Australian data at present” (ACRATH, 2020).

When considering this issue counterfactually, it is crucial to recognise that the healthcare sector not only plays a frontline role in addressing forced labour but also operates supply chains within its business operations. To illustrate this, healthcare organisations source goods globally, such as personal protective equipment (PPE) gloves from Malaysia, yet they often overlook the high risks of forced labour in this sector (Pryde et al., 2024). According to the *Paper Promises* report, workers frequently endure 12-hour shifts, six days a week, in factory conditions where temperatures near the glove mould ovens can exceed 60°C (Sinclair et al., 2022).

To address this issue, the United States, as the largest consumer of Malaysian gloves (Anderson et al., 2024), has banned the import from at least three Malaysian companies due to forced labour in their supply chains (Baumann-Pauly et al., 2023). In response, Malaysia has introduced labour law reforms, including a new criminal offence for forced labour (Kotecha, 2024), and on 21 March 2022, ratified the 2014 Protocol to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (International Labour Organization, 2022b). Given the complex nature of forced labour, it is essential to include other key stakeholders that support vulnerable populations, such as the settlement sector.

Settlement Sector

Global estimates show that forced labour in the private economy is three times more common among migrants than non-migrants (International Labour Organization et al., 2022). This increased vulnerability stresses the central role of the settlement sector as an essential stakeholder in anti-slavery collaborations. The settlement sector serves as a vital first responder, providing critical support to migrants and asylum seekers, who are particularly vulnerable to forced labour (David & Salter, 2021). The process of settlement is complex and filled with challenges (Wayland, 2006), with newcomers often excluded from basic legal protection and economic justice (Omidvar & Richmond, 2005). In essence, newcomers lack awareness of their rights, especially in employment, which leaves them vulnerable to exploitation (Wayland, 2006).

In Australia, settlement services were established after World War II to support the post-war movement of migrants and displaced persons (Millbank et al., 2006). While migrants and refugees were expected to integrate quickly, many faced significant challenges, including language barriers, economic adversity, housing insufficiency, unemployment, and cultural differences (Millbank et al., 2006). Despite the settlement sector's integral role in Australia's anti-slavery strategy, research about how this stakeholder group identifies and tackles forced labour is scarce (David & Salter, 2021).

Research conducted in Canada has shown that newcomers often face isolation, vulnerability, and limited community engagement (Wayland, 2006). Embracing the settlement sector expertise in anti-slavery collaborations is crucial for identifying common trends and developing effective strategies (Putt, 2007). Studies in Australia highlighted that greater collaboration between health, immigration, and law enforcement can contribute to identifying individuals at risk of forced labour and support immediate intervention efforts (George et al., 2018). Echoing this, a public submission to the NAP suggested that a particular *“focus on addressing the intersection between settlement, migration, and cultural-religious factors”* is essential (Australian Muslim Women’s Centre).

In essence, laws and policies should protect the rights of all migrants and reduce migrants’ vulnerability regardless of their migration status (International Labour Organization et al., 2022). A public submission to the Australia NAP estimate that over *“1000 visas are granted per financial year by the Department of Home Affairs”* (IOM, 2020). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) collects crucial data from applicants and *“the Department effectively has a data source of 1000 migrants, which can be tracked from source country, transit and to Australia and settlement”* (IOM, 2020). This valuable dataset could inform efforts to prevent forced labour within this community. Another participant to the NAP mentioned that

these organisations should be approached with culturally and linguistic[ally] diverse communities (CALD)-appropriate questionnaires to discuss and understand the prevalence of modern slavery-like practices within visa subclasses and community groups. (IOM, 2020)

The societal issue of forced labour involving migrants cannot be detached from political discourses that reinforce discrimination (International Labour Organization et al., 2022). Therefore, states and businesses jointly have human rights obligations to ensure the protection of migrant workers and their access to remedies (Farbenblum & Nolan, 2017).

As we can observe, the settlement sector is well placed to provide exceptional support to freshly arrived migrants, making it an essential stakeholder. Yet, it has been excluded from anti-slavery conversations, programs, and partnerships. The inclusion of this sector in MSCs is critical for two reasons. **First**, immigrants and refugees often face exclusion from essential services due to societal and systemic barriers, which increases their risk of exploitation. As first responders, the settlement sector works closely with this population, making organisations in the settlement sector adept at identifying victims and raising awareness.

Second, the settlement sector's legal and social expertise plays a significant role in supporting individuals and addressing their immediate challenges while also identifying emerging trends that lead to victims being trapped in forced labour. Therefore, the inclusion of the settlement sector as an active stakeholder in MSCs to address forced labour is important, ensuring that individual vulnerabilities are effectively addressed while contributing to the overall strategy and promoting human rights (David & Salter, 2021). However, collaborative anti-slavery efforts cannot advance without including other key stakeholders, such as law enforcement, which will be discussed in the next section.

Law Enforcement Agencies

Survivors and victims of forced labour typically encounter law enforcement, alongside traffickers and healthcare providers (Helton, 2016). The complexity of forced labour challenges law enforcement's ability to encounter and identify victims/ survivors outside of criminal proceedings. For instance, many victims are hidden by their perpetrators or may not self-identify, which hinders official detection (Farrell & de Vries, 2020) and the prosecution of traffickers (Helton, 2016). Echoing this, a submission to the NAP stated:

The National Estimate released in 2019 provides another source of information and compelling evidence that many victims are not being identified, which consequently means that their offenders are also unidentified, unpunished, and empowered to possibly increase their criminal activities. (Monash University, 2020)

This situation underscores the need for stronger collaboration between law enforcement and key stakeholders to improve survivor identification and support. Scholars suggest that many survivors of forced labour go undetected due to public and professional perceptions that it is less severe than sexual exploitation despite similar psychological and physical impacts (Van Meeteren & Hiah, 2020, p. 1607). Although studies show that law enforcement typically first identifies most victims referred to NGOs (Clawson et al., 2009), civil society organisations report that many victims fail to report to the police due to fear of detention, deportation, or retaliation from offenders (Sered, 2019; Sorokin & Stein, 2021; U.S. Department of State, 2021).

The Good Shepherd and the Salvation Army Australia (2020) highlighted this issue in their public submission to the Australian NAP 2020–25, stating that *“victim-survivors continue to disclose that their fear of authority means that they are choosing not to seek support”*. This fear may stem from victims’ previous negative experiences with law enforcement and is further intensified by exploiters’ psychological manipulation —coercive tactics that instill fear, erode autonomy, and impair decision-making (Greenbaum et al., 2017). Additionally, access to support survivor services, such as legal assistance, housing, and medical care, is often conditional upon victims’ participation in challenging criminal investigations (Gulzar, 2023), an approach shown to be ineffective (Richard & La Pierre, 2024), as it discourages many victims from seeking help due to fear and mistrust. Moreover, this approach creates a coercive environment, neglecting their well-being and risking re-traumatisation, ultimately removing survivors’ self-determination while imitating the abuse by their offenders (Richard & La Pierre, 2024). As discussed in Sered’s *Until We Reckon* (2019), this chain of events highlights significant gaps in the system’s ability to meet victims’ needs.

The UNODC’s 2022 report highlights a decline in victim identification and convictions, marking the first such decline in two decades (UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2022). As a result, forced labour cases are rarely prosecuted, and convictions for exploitation remain infrequent (De Vries & Farrell, 2023; Farrell et al., 2016). Research shows that countries like

the United States, Portugal, and Spain have far more identified forced labour victims than convictions of traffickers (Nichols & Heil, 2023). In Australia, only 24 offenders were convicted of slavery-related crimes between 2004 and 30 June 2019, emphasising the urgent need for stronger collective frameworks among law enforcement and key stakeholders (Lyneham, 2021).

To further complicate this scenario, studies confirm that law enforcement has a limited understanding of forced labour, struggles to differentiate it from other crimes (De Vries & Farrell, 2023; Farrell & de Vries, 2020; Farrell et al., 2010), and lacks the necessary procedural framework for effective investigations (Farrell & Pfeffer, 2014). Despite increased attention to the social issue of forced labour, knowledge and understanding of the problem remain fairly limited (Clawson et al., 2009). Moreover, scholars are concerned that victims are not being properly identified and that many cases are conflated with other crimes, such as domestic violence (Lederer & Wetzel, 2014). This misidentification further hinders efforts to provide support and justice to victims and address the overall issue of forced labour.

While law enforcement is essential to anti-slavery efforts, a meaningful collaboration between the healthcare sector, pharmacies, and the settlement sector is crucial (Zimmerman et al., 2011) for improving the identification of victims while prosecuting perpetrators (Helton, 2016). Educating and training not only law enforcement agents but also other stakeholders is crucial for governments to enhance collaboration and improve service support (U.S. Department of State, 2019; Walk Free, Report 2016).

MSCs involving different stakeholders and task forces are encouraging approaches to successful identification of victims (Clawson et al., 2009). International law enforcement communities have united efforts to fight forced labour. For instance, Interpol and Europol facilitate cross-border collaboration and data sharing among law enforcement agencies worldwide to combat forced labour. To increase collaboration between governments and non-governmental agencies, the UN created in 2007 the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against

Trafficking in Persons (ICAT) (United Nations, 2007). ICAT is a UN-mandated policy forum designed to improve collaboration among UN agencies and international organisations (e.g., ILO, Interpol, International Organisation for Migration (IOM)) to combat human trafficking and forced labour and provide support for victims.

These approaches highlight the critical need for MSCs across all levels and sectors to fight forced labour. A public submission to the NAP highlighted this point: *“There is extensive international evidence to support collaboration between law enforcement bodies and NGOs in victim detection and engagement”* (The Salvation Army Australia and Uniting Church). From a business perspective, studies indicate that the failure to engage other stakeholders, such as civil society and unions, significantly reduces the identification of forced labour victims, revealing a major flaw in corporate practices (Lichtman et al., 2023). Therefore, it is essential that governments, law enforcement, social services, healthcare providers, NGOs, and businesses collaborate in addressing the pervasive issue of human rights abuses (Boersma, 2018; David & Salter, 2021; Helton, 2016; Lederer et al., 2017; Lederer & Wetzel, 2014). In the next section, we will discuss how the inclusion of these groups is critical for increasing impact and creating a more effective strategy to address forced labour.

Survivors and Workers

“People with lived experience of modern slavery and human trafficking are rarely included in the development of research or policy.”

(Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group, 2021, p. 6)

The current literature highlights the crucial role that the voices of survivors of human rights abuses and workers play in developing and implementing strategies to combat forced labour (Armstrong & Greenbaum, 2019; Foot, 2015; Jonathan Todres & Diaz, 2019; LeBaron et al., 2021; Lederer, 2017; Nolan & Boersma, 2019; Rawling et al., 2021). The United Nations confirms that these voices are often overlooked despite their critical importance (United Nations, 2021). Moreover, the *U.S. Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report 2023* underlines the

importance of engaging survivors as experts and equal partners in the development of effective, culturally competent, and trauma-informed anti-trafficking policies (U.S. Department of State, 2023). While I recognise the importance of including survivors' voices, this research does not directly incorporate their perspectives due to access barriers. Instead, their views are represented through experts and survivor-researcher reports. More details on this approach are provided in **Chapter 3**, Methodology.

Restorative justice scholars note that “survivors do not only want to ask questions. They want to speak and they want their voices heard” (Sered, 2019, p. 25). Dang, a survivor-leader and scholar argues that anti-slavery efforts are leaving out survivors' insights that could strengthen interventions (Dang, 2018). She eloquently remarked, “Our experience in slavery is not the only, nor the primary topic that we want to discuss. We want to talk about policy change” (Dang, 2018, p. 1). Survivors and impacted communities are rarely consulted in the development of strategies to address this issue (LeBaron et al., 2021). Some approaches have proven ineffective, while others have contributed to the re-traumatisation of survivors, devaluing or even ignoring their knowledge and expertise on the issue (Lockyer, 2020). In this context, researchers from the UK's ATMG share reflections from a small participatory research study involving survivors and non-survivors of slavery or exploitation:

A victim of modern slavery [...] has no control over the decisions made regarding their life: they have no agency, no voice, they are spoken over, looked over, ignored and they can feel like they have no identity. Once they have escaped their abuse, often support is then decided for them, and many survivors feel that once again they have no control over their life. At times, it can feel like an extension of their abuse. (ATMG, 2021, p. 6)

Their report *Agents for Change* states that survivor inclusion in anti-trafficking collaboration and policy making is essential but often neglected. “We believe our reflections can provide some insight into other survivors' experiences and views” (Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group, 2021, p. 6). Other research with survivors has also shown their essential

contributions to anti-slavery efforts (Bick et al., 2017; Greenbaum et al., 2018; Kiss & Zimmerman, 2019; Lederer & Wetzel, 2014). Additionally, scholars in business and human rights emphasise that integrating rights holders' perspectives is crucial for understanding human rights risks and developing effective accountability mechanisms (Biswas-Tortajada et al., 2023).

Individuals with lived experience provide unique insights that can significantly improve strategies to address these challenges. For instance, the United States Advisory Council on Human Trafficking, established by the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act on May 29, 2015 (U.S. Department of State, 2015). The Council provides a formal platform for survivors to advise the President's Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (PITF) and offer recommendations on federal anti-trafficking policies, including those addressing forced labour (U.S. Department of State, 2000). Offering survivors a space to raise their voices is necessary for justice, valuable support, and restoration (Van Ness et al., 2022; Zehr, 2015).

Similarly, survivor leaders have stepped forward to raise awareness and address the issue. Harold D'Souza, a survivor of forced labour and former member of the U.S. Survivor-Informed Leadership Committee, founded Eyes Open International (www.eyesopeninternational.org) to raise awareness and empower victims. Similarly, Kendall Alaimo, an anti-slavery activist, serves as an advisor to the International Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council (ISTAC) at the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) (Alaimo, 2021). Thus, survivors and advocates argue for more meaningful and ethical ways to involve survivors in collaborative decision-making processes (Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group, 2021; Lockyer, 2020).

Stakeholder engagement in forced labour strategies is often limited to a research advisory board of experts that rarely includes key stakeholders, especially those with lived experience (Hounmenou, 2020). In Australia, expert advisory groups on forced labour have

so far only brought together stakeholders with essential knowledge and expertise but have not included survivors, as will be discussed in Chapter 5. Including the survivor perspective brings empirical evidence to guide policy and program development by preventing tokenism and the use of anecdotal understanding of survivors' experiences (Lockyer 2020). Research also suggests an enhanced role for "beneficiary actors" as active stakeholders due to their experience and closeness to the problem (Harris & Nolan, 2022). As one participant in the public submission to the Australian NAP mentioned,

[t]he involvement of victims is critical to ensuring that the measures taken to address trafficking benefit those in need, that unintended harmful consequences are anticipated and avoided, and that opportunities for change and improvement are identified in a timely way. (Mercy Foundation)

These findings are consistent with a larger literature recommending the inclusion of broader groups in collaborations to address forced labour (Boersma, 2018; Foot, 2015; Nolan & Boersma, 2019). They also demonstrate that as well as the Australian NAP advocating for more collaboration, key stakeholder voices must be included for the NAP to be successful. Their involvement can inspire the Australian community to better understand, engage with, and combat forced labour in global supply chains, beginning with their own business operations. By exploring an all-inclusive approach, this study drives stakeholders to actively reflect on their unique roles and expertise. Listening more attentively to stakeholder voices allows us to develop an evidence base that can inform policy making and prevent forced labour from happening. This approach not only enhances individual contributions to the anti-slavery initiative but also ensures that diverse perspectives and resources are effectively integrated within a collaborative framework to combat forced labour.

Having explored the significance of stakeholder representation and engagement in MSCs to address forced labour, it is now essential to define MSCs, explore existing

knowledge, identify gaps in our understanding, and explore how these collaboration models could contribute to combating forced labour in supply chains.

1.3 How MSCs Frameworks Might Alleviate Forced Labour

“Collaboration with companies is vital, as they can act as influential change agents.”

(Nolan & Boersma, 2019, p. 181)

It is beyond doubt that human rights abuses such as forced labour represent global health risks (Fraley et al., 2020), international economic concerns (International Labour Organization, 2014, 2024), and breaches of fundamental human rights (Baumann-Pauly, Nolan, Labowitz, et al., 2016; Nolan & Boersma, 2019), leading to profound societal consequences. The transnational nature of forced labour, combined with businesses operating within diverse national commercial systems (Jain et al., 2023) and modern slavery laws being limited by national borders (Nolan & Boersma, 2019), creates significant structural injustices that unethical actors can exploit. This illustrates the complexity of forced labour.

Addressing structural injustice requires change at the macro level (Browne & McKeown, 2024, p. 95). This need for change is underscored by non-binding legal standards, voluntary reporting, questionable rating tools (Boersma & Nolan, 2022), and insufficient worker protection in many regions of the world, such as China (Clarke & Boersma, 2017). These gaps underscore the need for a deeper understanding and implementation of collaborative models across all levels of society to effectively address forced labour (Caruana et al., 2021; Foot, 2015). In this context, collaboration among different stakeholders becomes crucial to counteract the prevalent issue of forced labour, particularly within global supply chains spanning industries such as agriculture, technology, textiles, mining, and other factory work (Harris & Nolan, 2022; Nolan & Frishling, 2019).

The growing complexity of global social issues, such as forced labour, requires unique and collaborative strategies. MSCs have emerged as an innovative strategy in both theory

and practice (Bryson et al., 2006, 2015; Ferraro et al., 2015; George et al., 2016; Gray & Purdy, 2018; Selsky & Parker, 2005). Particularly through the combination of “social partnerships and responsible business” (Seitanidi & Crane, 2013), MSCs are gaining recognition as a promising strategy for addressing social challenges such as forced labour (Baumann-Pauly et al., 2017; Baumann-Pauly & Posner, 2023; Crane & Seitanidi, 2013; Foot, 2015; B. Gray & J. Stites, 2013; Suárez & Esparza, 2017; Weber et al., 2021). However, research has moved from questioning the relevance of collaboration models to concentrating on how to establish, organise, govern, intensify, and prolong them (Van Tulder et al., 2016). But what exactly are MSCs? What gaps persist within this conceptual framework? And how are MSCs being implemented?

Defining MSCs

MSCs have been defined as voluntary collaborative efforts (Waddock, 1991) and “social problem-solving mechanisms among organisations” (Waddock, 1989, p. 79) to accomplish together an objective that would not be possible to address in silos (Bryson et al., 2006). In essence, they contribute to issues that “cannot be handled by single public organisations alone, or even by single sectors” (Bryson et al., 2020, p. 167). Other scholars define MSCs as long-term collaborations between organisations from different sectors including government, business, and civil society (Clarke & Crane, 2018) “to address social issues and causes that actively engage the partners on an ongoing basis” (Selsky & Parker, 2005, p. 850). Scholars suggest that MSCs help us understand organisations and their partnerships, including their societal impact (Branzei & Le Ber, 2013). Despite their differences, stakeholders collectively value collaboration to address social issues (Selsky & Parker, 2005; Suárez & Esparza, 2017; Weber et al., 2021).

MSCs assume diverse forms, such as business-non-profit, business-government, government-non-profit, and tri-sector (government, business, and non-profit) (Selsky & Parker, 2005). Stakeholders may involve government, business, non-profits (Selsky & Parker,

2005), philanthropies, communities and/or civil society (Bryson et al., 2006; Selsky & Parker, 2005), and direct beneficiaries (Lumpkin, 2019), who all represent the interests of different participants and aim to arrive at progressive solutions in combating forced labour. These collaborations are also known as social partnerships (Waddock, 1989), cross-sector partnerships (Selsky & Parker, 2005), multi-stakeholder networks (Roloff, 2008; Schneider & Sachs, 2017), multi-stakeholder partnerships (Gray & Purdy, 2018), cross-sector collaboration (Bryson et al., 2006, 2015), multistakeholder initiatives (Baumann-Pauly & Trabelsi, 2021; Boersma, 2018), and cross-sector social partnerships (Weber et al., 2021), to name a few.

This type of collaboration develops independently of the organisation's formal structure (Munyon et al., 2014). Some arrangements become formal contractual partnerships with governance structures, rules, and processes (e.g., multistakeholder Initiatives MSIs), while others operate informally over time (e.g., multi-stakeholder networks). Although studies suggest that MSI remedies (e.g., improving transparency, addressing power imbalances, and prioritising systemic change) offer significant advantages over companies' internal mechanisms, mentioning "higher levels of independence and efficacy", the lack of publicly open data hampers the study of how these MSI remedies function (Harrison & Wielga, 2023, p. 45).

In this study, I use the term "multi-stakeholder collaboration" (MSCs), defined as voluntary collaborative frameworks that engage stakeholders from different sectors—public, private, NGOs, civic society organisations, or community groups—that have a stake in an issue. These stakeholders collaborate to address social challenges they cannot overcome individually (Desai, 2018; Gray & Purdy, 2018; Savage et al., 2010; Selsky & Parker, 2005; Waddock, 1989). This definition is built on three foundational premises. **Firstly**, it acknowledges the *voluntary* participation of diverse sectors to amplify stakeholder voices in addressing forced labour within supply chains (Caruana et al., 2021; Foot, 2015; Van Buren & Greenwood, 2009). **Secondly**, stakeholders unite in a *collaborative engagement*, pooling their expertise to champion societal objectives beyond mere organisational interests (Van

Tulder et al., 2016). This collaborative approach necessitates the participation of key stakeholders (Van Buren & Greenwood, 2009). **Lastly**, it emphasizes MSCs between businesses and other sectors, *recognising their substantial economic and societal implications*. This focus is pivotal for exploration (Crane & Seitanidi, 2013) and will significantly impact global supply chains (Savage et al., 2010) because it advocates for a more inclusive and interconnected strategy (Le Ber & Branzei, 2010).

What Remains Unresolved in MSCs

One of the key elements of MSCs is their voluntary and collective approach (Waddock, 1991) to addressing complex issues that cannot be solved in isolation (Waddock, 1989). Despite their good intentions, MSCs are not a panacea, and collaboration can sometimes be challenging, frustrating, and unsuccessful (Bryson et al., 2006; Gray & Purdy, 2018; Le Pennec & Raufflet, 2018; Tencati & Zsolnai, 2013). MSCs often collapse in “contentious negotiations” (Gray et al., 2022, p. 2), which leads to them not always being seen as effective or legitimate (Boersma, 2018, p. 613). To further complicate this scenario, for some stakeholders with a stake in the issue, “participation may be restricted or even nonexistent” (Gray et al., 2022, p. 2)

Overall, these collaborations often fall short of tackling the problems they seek to solve (MSI Integrity, 2020); in some cases, the MSCs’ solutions can even create “the problems they were meant to solve” (Bryson et al., 2006, p. 44). However, the reason why MSCs fall short remains unexplored (Gray et al., 2022, p. 1). Research on MSCs has been “partial and fragmented”, predominantly focusing on collaboration performance and systemic change at the macro level (Clarke & Crane, 2018, p. 304) and legitimacy of collaborative processes (Boersma, 2018), while the complexities of collaboration have drawn less attention (Preuss et al., 2024). Moreover, research on MSCs has primarily focused on macro-level issues undermining their “stability and effectiveness” (Bode et al., 2019, p. 397) with limited attention to micro-level dynamics.

Combining macro-level outcomes with micro-level interactions provides a more comprehensive framework for exploring the effectiveness of MSCs, yet research combining these levels remains limited (Preuss et al., 2024). To address this limitation I blend three theoretical frameworks—stakeholder theory, MSCs, and restorative justice (as presented in Chapter 2). This approach responds to the need for a deeper understanding of stakeholder inclusion, MSC dynamics, and the challenges and effectiveness of these models in addressing forced labour (Caruana et al., 2021; Foot, 2015). I also address the micro–macro divide in management studies by connecting individual-level phenomena to macro-level organisational structures and outcomes (Eckardt et al., 2019). By doing so, the study explores the phenomenon across macro, meso, and micro levels of analysis. This multi-layered exploration can provide valuable insights into macro-level efforts within MSCs and stakeholder engagement.

Obstacles to stakeholder inclusion encompass tensions among stakeholders (Boersma 2018; Quayle et al., 2019), power disparities (Selsky & Parker, 2005; Dempsey, 2017), concerns about safety and control (Dempsey, 2017; Lockyer, 2020), and issues related to trust (Sloan & Oliver, 2013). In this context, power imbalances among stakeholders can create trust issues and “prevent partners from easily agreeing on a shared purpose” (Crosby & Bryson, 2010, p. 225). Such obstacles risk excluding voices both in theoretical discourse and practical application (Dutta, 2015; Lockyer, 2020), potentially jeopardising the sustainability of MSCs. To improve MSCs effectiveness, all stakeholders must be equally invested and recognised as valuable contributors (Jones & Lutze, 2016).

Building on these observed limitations, additional challenges underline the need for a richer exploration of MSCs as a mechanism for tackling forced labour. **First**, MSCs have received limited attention within the management sector as an organisational strategy for addressing forced labour (Caruana et al., 2021; Foot, 2015). Moreover, research initiated in 2010 at Harvard Law School’s International Human Rights Clinic and produced by The Institute for Multi-Stakeholder Initiative Integrity has highlighted significant limitations in the

effectiveness of what they term “multi-stakeholder initiatives from a human rights perspective” (MSI Integrity, 2020). The research revealed that although MSCs engage various stakeholders, they often employ a top-down approach that reinforces corporate power, limits civil society participation and action, and excludes the voices of rights holders (MSI Integrity, 2020). Therefore, it is critical to explore MSCs from multiple levels of analysis—particularly, the organisational (macro), collaborative (meso), and individual (micro) levels—to gain a deeper understanding of the collaboration dynamics in addressing forced labour.

Second, there is no clear evidence that MSCs contribute to remedies for rights holders or bridge governance gaps (MSI Integrity, 2020). Moreover, scholars suggest that MSC models “may lack transparency, accountability and independence and might not include all relevant stakeholders” (Boersma, 2018, p. 613). Other studies on collaborative models suggest that these collaborations fall short of their potential due to factors such as “competitive self-interest, abortive governance arrangements, a lack of accountability, poor measurement and inadequate benchmarks for evaluation, a lack of shared goal and trust deficit” (Eweje et al., 2021, p. 189). These findings highlight the necessity of evaluating and reassessing the structure of MSCs and exploring the role and inclusion of stakeholder voices in these collaborative models to address forced labour.

Ongoing collaborative efforts and research emphasise the importance of joint action, yet Australia must address two key issues to enhance the effectiveness of MSCs in combatting forced labour. The absence of a National Anti-Slavery Commissioner in Australia has long been a significant gap in fighting forced labour. The recent appointment of Chris Evans as Australia’s inaugural Anti-Slavery Commissioner (Australian Attorney-General’s Department, Nov 11 2024) marks a significant step forward. This role is vital for aligning collaborative efforts among government agencies, businesses, NGOs, the private sector, survivors, workers, and other key stakeholders. Evans, with a five-year term starting in December 2024, brings expertise from his role as CEO of the Global Freedom Network, improving efforts to coordinate stakeholders and address forced labour.

Third, Australia's legal framework lacks comprehensive human rights protections, despite its strong common law foundation and societal emphasis on fairness and freedom. While MSCs rely on coordinated efforts among various stakeholders, the absence of a robust legal framework significantly weakens their potential impact. As the Australian Human Rights Commission has indicated, "unlike most similar liberal democracies, Australia does not have a Bill of Rights" (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2020). Echoing this, a recent article published by the University of New South Wales highlights that Australia's approach to law and order exhibits a significant blind spot: human rights (McNamara, Aug, 2024).

The absence of a human rights federal instrument leads to lacunae within the prevailing legal framework, thereby hindering the consistent and robust protection of human rights within the country. The enactment of a national Human Rights Act in Australia would fill existing legal voids, offering a more coherent and unified understanding of human rights and freedoms. Moreover, a Human Rights Act would provide a framework for collaborative and effective governance, strengthening the MSA and NAP and guaranteeing the nation's commitment to fairness, freedom, and equality. As we will explore in the next section, several MSCs have been actively implemented to address and prevent human rights abuses such as forced labour.

MSCs Models: Global Context

MSCs serve as platforms that encourage collaboration and innovation by gathering diverse voices and expertise from various sectors, acting as conduits for holistic solutions (Weber et al., 2021). By integrating multi-layered perspectives, they tap into a reservoir of collective knowledge and experience benefiting both the immediate stakeholders and the larger community (Gray & Purdy, 2018; Van Tulder et al., 2016). Exploring the dynamics of MSCs offers insights into organisational interactions and societal roles (Branzei & Le Ber, 2013). While numerous examples of MSCs exist, I will focus on those directly connected to forced

labour. Table 1 presents a comparative overview of selected MSC initiatives addressing forced labour.

Table 1 Comparative Overview of MSC Initiatives Addressing Forced Labour

Initiative	Sector/Focus	Stakeholder Composition	Key Features	Geographic Scope
Fair Labor Association (FLA)	Apparel & manufacturing	Businesses, CSOs, universities	Independent monitoring, ILO-aligned standards	International
Fair Food Program	Agriculture	Workers, growers, retailers, consumers	Worker-led audits, binding agreements	U.S.
Worker-Driven Social Responsibility (WSR)	Agriculture / Apparel	Worker-led, NGOs, buyers	Worker-centric model, supply chain accountability	U.S.
Diamond Development Initiative	Mining	Industry, NGOs, local communities	Community development, formalisation of artisanal mining	Africa
Better Cotton Initiative (BCI)	Agriculture (cotton)	Brands, civil society, consultants	Sustainable standards, forced labour task force	International
HEAL Network	Health	Health professionals, advocates	Training on victim identification	U.S. with international engagement
ISTAC (OSCE)	Policy & advocacy	Survivors, policymakers, OSCE	Survivor-informed strategy	International
Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group (ATMG)	Research & advocacy	Academics, survivors, NGOs	Participatory research, advocacy	UK
Modern Slavery PEC	Research & policy	Academia, government, businesses, survivors	Policy-relevant research collaboration	UK with international engagement
Trilateral Research	Technology & policy	Consultants, academia, policymakers	Ethical AI, anti-slavery innovation	International
Global Commission on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking	Global governance	Political leaders, CEOs, academics, survivors	Strategic policy influence, SDG alignment	International

Scholars affirm that the legitimacy of global governance relies on the democratic contribution of everyone affected (Hilbrich, 2024). One example is the international collaborative effort led by former UK Prime Minister Theresa May, who chairs the newly established Global Commission on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, an international initiative launched in October 2023 (Global Commission on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, 2023). This initiative brings together a diverse group of stakeholders, including former political leaders, CEOs, academics, activists, survivors, and other key figures across various continents. Their combined expertise ensures actions are both compassionate and

effective, reinforcing the crucial role of MSCs in driving socio-political change and advancing global standards such as the SDG (United Nations, 2015). Similarly, the UN Global Compact exemplifies the potential of MSC to address forced labour. Its multi-year programme actively engages businesses to align their operations with universal principles of human rights and labour while promoting broader societal goals (United Nations Global Compact, 2024). The UN Global Compact highlights the private sector's role in fostering collaboration to address forced labour and drive systemic change toward shared global goals.

The Fair Labour Association (FLA) is an MSC that brings together businesses, civil society organisations, and universities to improve workers' rights and working conditions worldwide, with a particular emphasis on the supply chain (Fair Labor Association, 1999). By promoting transparency and conducting independent monitoring, the FLA ensures that member companies adhere to its Workplace Code of Conduct, which aligns with ILO standards. The Fair Food Program is a collaborative framework that incorporates rigorous auditing to benefit all participants in the supply chain, including workers, growers, retailers, and consumers (Fair Food Program, 2011). Another example is the Worker-Driven Social Responsibility model, established in 2015, which emphasises a worker-centric approach, notably in the U.S. agricultural sector (Worker-Driven Social Responsibility Network, 2015). Similarly, in the mining industry, the Diamond Development Initiative International aims to augment the positive developmental outcomes for miners and their associated communities (Diamond Development Initiative, 2006).

The Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) underscores sustainability across the social, environmental, and economic domains (Better Cotton Initiative, 2005). Through a multi-stakeholder collaboration model, BCI has formed a Task Force on Forced Labour and Decent Work, which includes experts from civil society, retail brands, and consultancies. Venturing beyond agriculture, mining and manufacturing, other MSCs cater to specific industry challenges: The Health Education Advocacy Linkage (HEAL) functions as a comprehensive

network set on increasing diverse health professionals' awareness so they can better identify victims/survivors of forced labour (The Health Education Advocacy Linkage, 2013).

A notable trend in MSCs is the integration of survivors' and workers' perspectives into policy design, as exemplified by the International Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council (ISTAC), established in 2021 under the guidance of the OSCE (International Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council, 2021). This collaborative framework is an inspiration, directing the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to formulate strategies that are both insightful and actionable.

On the academic front, the UK's ATMG has ventured into participatory research, melding the voices of survivors and non-survivors of forced labour (Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group, 2021). Moreover, the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (Modern Slavery PEC), established in 2019 through public funding, operates in an unprecedented UK-wide effort as a nexus of collaboration among academics, policymakers, businesses, and survivors, emphasising research-driven approaches to address modern slavery, including forced labour (Modern Slavery PEC, 2019). Within technology and research, Trilateral Research, founded in 2004, emerges as a leader in the ethical development of AI, proactively engaging with the complex social challenges of our time, such as forced labour (Trilateral Research, 2004). The company's operations, notably in the UK and Ireland, along with its network of consultants across the EU and Pakistan, epitomise a commitment to combating modern slavery and forced labour.

Practical Examples of Collaboration in Australia

In Australia, the Cleaning Accountability Framework (CAF), founded in 2012, represents a sector-specific framework to elevate labour standards in the cleaning industry (Cleaning Accountability Framework, 2014). Through collaboration with a spectrum of stakeholders—including cleaners, worker representatives, tenants, contractors, property managers, and investors—CAF is dedicated to the principles of fair labour, ethical procurement, and the

implementation of best practice standards. In line with industry-specific initiatives, the Human Rights Resources and Energy Collaborative (HRREC) serves as a prime example. This collaboration unites leading Australian companies in the energy and resources sector, fostering a collective approach to knowledge sharing, practice improvement, and the development of functional tools and resources, aligned with global human rights standards (Human Rights Resources and Energy Collaborative, 2019). Their primary objective is to enhance the identification and resolution of forced labour within supply chains. Participating companies include Alcoa Australia, AngloGold, BHP, Rio Tinto, and Fortescue Metals Group, among others (Walk Free & HRREC, 2022).

Despite these efforts, studies show that governments often question the legality, governance, and accountability of MSCs, especially when they contest public sector interests (Eweje et al., 2021). Another example of collaboration is the Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery (HTMS) Research Network, established in 2022 by the Australian Institute of Criminology (Australian Government, 2022). This initiative aims to improve understanding and responses to forced labour in Australia. Its primary goals include identifying and promoting relevant research, building a consortium of researchers from various sectors, including government, civil society, academia, and business, and sharing expertise on research methodologies related to modern slavery.

Government-led collaboration models can play a critical role in addressing forced labour. Within the scope of consultative panels, the Australian government has committed to the development of strong partnerships across a spectrum of critical sectors, including NGOs, the corporate sector, labour unions, the academic community, and state and territory governments. These collaborative frameworks include the National Roundtable on Human Trafficking and Slavery, established in 2008 (Committee, 2017, p. 18), and the Australian Modern Slavery Expert Advisory Group, founded in 2020 (Australian Government, 2020). These collaborative models operate as a pivotal forum for government consultations with key stakeholders, addressing policy and legislative reforms in the sphere of forced labour.

While the establishment of the National Roundtable on Human Trafficking and Slavery and the Modern Slavery Expert Advisory Group signifies substantial progress toward a unified strategy in addressing forced labour, questions remain about their actual efficacy, transparency, and the criteria behind stakeholders' inclusion. Evaluating the tangible outcomes of collaborative efforts in addressing forced labour is crucial to establish whether these instruments actually transform or merely represent progress in addressing this complex issue. The dynamics around these two frameworks will be further explored in Chapter 5.

At a state level, the Anti-Slavery Commissioner of New South Wales, Dr James Cockayne, has developed an advisory panel (NSW-Government, 2022) with a wide range of stakeholders, including individuals with lived experience, representatives from business, community organisations, labour unions, investment firms, human rights advocacy, academia, and public service. This collaboration is especially pivotal as the inclusion of multiple stakeholders across sectors is essential in the fight against forced labour. As one public submission to the NAP mentioned, there is a *“need for multi-agency collaboration, including working with other sectors”* (Good Shepherd ANZ & the Salvation Army Australia, 2020).

Together, these efforts highlight the potential of strategic alliances to drive meaningful change in addressing forced labour. MSCs between organisations and key stakeholders can provide the greatest potential and collectively pave the way for broader freedoms and labour standards (Locke, 2016; Roloff, 2008). By integrating collaborative mechanisms across organisations, "we can design a framework that encourages people to ask relevant questions for making ethical decisions" (Freeman et al., 2019, p. 154), leading to a paradigm shift in business engagement strategies, especially with marginalised groups, and fostering a more synchronised and meaningful interaction (Chowdhury et al., 2022). This culture of inclusivity and collaboration integrates diverse perspectives, enhances the influence of policy, and fosters a deeper understanding of the issue.

However, it is important to note that while the potential of MSCs is vast, their efficacy should be approached with a balanced perspective, recognising that success is not universally guaranteed (Gray & Purdy, 2018). Thus, MSCs, strategically anchored at the intersection of both discretionary and binding human rights commitments in the dynamic business and human rights domain exemplify the transformative power of collaborative endeavours (Baumann-Pauly & Posner, 2023). Their collective actions not only sculpt pragmatic solutions to the pervasive issue of forced labour but also propagate an ethos of synergy and collaboration in addressing global challenges.

To effectively explore the role of MSCs in addressing forced labour, it is essential to integrate two conceptual frameworks: stakeholder theory at the macro level and restorative justice at the individual level. This theoretical blending will enhance current efforts to develop rigour and deepen understanding of the complexities inherent in stakeholder engagement within MSCs. It allows an in-depth exploration, focusing on the foundational mechanics of partnership creation, sustenance, and the essence of collective decision-making. This approach recognises that for genuine, lasting solutions, stakeholders cannot operate in silos. Instead, a collaborative, inclusive approach is imperative. The following sections will provide a detailed exploration of these frameworks: Section 2.1 will discuss the conceptual framework, while Section 2.2 will examine the theoretical framework.

1.4 Chapter Insights

Forced labour, defined as exploitation that individuals cannot leave due to threats, violence, coercion, deception, and abuse of power, is a pervasive problem that affects around 27 million people, with the highest number of victims in the Asia Pacific region. Forced labour, encompassing a spectrum of severe human rights abuses, remains a global issue despite numerous international and national efforts to combat it. The ILO has encouraged governments to improve labour standards, and China's recent ratification of fundamental forced labour conventions signifies a commitment to this cause. Vulnerable groups include

individuals with limited knowledge of rights, limited language skills, financial difficulties, and a lack of legal protections, among others.

Forced labour is the most used method of enslaving people in global supply chains, particularly in industries like agriculture, technology, textiles, and mining. While ethical certification schemes aim to prevent exploitation, audit fraud and high compliance costs often undermine their effectiveness. Modern slavery legal frameworks, including those in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, encourage disclosure and due diligence but face challenges in implementing and ensuring accountability in practice. Economic globalisation and fragmented supply chains aggravate the problem, generating substantial illegal profits.

This chapter has explored the importance of including diverse stakeholder voices in collaboration models to contribute to anti-slavery initiatives effectively. Stakeholders in the context of forced labour encompass various groups and individuals, including governments, businesses, academics, NGOs, civil society, unions, community, and workers in supply chains. This broad inclusion reflects the complexity of the issue and underscores the need to involve various stakeholders across different sectors. However, Australia's NAP to combat modern slavery, which emphasises MSCs, faces significant challenges in its practical implementation. The current approach leans towards criminal justice, neglecting engagement with critical stakeholders, including survivors and workers. Limited attention to MSCs in the context of forced labour, along with the inadequate inclusion of critical stakeholders, has hindered comprehensive global anti-slavery efforts.

Effective collaboration models are essential in addressing the complex issue of forced labour in global supply chains. MSCs leverage diverse perspectives and expertise to promote sustainable solutions. Noteworthy models include the FLA, which unites businesses, civil society, and universities to improve workers' rights, and the WSR initiative, which empowers workers in sectors like agriculture in the United States. Australian government-led efforts, discussed in Chapter 5, include Australia's National Roundtable on Human Trafficking and

Slavery and the Modern Slavery Expert Advisory Group, both of which integrate stakeholders from various sectors.

International initiatives like the Global Commission on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, led by former UK Prime Minister Theresa May, and the UN Global Compact also play essential roles in promoting global labour standards. These collaborative frameworks address forced labour by encouraging transparency, accountability, and ethical behaviours within business operations, highlighting the need for more collective efforts. This chapter has provided significant insights into stakeholder inclusion in collaboration models as research in this field progresses. Carefully exploring and including key stakeholders from various sectors could transform existing collaboration models and oversight systems.

My proposed multi-stakeholder collaboration model, based on stakeholder theory and restorative justice, is significant. It facilitates the unique exploration of collaboration models at three levels of analysis: macro level (between organisations), meso level (within stakeholder groups), and micro level (in one-on-one interactions). This all-inclusive approach will allow detailed exploration from different angles and fields to avoid silos of knowledge, encouraging stakeholders to reflect on their unique roles and expertise. This shift can potentially support future efforts, paving the way for creating more effective policies and interventions. MSCs and stakeholder inclusion are paramount as they contribute to developing robust and actionable solutions to combat forced labour. Thus, this chapter has provided an overview of the phenomenon to explore the main research question: Why do stakeholder voices matter, and how can they make a difference in MSCs to address forced labour in the supply chain? The next chapter will introduce the conceptual and theoretical framework, offering a theoretical blending to explore MSCs to address forced labour.

2 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Forced labour and its numerous root causes are too complex to be addressed in silos, which emphasises a critical need for interdisciplinary research that combines various academic disciplines (Caruana, R., Crane, A., Gold, S., & LeBaron, G. 2021; Crane, A. (2013). Examining forced labour through the conceptual framework of voice, combined with theoretical approaches from stakeholder theory, MSC models, and restorative justice is essential for four reasons.

First, the conceptual framework of voice is crucial because it highlights the importance of including the perspectives and experiences of all stakeholders involved in anti-slavery strategies. Having a voice means active participation in decision-making (Benoit-Barné & Martine, 2021). This approach involves stakeholders such as government agencies, businesses, civil society organisations, labour unions, academics, workers, frontline responders, and community representatives. For Dempsey (2017, p. 2479) “the exercise of voice is deeply tied to notions of freedom and basic human rights”; thus, ensuring that these diverse voices are heard is critical for effective policy development, collaboration, and remediation.

Second, stakeholder theory extends beyond economic gain to include the interests of all stakeholders in value creation, shifting from a transactional to a relational perspective on corporate behaviours (Freeman, 1984; Wettstein, 2023). This theoretical approach underscores the ethical duties of businesses and encourages more inclusive decision-making processes. By considering the perspectives of all stakeholders in the collaboration models, the research aims to ensure that the strategies developed are relevant and inclusive.

Third, MSCs (explored in greater detail in **Section 1.3**) have emerged as an intentional approach to addressing social problems (Ferraro et al., 2015; George et al., 2016; Gray & Purdy, 2018) such as forced labour (Foot, 2015). Integrating the voices of all stakeholders into

MSCs improves the legitimacy and significance of these collaborations while developing a robust and sustainable approach.

Fourth, the restorative justice framework centres on the individual as the unit of analysis, shifting the focus from retribution to healing and dialogue (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2011; Van Ness et al., 2022; Zehr, 2002b; Zehr et al., 2022). It prioritises the needs of all affected parties and the restoration of relationships. This approach aligns with the concept of voice and stakeholder engagement, ensuring active participation in the justice process. A key aspect of restorative justice is fostering accountability and systemic change by genuinely involving all stakeholders in developing solutions.

Integrating these theoretical approaches allows the research to offer a more comprehensive examination of forced labour. Conceptual blending aims to use multiple lenses to counteract the tendency to create silos of knowledge, thereby building bridges within and across disciplines (Okhuysen & Bonardi, 2011). This method involves flexibility in integrating diverse theories and embracing a cross-disciplinary perspective within various literature streams (Cornelissen & Durand, 2014). By ensuring that all relevant voices and perspectives are included in the conversation, this approach fosters a more ethical and sustainable response to forced labour.

2.1 Conceptual Framework

In this section, I conceptually address the question: Why does the inclusion of stakeholder voices matter and how can they make a difference in MSCs to address forced labour in the supply chain? To explore this, I review literature encompassing the concept of voice to investigate the sociological complexities of forced labour.

Stakeholder Voice

“Our voice has the power to change the world”, the old saying goes. Here, I will focus on “voice” as a discursive standpoint (e.g., the right to express opinions, narrations, and

experiences) and a form of agency (connected to the verb *to voice* and the stakeholders' capacity to speak on their own behalf or representing a group) (Benoit-Barné & Martine, 2021, p. 5). While the term "voice" has been used extensively in both academic and more popular contexts to denote various discursive modalities (such as public speeches, written compositions, interview accounts, etc.), numerous authors neglect to provide a conceptual framework of the term (Benoit-Barné & Martine, 2021), rendering its meaning susceptible to diverse interpretations.

The notion of voice is complex and multi-layered. At a fundamental level, it functions as an instrument for daily communication, facilitating the sharing of thoughts and ideas. Yet, its profundity stretches far beyond this elementary understanding. For Dempsey (2017) "the exercise of voice is deeply tied to notions of freedom and basic human rights" (p. 2479). In this study, my interpretation of voice is aligned with critical-oriented communication frameworks that perceive voice as individuals' faculty to freely share and express their own interests to influence decision-making processes (Dempsey, 2017; Lockyer, 2020). That said, "to have a voice is to have agency, and to be a voice is to be an agent able to speak as and for something, or someone" (Benoit-Barné & Martine, 2021, p. 5).

Voice is strongly connected to the right and the agency to express an opinion (Lockyer, 2020) and emphasises the principle that people should feel their voices are valued and matter (Zoghلامي, 2021). However, the concept of voice also holds varied interpretations among organisational communication scholars, leading to research on the topic that is conceptually ambiguous and without a precise definition (Benoit-Barné & Martine, 2021; Kaine, 2020). Individuals exercise voice as a form of agency, operating within interconnected social contexts and structures rather than in isolation (Couldry, 2010). This research highlights the significance of acknowledging and valuing stakeholder voices in decision-making processes and collaborative models, drawing attention to their ties with freedom, human rights, and individual agency, especially in the context of addressing forced labour.

In the restorative justice literature, voice represents varied approaches to moral reasoning, contrasting the ethic of care, which highlights responsibility and relationships, with the ethic of justice, which is focused on rights and rules (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2011). Stakeholder voices are important, and the inclusion of key stakeholder voices, such as facilitators' and participants', is especially crucial (Pointer, 2021). They deserve to be heard (Sered, 2019), and ensuring that the voices of survivors are heard fosters a sense of healing for them (Nichols & Heil, 2023).

From a management perspective, a worker's voice entails personal involvement in the decision-making process (Benoit-Barné & Martine, 2021). Moreover, studies suggest that a worker's voice is crucial for influencing organisational affairs that impact their work and interests, enhancing labour standards and improving working conditions (Trusgnach et al., 2024). Therefore, I will use the concept of voice to symbolise the process of "giving an account of one's life and its conditions" (Couldry, 2010) and being heard and acknowledged in doing so (Benoit-Barné & Martine, 2021).

Given this multifaceted character of voice, it becomes evident that voice wields substantial power in shaping societal structures and policies. Within the purview of this research, the potency of voice, if it is included in MSCs, to mould policies, specifically addressing the pressing issue of forced labour, is explored. This conceptual breadth underscores that voice is not a mere act of vocalisation. It represents a deeply meaningful and influential form of expression with inherent value. This value is closely intertwined with broader paradigms of individual empowerment, reinforcing the pivotal role of voice in the realisation and practice of personal agency (Deetz & Brown, 2004).

But whose voice am I referring to? Given that the Australian Modern Slavery Act 2018 primarily emphasises forced labour within business operations, both businesses and their supply chain workers are integral to resolving the problem. This research explores the multifaceted perspectives provided by key stakeholders associated either directly or

peripherally with the pressing concern of forced labour. Section 1.2 illustrated the diverse array of stakeholder voices, including governmental agencies, businesses, civil society organisations, philanthropic bodies, grassroots communities, workers, and other pivotal actors. In the context of organisational decision-making, it is imperative to embrace the perspectives of all stakeholders widely. This inclusive approach ensures the development of cohesive and well-informed strategies.

Studies have shown that when stakeholders are given the opportunity to freely develop and express their ideas and interests, it leads to a more inclusive and resourceful decision-making process (Dempsey, 2007). Thus, each stakeholder offers a distinctive lens, instrumental in dissecting and navigating the intricacies of forced labour within supply chains. Such an integrative approach not only promotes empowerment and equitable representation (Dutta, 2015) but also alleviates potential stakeholder mistrust. However, it is important to note that unrestricted expression of stakeholder voices may not always be beneficial, as opportunities for voice are often strategically and provisionally confined to specific forums to avoid unintended consequences and foster genuine empowerment (Dempsey, 2007). It is also imperative for stakeholders to see their contributions reflected in anti-slavery actions and communications to ensure their representation is authentic.

Moreover, the active engagement of a multitude of voices, with a special emphasis on those from marginalised segments, is crucial for fostering an inclusive organisational culture (Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group, 2021; Foot, 2015; Lockyer, 2020). Sarah S (2024), a survivor and advocate, provides valuable insights into the critical voices of impacted individuals:

There was also a desperate need to reclaim my voice. My perpetrator had silenced us and believed that he had buried our stories. He thought that we would never be strong enough to speak out.

This research focuses on all key stakeholders involved in addressing forced labour, emphasising the importance of including diverse key stakeholders in collaborative models. Although I strongly advocate for the inclusion of all key stakeholders in collaborative models, I specifically mention certain stakeholders, such as workers (Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group, 2021; Chowdhury et al., 2022; Dang, 2018; Harris & Nolan, 2022) and affected communities (Baumann-Pauly, Nolan, Labowitz, et al., 2016), among others, because they rarely participate in formulating strategies and solutions for these pressing issues (LeBaron et al., 2021).

Unheard Voices

Historical trends in local governance, as discussed by Taylor Marlin (2006), indicate that without structured mechanisms for meaningful engagement and follow-through, stakeholder voices risk being sidelined. This issue is illustrated by the experience in Colombia under President Álvaro Uribe Vélez's "Consejos Comunales de Gobierno" [community-led government councils'], which, despite creating open forums for community engagement, often led to unclear outcomes with insufficient accountability and follow-up (Muñoz Eraso, 2010). Moreover, the imbalance in power and resources often reduces community participants to the status of subjects or clients rather than empowered decision-makers (Taylor, 2007). However, despite their central importance in shaping and implementing relevant strategies, the impacted communities are often side-lined in anti-slavery discourse (United Nations, 2021).

Establishing inorganic and unstructured environments where individuals are ostensibly granted a voice can be a straightforward task. However, such settings often inadvertently undermine collective action and diminish the participants' capacity for effective communication. This, in turn, weakens their ability to articulate their perspectives in a manner that is both meaningful and conducive to positive outcomes.

Within the framework of restorative justice, scholars like Danielle Sered, particularly in her seminal work *Until We Reckon: Violence, Mass Incarceration, and a Road to Repair*

(2019), stress the imperative of attentively listening to survivors. Sered articulates that the needs of survivors transcend mere question-asking. Instead, they are inclined towards active engagement in dialogues, where they endeavour to have their voices not just expressed but also genuinely acknowledged and valued. In this context, Zehr (2002a), another scholar in the field of restorative justice, asserts:

The key is not in silencing the pain, building walls and posting guards but in giving voice to our pain, telling our truths; the solution is in what long-time peace advocate Eloise Boulding calls “prophetic listening” to one another [...] Only when these walls are addressed will we reach our destination. (p. 30)

This emphasis highlights a deeper understanding of survivors’ perspectives and the importance of their contributions to the discourse of restorative justice. Dang, a renowned scholar and survivor-leader, poignantly underscores this discrepancy in her article “Survivors are speaking. Are we listening?” (2018, p. 1) by critiquing the anti-slavery movement for overlooking survivors’ unique insights and knowledge, which could significantly bolster intervention efforts. She poignantly notes, “Our experience in slavery is not the only, nor the primary, topic that we want to discuss. We want to talk about policy change”. These assertions from Dang highlight the profound significance of truly listening to and valuing the stakeholder voices that matter most. As she states, “we want to design social service programs and lead our own organisations and programs” (Dang, 2018, p.1).

This underscores the complexity of forced labour and the central role that organisations, particularly businesses, assume in acknowledging and integrating stakeholder voices into their decision-making strategies. Stakeholder voices are key to corporate functionality, exposing organisational weaknesses (Bowden, 1995; Hirschman, 1970). Although stakeholder theory states that “we must create value in a context, with the help of others and with others who value what we create” (Freeman et al., 2010, p. 281), stakeholder voices in organisations are sometimes silenced, unduly influenced, undervalued, or even

rejected (Dempsey, 2017), with managers favouring dominant stakeholders over less powerful actors (Chowdhury et al., 2022; Roloff, 2008). A survivor peer research group has raised their voice and concerns about not being included in anti-slavery conversations, not only as beneficiaries but as active stakeholders in research.

Survivors have a certificate in life experience; but at times, it feels like this is not valued.

Survivors should have the option of engaging in research and policy as peers and not just as recipients of support. (ATMG, 2021, p10)

This quote illustrates that survivors are aware not only of the benefits of sharing their lived experiences to build awareness but also of the advantages of being involved in anti-slavery conversations. While reading their research and their pertinent quotes, I could clearly hear, “We have the knowledge and a lived experience to be involved in the anti-slavery conversations” and can contribute to the solution to a problem that is deeply close to us. As Dang (2018) eloquently described, “survivors are placed in an exasperating predicament: to be heard in limited ways, with little to no compensation, or to be excluded from important conversations that affect their lives.” (p.1).

Such conditions might deter stakeholders, especially workers, from engaging in direct dialogues because they fear adverse outcomes like diminished self-esteem (Detert & Edmondson, 2011) or deportation (Simpson et al., 2021). If their voices are not heard, silence will only support the “status quo and oppressive conditions” (Dempsey, 2017, p. 2479). Hence, recognising these psychological factors, coupled with ethical considerations to avert re-traumatisation, is crucial for authentic interaction with workers’ voices (Lockyer, 2020). Some scholars suggest that when stakeholders have a voice through involvement and participation, they are more likely to be treated justly and rightfully (Van Buren & Greenwood 2009).

A deep understanding of social inequalities and their effects on individuals’ lives plays a significant role in promoting both individual and collective empowerment (Decault, 2021; Dutta, 2015). Thus, in facilitating an environment where stakeholders possess the autonomy

to cultivate and articulate their interests, and by integrating these interests into decision-making mechanisms, the voice of stakeholders plays a pivotal role in enhancing coordination and ensuring accountability (Dempsey, 2007). In essence, recognising and valuing stakeholders' lived experiences and expertise is fundamental to fostering effective coordination and accountability in decision-making processes.

Collective Voices

Some researchers emphasise the significance of a collective (union) voice in influencing management changes that benefit stakeholders (Freeman & Medoff, 1984). But who is allowed to speak? (Fleming et al., 2013). As Bakhtin argued, "a single voice ends nothing and resolves nothing. Two voices are the minimum for life, the minimum for existence" (Bakhtin & Dostoevsky, 1984, p. 252). Other scholars argue that the unification of voices can make a difference. For instance, for a voice to have influence (convince someone of something), it needs to illustrate the voices on behalf of which it speaks; it needs to show a plurality of voices (multivocality) (Martine & Benoit-Barné, 2021) to make a difference. Thus, rather than having a plurality of disconnected voices, I propose here that many stakeholder voices may speak and be heard through MSCs. Thus, I argue that collective voices through MSCs can influence policy making, help business have a meaningful relationship with workers in supply chains, and, therefore, prevent forced labour.

Stakeholder voice promotes fairness, but its absence creates a moral problem and puts workers at risk of exploitation by organisations (Van Buren & Greenwood, 2009). In this context, "to have a voice is to have agency, and to be a voice is to be an agent able to speak as and for something or someone" (Benoit-Barné & Martine, 2021, p. 5). Therefore, it is critical to examine stakeholder voices in the context of MSCs and how these collaboration models might function as mediators between organisations and workers to address forced labour in business operations.

The challenge of stakeholder voice inclusion in MSCs to address forced labour involves both organisational and individual dimensions (Dang, 2018; Gray & Purdy, 2018). The *organisational component* centres on the “relationship” between stakeholders and their affiliation with the organisation (Dentonie 2016, Roloff 2008, Parmar et al., 2010) and their partnerships with society at large (Branzei & Le Ber, 2013). Although stakeholder theory recognises that stakeholders “have names, faces and children” who contribute to the value creation of an organisation (Freeman, 2017, p. 6), stakeholder voices such as workers’ or representative stakeholders’ are rarely heard in anti-slavery strategies (LeBaron et al., 2021). Value creation and a right for stakeholder voices to be heard are closely interlinked (Van Buren & Greenwood, 2009, p. 17) Thus, when a stakeholder creates value for an organisation or when an organisation takes value from a stakeholder—in our case, key stakeholders (e.g., workers)—stakeholders should have the right to a voice in their association with the organisation; however, this is rarely acknowledged (Van Buren & Greenwood, 2009, p. 19).

The *individual dimension* of voice, in contrast, is anchored at the intersection of organisational communication and MSCs, where voice plays an important role in effective corporate functioning (Deetz, 2004). It also evokes the notion of a voice with meaning; a voice that carries value and is connected with freedom of expression; a discursive standpoint that can be attributed to an individual (Benoit-Barné & Martine, 2021); a voice with the capacity and power to speak, to voice an idea on the individual’s behalf or on behalf of others, without impediment.

It is a voice that serves as a conduit for acknowledging divergences and disputes, representing a fundamental mechanism through which stakeholders interrogate, contest, and reconfigure relations of accountability (Dempsey, 2007). Through the articulation of voice, individuals possess the capacity to exercise their influence and critique prevailing structures, consonant with the principles of empowerment, liberty, and foundational human rights. Thus, stakeholder voice inclusion is an answer to the problem of injustice in organisations, in particular for stakeholders who lack power (Van Buren & Greenwood, 2009). Considering this

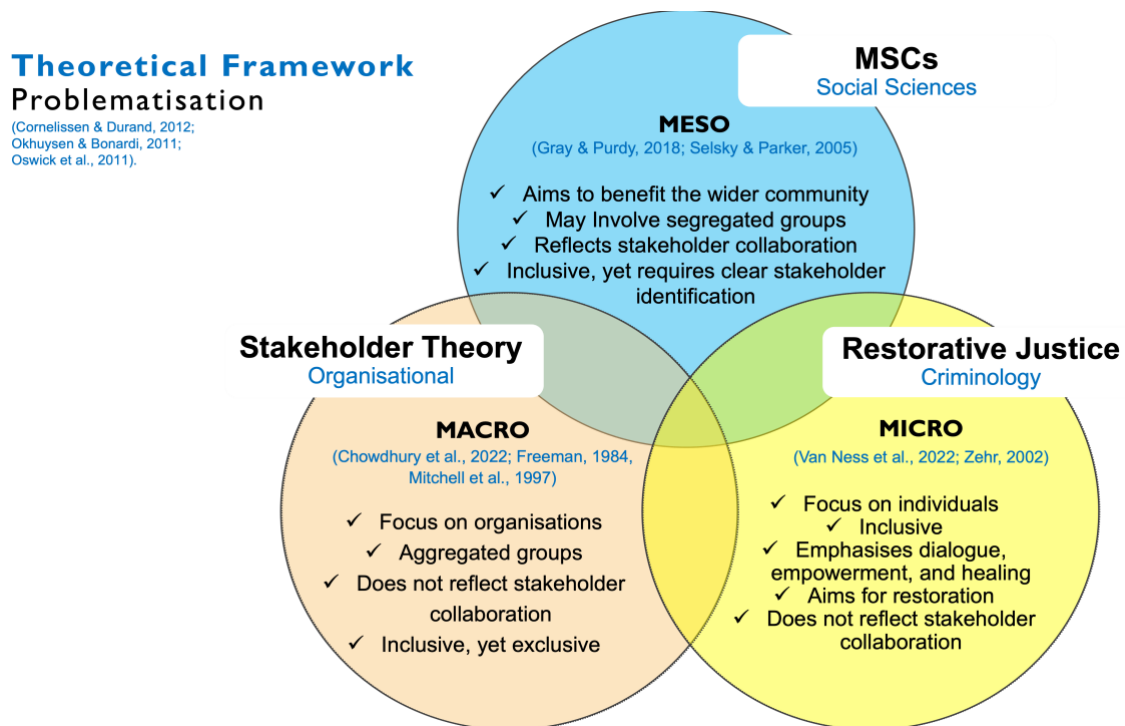
premise, one might query: Is this not the objective of MSCs? To integrate stakeholder perspectives into dialogues addressing shared challenges? To incorporate pivotal stakeholders who have played a role in value generation within an organisation and accord them equitable consideration as stakeholders?

Academics in the management field, where business and stakeholders convene, should advocate for stakeholders who are not being treated fairly rather than explore their situation purely as a research phenomenon (Van Buren & Greenwood, 2009). Although the importance of including stakeholder voices has been recognised in this chapter, it is important to note that assuming stakeholder voice inclusion in MSCs as largely beneficial can be risky as more voices do not necessarily yield more power (Dempsey, 2017) or decision-making influence (Van Buren & Greenwood, 2009). With this in mind, having a voice is not sufficient, it must be conceived as a value which is associated with free speech (Benoit-Barné & Martine, 2021). Thus, my study builds on stakeholder voice inclusion in MSCs but, at times, challenges many of these findings.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

My theoretical approach started with a collection of ideas from different organisational (stakeholder theory), social science (MSCs), and criminology (restorative justice) theories to help me address the fundamental social question (Pratt, 2016): *Why do stakeholders' voices matter and how can they make a difference in MSCs to address forced labour in the supply chain?* Including diverse stakeholder voices in collaboration models is crucial for effective policy development, sustainable solutions, and remediation in forced labour cases. **Figure 4** illustrates the theoretical framework guiding this thesis across three levels: stakeholder theory (macro), MSCs (meso), and restorative justice (micro). It offers a visual overview of the intersection of key concepts, serving as an exploratory model to guide problematisation—not as a comprehensive map or a prescriptive model.

Figure 4 *Theoretical Framework Guiding the Thesis*



Different disciplines have explored forced labour through multiple lenses, providing a rich foundation for this research. For instance, discourse ethics (Boersma, 2018), narrative approach (Burn, 2017), critical cosmopolitan theorising (Foot et al., 2019), coalition theory (Foot et al., 2021), theory of collaborative advantage (Foot, 2015), stakeholder theory (Hounmenou, 2020), intersectional feminism framework (Lockyer, 2020), and corporate social responsibility (New, 2015), among others.

To bring a fresh perspective to my research and its relation to management's role in stakeholder reasoning (Chowdhury et al., 2022; Okhuysen & Bonardi, 2011), I ask: What if we think about the foundational assumptions and default explanations differently? (Cornelissen & Durand, 2012; Derry, 2012). For instance, what if I explore stakeholders' voices and their inclusion in decision-making to address forced labour not as a proxy but as human beings with a voice? What if I examine stakeholder voices in tackling forced labour, not as individual contributions but as a collective force within MSCs? This approach could support my

theoretical development, emerging from counterfactual reasoning and helping researchers in developing alternative theories (Cornelissen & Durand, 2014).

To be able to provide this insight, I blend stakeholder theory, MSCs, and restorative justice to achieve synthesised coherence and construct relationships. By synthesised coherence, I mean building a bridge between these conceptual conversations that share a common but unrecognised interest (Pollock, 2021) in ideas that have not been explored (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997). In essence, the primary purpose of conceptual blending is to integrate presumptive reasoning and mental inputs, providing a practical evaluation of phenomena, generating new insights, and avoiding silos of knowledge that can contribute to theory development (Cornelissen & Durand, 2012; Okhuysen & Bonardi, 2011; Oswick et al., 2011). I also address the call for greater focus on the micro–macro divide in management studies, connecting emerging individual-level phenomena to macro-level organisational structures and outcomes (Eckardt et al., 2019). I will focus here on stakeholder theory and restorative justice as I have already covered MSCs in the previous chapter.

Stakeholder theory and MSCs share similar expectations about stakeholder inclusion in collaboration and decision-making. However, contrary to stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), MSCs seek to include stakeholders beyond the firm's interest to benefit the wider community (Gray & Purdy, 2018; Van Tulder et al., 2016). While both theoretical frameworks discuss the involvement of various stakeholders, they lack clarity in defining what constitutes a stakeholder and who qualifies as one. (Phillips et al., 2019).

This indicates a need to explore the issue from the individual, micro-level perspective as my unit of analysis. For this, restorative justice theory is particularly useful because it allows to evaluate the individual's role in stakeholder collaborations. This theory focuses on healing and accountability through respect, inclusion, and benefit for all stakeholders (Van Ness et al., 2022; Zehr, 2015). By focusing on the personal experiences and needs of individuals, restorative justice offers a humanising effect that could illuminate stakeholder interaction in

MSCs and create more inclusive and effective anti-slavery initiatives. It addresses the limitations of other theoretical frameworks by building a bridge, ensuring that the voices of all affected stakeholders are heard and valued.

Blending stakeholder theory, MSCs, and restorative justice is advantageous because these three theoretical lenses share concepts such as inclusivity and participation, stakeholder value, accountability and collaboration, and ethical practices. These concepts contribute to a conceptual framework that pivots around stakeholder voices. By blending these theories, I create a more robust theoretical approach that allows me to explore the phenomenon from three different perspectives: at the organisational level (stakeholder theory), across organisations (MSCs), and at the individual level (restorative justice). This integration enhances our understanding of stakeholder engagement and the effectiveness of collaborations in addressing forced labour, ensuring comprehensive engagement, ethical accountability, and sustainable collaboration, ultimately leading to more effective solutions.

Now that I have explained the reasoning behind my theoretical blending, it is essential to examine these theories in greater detail to appreciate their strengths and how they collectively enhance our approach to collaboration to addressing forced labour.

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory's crucial contribution to business studies has been the shift from a transactional to a relational viewpoint on corporate behaviours (Freeman, 1984; Wettstein, 2023), embodying a humanistic view of business (Freeman et al., 2020) and bridging management and ethics (Phillips et al., 2003) to explore organisational phenomena (Kujala & Sachs, 2019). For my study, I understand stakeholder as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by achieving the organisation's objectives” (Freeman, 1984, p. 246). In essence, stakeholder theorists see individuals as stakeholders with names, faces, and families (2017). However, not everyone agrees with this definition, as some consider that this combination identifies “anyone” as a stakeholder (Mitchell et al., 1997).

In the context of the broader discussion on addressing forced labour, the role of stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) emerges as a pivotal conceptual tool. It facilitates collaboration at an organisational level among various stakeholders that have a stake in an issue. Moreover, the theory provides a framework that helps decode complex value-generating relationships within the organisation (Parmar et al., 2010). As such, stakeholder theory is critical in MSCs, helping to identify key stakeholders that need to be included. Additionally, it offers a replicable organisational structure to guide these collaborations in successfully tackling the issue.

On the other hand, stakeholder theorists emphasise that the role of firms in capitalism is to orchestrate stakeholder collaboration (Bridoux & Stoelhorst, 2022), encouraging organisations to scrutinise their social and ethical obligations (Carroll & Buchholtz, 1993). Stakeholders include investors, employees, management, customers, suppliers, competitors, local communities, NGOs, government, citizens, and workers in supply chains (Chowdhury et al., 2022; Freeman, 2017; Kujala & Sachs, 2019; Kujala et al., 2022). Despite definitional and actor variations, all stakeholders are characterised through their association with an organisation or business (Roloff, 2008). Here, organisations are “the vehicles by which stakeholders are engaged in a joint and cooperative enterprise of creating value for each other” (Freeman et al., 2010, p. 6), yielding societal benefits. This underscores the intertwined nature of value creation and stakeholder voice (Van Buren & Greenwood, 2009, p. 17).

Stakeholder theory has been a highly influential framework for comprehending and enhancing organisations and their interactions with other social actors (Bondy & Charles, 2020). Its application across various fields—including strategic management, human resources, production, marketing, finance, accounting, law, public policy, and business ethics (Parmar et al., 2010)—makes it a versatile tool for addressing complex problems like forced labour (Johnson-Cramer et al., 2022; Laplume et al., 2008; Wood et al., 2021). By providing a conceptual toolset for developing organisational value-creating relationships (Freeman, 1984;

Parmar et al., 2010) stakeholder theory enables organisations to offer valuable insights and innovative approaches to stakeholder management (Harrison et al., 2015).

Despite this theory's emphasis on people and groups of people (Parmar et al., 2010, p. 38) and its prioritisation of stakeholder concerns (Miles, 2012), it not only falls short of addressing all ethical concerns (Parmar et al., 2010; Phillips et al., 2003) but also inadequately identifies distinct stakeholder groups and their interests (Carroll & Buchholtz, 1993, p. 97). For instance, although suppliers are recognised as stakeholders (Freeman, 2017), the valuable role of workers in supply chains has been dismissed due to a lack of attributes of power, legitimacy, and urgency (Mitchell et al., 1997). This approach exhibits potential bias (Derry, 2012) perpetuating the issue of human rights risks in business operations. I argue that if an organisation is violating an individual's human rights, the primary concern should be the rights violation itself; their status as a stakeholder should be a secondary consideration, at best. This underscores the need for deeper understanding of stakeholder claims (Van de Ven, 2005) and clearer corporate responsibilities for unethical practices (Nadeem, 2021).

Although the concept of stakeholder is fundamentally subject to debate (Crane & Ruebottom, 2011; Fassin, 2009), it has been variously described and is well-defined by scholars (Laplume et al., 2008; Miles, 2017; Mitchell et al., 1997), depending on the purpose it serves (Miles, 2017). However, questions such as who is and who is not a stakeholder, (Phillips et al., 2019) and how to balance stakeholder interests need further attention (Laplume et al., 2008). Moreover, this theoretical framework struggles to capture the dynamics in MSCs (Quayle et al., 2019; Roloff, 2008), which are pivotal for tackling forced labour. Despite a recent move towards collaborative engagement (Kujala & Sachs, 2019, p. 227), the literature on stakeholder involvement remains somewhat disjointed (Kujala & Sachs, 2019; Kujala et al., 2022), reflecting the fragmented nature of supply chains. As scholars affirm, Mitchell et al.'s (1997) approach misinterprets Freeman's (1984) original, more inclusive stakeholder theory and perpetuates the exclusion of important stakeholders (Derry, 2012).

Stakeholder theory has evolved dramatically, shifting from focusing on transactional and managerial firms to a broader management strategy that creates value for diverse stakeholders (Freeman, 1984; Wettstein, 2023). It questions the conventional view of maximising shareholder wealth (Laplume et al., 2008) by incorporating a more humanistic stance on business (Freeman et al., 2020). Studies have emphasised the significance of stakeholder theory in integrating stakeholder perspectives, designing nuanced language to address social issues in management, and encouraging corporate social responsibility (Dmytriiev et al., 2021).

Further, stakeholder theory has been applied to community contexts to promote civic wealth creation and societal impact (Lumpkin & Bacq, 2019). Recent research has offered theoretical frameworks that focus on key stakeholders, particularly marginalised groups to address various ethical and social issues (Chowdhury et al., 2022). As stakeholder theory develops, significant research remains to be done (Harrison et al., 2015), with scholars aiming to place ethics at the core of business and business at the core of ethics, thus creating a framework for understanding business in the twenty-first century (Parmar et al., 2010).

While stakeholder theory addresses secondary stakeholders, it fails to examine the issues and self-representation of marginalised groups (Chowdhury, 2021b). Secondary stakeholders are those “who influence or affect, or are influenced or affected by, the corporation, but they are not engaged in transactions with the corporation and are not essential for its survival” (Clarkson, 1995, p. 107). In the context of forced labour, stakeholders rarely exhibit all three attributes unless they form coalitions with more powerful actors (Chowdhury et al., 2022). Marginalised stakeholders, struggling with self-organisation and lacking power, must rely on the advocacy or support of more powerful and prominent stakeholders to have their voices heard (Bondy & Charles, 2020).

Scholarly work on collaboration states that stakeholders are considered legitimate when potential partners recognise their right and capability to influence the issue or problem

being addressed (Gray & Purdy, 2018). In this context, MSCs could serve as a platform for involving different stakeholders across sectors with a common interest (Selsky & Parker, 2005), fostering network actors to support every participant, particularly, marginalised stakeholders (Chowdhury, 2021b). This is critical because the lack of acknowledgment of stakeholders as valuable contributors creates a chain reaction of distrust and stereotyping among participants (Ansell & Gash, 2008).

Given this context, although stakeholder theory sheds light on organisational management, it does not imply that stakeholder theory is well suited to determine stakeholder inclusion in MSCs aimed at addressing forced labour. Moreover, stakeholder theory does not entirely encapsulate the dynamics and practical aspects integral to MSCs (Quayle et al., 2019; Roloff, 2008). Such collaborations are indispensable when we consider the global challenge of addressing forced labour effectively. Instead, I argue that stakeholder theory, a theory of organisational ethics, has significant limitations in understanding stakeholder claims (e.g., workers in the supply chain) for addressing the organisational footprint and social responsibility (Van de Ven, 2005). In contrast, MSCs go beyond the firm's interest by embracing a social purpose, which is an essential element to effectively addressing forced labour.

Considering the background, I apply stakeholder theory and restorative justice to bridge the gap between individual stakeholders—the actors in MSCs—the process itself, which involves collectivities of organisations working together to address the common problem of forced labour.

Restorative Justice

Applying the restorative justice approach at the individual level as an additional layer of analysis could illuminate the effectiveness of these MSC models. Restorative justice is a moral repair approach that focuses on restoring relationships by engaging all actors connected to the wrong, including affected stakeholders, in the repair process (Goodstein & Butterfield,

2010; Vives-Gabriel et al., 2023). In recent years, organisations have been increasingly urged to address human rights issues within their operations (Baumann-Pauly & Nolan, 2016; Baumann-Pauly et al., 2017; Baumann-Pauly & Trabelsi, 2021; Ferraro et al., 2015; George et al., 2016; Gray & Purdy, 2018).

In response to this growing concern, various national laws (e.g., Australia and UK MSA) have been implemented, requiring companies to disclose their practices rather than mandating proactive measures (Sinclair & Nolan, 2020). Despite these regulatory efforts, it is well-documented that many companies often fail to meet their obligations and engage in corporate misconduct (Nadeem, 2021; Nolan, 2022; Nolan & Boersma, 2019). This also involves neglecting genuine efforts to repair the harm done to stakeholders such as workers in supply chains. To address this, Zehr (2008, p. 3) proposes a restorative justice approach that focuses on harms and needs:

Restorative justice seeks to reframe the way we conventionally think about wrongdoing and justice: away from our preoccupation with lawbreaking, guilt and punishment, toward a focus on harms, needs and obligations. Restorative justice especially emphasizes the importance of the engagement and empowerment of those most affected by wrongdoing, and uses a problem-solving approach.

This definition focuses on dialogue, engagement, and empowerment. Restorative justice, a term actively debated (Boyes-Watson, 2018), originated in criminal law and extended into social welfare, education, organisational fields (Braithwaite, 1999; Goodstein & Butterfield, 2010; Vives-Gabriel et al., 2023), sociology, philosophy, psychology, and gender studies (Menkel-Meadow, 2007) to mend relationships and foster reconciliation. It actively engages all stakeholders that “with a stake in a particular offense come together to resolve collectively how to deal with the aftermath of the offense and its implications for the future” (Braithwaite, 1999, p. 5; Hartmann, 2018). Restorative justice is a social movement that actively promotes

peaceful approaches to harm caused by unethical behaviour, problem-solving, and violations of human rights (Gohar, 2018).

It is critical to understand that “restorative justice is a compass, not a map” (Zehr, 2002b, p. 10). Restorative justice offers significant benefits in fostering reconciliation, yet it faces challenges. A critical barrier is the lack of collaboration, particularly the exclusion of victim advocates during early planning stages, which undermines diverse representation and limits the program's ability to address community needs comprehensively and effectively (Zehr et al., 2022, p. 154).

Contrary to the criminal justice approach, which ensures that offenders receive penalties commensurate with their actions, restorative justice focuses on meeting the needs of victims and requires offenders to take responsibility for repairing the harm they have caused (Zehr, 2015). However, to achieve a balanced approach in restorative justice, the implementation requires offenders to provide truthful accounts and acknowledge their responsibility for the committed atrocities (Sarkin & Pereira Lopes, 2023). If successful, restorative justice, as indicated by several studies, increases victim satisfaction compared to the retributive approach; however, more recent studies question satisfaction as a success criterion, concentrating instead on victims' mediation experiences (Green, 2007).

At its core, restorative justice emphasises dialogue-based resolutions and transparency to repair injustice, focusing not only on identifying broken laws and culprits but also on fostering healing and accountability (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2011; Van Ness et al., 2022; Zehr, 2002b; Zehr et al., 2022). Echoing this, scholars argue that communication and collaboration among practitioners of restorative justice across different settings and roles should be further enhanced and better structured (Marder, 2016).

Here is where my proposed MSC model (explored in detail in Chapters 5, 6, and 7), grounded in stakeholder theory and the restorative justice framework, is significant. An all-inclusive approach allows for the exploration of the phenomenon from a unique angle, avoiding

silos of knowledge (Cornelissen & Durand, 2012; Okhuysen & Bonardi, 2011; Oswick et al., 2011) and encouraging stakeholders to reflect on their partnership's distinct roles and expertise. Integrating these theories is crucial to comprehensively understanding and addressing the complex dynamics at play. Recognising the individual needs, perceptions, and experiences of the stakeholders is central to addressing the difficulties of forced labour and working towards sustainable solutions. This comprehensive approach highlights the need to explore corporate responses, where restorative justice can offer a pathway to sustainable change.

Corporate Responses and Restorative Justice in the Context of Forced Labour

Corporate remediation practices are vital for addressing human rights violations, with a strong focus on restorative justice frameworks (Schormair & Gerlach, 2020). Under international law, a violation of human rights necessitates reparation; however, despite the widespread denunciation of forced labour, the issue of how to adequately remedy the abuse of the victim's rights is often neglected (Simmons et al., 2022). Corporate remediation represents a current failure and a potential opportunity for improvement.

Scholars acknowledge that while some research exists on corporate responses and remediation efforts following the detection of forced labour, this area still requires further exploration, particularly on remediation processes, to develop a comprehensive understanding of effective practices (Benstead et al., 2021; Pryde et al., 2024). Access to an effective remedy is fundamental to human rights and constitutes the third pillar of the UNGPs (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2011), outlining practical steps for governments and businesses to protect, respect, and remedy human rights abuses. However, the adoption and implementation of the UNGPs is voluntary, allowing companies to independently choose which responsibilities to approve and implement (Salcito et al., 2015).

While businesses recognise their obligations as delineated by the UNGPs, they remain hesitant to accept general legal liability for human rights violations (Muchlinski, 2021). A recent

study on exploited migrant workers in Finland and Norway found that businesses' responses to human rights in forced labour statements provide superficial details on remedies and lack transparency (Davis & Haapasaari, 2024). Additional studies mention that “it has proved impossible to study how well the vast majority of company grievance mechanisms are functioning in practice because of their complete lack of transparency” (Harrison & Wielga, 2023, p. 45). As a result, “the situation of those whose rights are most severely impacted by corporate activities on the ground” has not improved (Wettstein, 2021, p. 313), failing to execute the most crucial element of these principles—ensuring access to remedies for those impacted by human rights violations (Schrempf-Stirling & Van Buren III, 2024).

Remediation should take into account both the direct and indirect effects of corporate activities on rights holders (Pryde et al., 2024). However, the concept of remedy can be particularly challenging to understand, especially for those encountering the immediate corporate actions on rights holders for the first time (Moore, 2024). To further complicate this scenario, the UNGP description of access to remedy is vague, aspirational, and general, lacking specificity and robustness, which makes its recommendations difficult to enforce and evaluate in practice (Salcito et al., 2015, p. 5). Consequently, significant uncertainty remains about how companies should effectively remediate forced labour abuses.

In the Australian context, researchers argue that despite the enactment of the MSA, significant uncertainty persists regarding the development and implementation of effective remediation processes, and the MSA does not sufficiently facilitate access to remedy (Pryde et al., 2024). To address this, scholars have developed a recent toolkit that actively guides businesses, government, and civil society in responding to the Australian MSA and conducting human rights due diligence, highlighting the importance of stakeholder engagement and collaboration for effective remedies (Nolan et al., 2023). Although there is broad agreement about the need for public and private governance initiatives to address forced labour (Crane et al., 2019), research on collaboration from a social sustainability perspective remains limited (Benstead et al., 2021).

Given this context, restorative justice has the potential to acknowledge and encourage stakeholders involved in collaboration models and support them in re-shaping their narratives (Zehr, 2002a). Since victimisation is typically regarded as a state of powerlessness, it is crucial for restorative justice processes to restore victims' sense of control over their lives (Vives-Gabriel et al., 2023). For example, studies have shown that restorative justice mitigates the severe effects of ongoing vulnerability for victims of forced labour in the seafood industry (Yea et al., 2022).

Through meaningful engagement, those who are abused, wrongdoers, affected communities, and key stakeholders can search for solutions that promote repair and reconciliation and facilitate social recovery (Braithwaite, 1999; Sered, 2019; Zehr, 2002a). It entails victims receiving compensation and apologies, offenders accepting responsibility and making restitution, and the general community building trust and promoting collective learning (Goodstein & Butterfield, 2010). As scholars eloquently stated, restorative justice is a "collaborative problem-solving approach" (Sered, 2019, p. 113) and a process of "earned redemption" (Braithwaite, 2013, p. 462). In this exploration of recovery, Sarah S (2024) has articulated an approach to the victim–offender dialogue process:

In order to heal, interactions need to counteract previous relationships with perpetrators that built trust only to break it, deceived in order to trap, promised help only to take freedom, and exploited you in unspeakable ways. Remedy then, looks like learning to believe that humans can be kind, empathetic, responsive, and respectful. These kinds of relationships give you hope that there is a place where you can be heard, accepted, and your dignity is restored

Echoing this, Yu et al. (2018) interviewed 80 survivors of forced labour and found that the majority supported an alternative form of justice over the retributive justice approach, which they felt did not meaningfully ensure accountability. Moreover, the study revealed the victims' desire to confront their traffickers, demonstrate their perseverance despite their victimisation,

and ensure that their traffickers understood the negative impact of their actions (Yu et al., 2018). This sentiment is illustrated by a survivor of forced labour, who stated:

I want [my trafficker] to know that even if you treated me badly, I'm still alive. I'm like, you wanted to break me, but I didn't (site 4, survivor 7). (Yu et al., 2018, p. 10)

These comments illuminate a process that not only addresses the immediate needs of forced labour survivors but also supports their long-term recovery by providing a foundation of healing, trust, and mutual respect. In this context, restorative justice offers an alternative to survivors of forced labour, shifting the focus away from merely punitive measures (Yea et al., 2022) and helping all stakeholders involved move forward in their lives, thereby promoting sustainable and meaningful change (Schormair & Gerlach, 2020). By prioritising the well-being of all stakeholders involved, restorative justice promotes systemic changes, paving the way for a more just and equitable society.

Given that “restorative justice gives a voice to all stakeholders” (Nichols & Heil, 2023, p.243), survivors should take a primary role in shaping the direction, structure, and involvement in alternative justice practices to address forced labour (Yu et al., 2018). Accordingly, scholars advocate for collaboration among all stakeholders in the anti-slavery movement, grounded in the principles of restorative justice (Richard & La Pierre, 2024). Therefore, embracing restorative justice provides a more empathetic approach and empowers forced labour survivors, fostering a systemic transformation approach towards a more just society that benefits everyone.

To achieve this, collaboration from multiple stakeholders is essential, with businesses engaging rights holders and key stakeholders (e.g., unions, suppliers, experts, and civil society) in the design and implementation of remedies based on restorative justice principles, as cross-collaboration can enhance transparency and legitimacy while preventing remedies from lacking trust and usage (Pryde et al., 2024). Although stakeholder theory focuses on

addressing stakeholder interest, it inadequately examines the issues faced by marginalised stakeholders and their ability to represent themselves (Chowdhury, 2021b).

In this context, applying restorative justice theory allows for a detailed exploration of forced labour at the individual level. This approach convenes all stakeholders in an inclusive and balanced dialogue to discuss and address the consequences of injustice and determine appropriate measures for rectification (Schormair & Gerlach, 2020). Consequently, it is essential for understanding current collaboration models and helping stakeholders develop more ethical practices to prevent forced labour. Moreover, it can inform various MSC models, allowing organisations and businesses to recognise their impact, ensure greater accountability, and respect human rights.

Collaborative problem-solving approach

Concepts serve as the foundational building blocks of theory, which, in turn, provides a structured explanation of the relationships among these concepts (McCold & Wachtel, 2012). Drawing on a restorative justice framework grounded in stakeholder theory and MSCs, I argue that this approach provides a valuable framework for understanding and enhancing stakeholder inclusion in MSCs to address forced labour effectively. These theoretical frameworks share a holistic and inclusive approach in their respective domains. On the one hand, stakeholder theory underscores the importance of considering the interests of all relevant stakeholders at the organisational level (Freeman, 1984). By incorporating restorative justice principles into stakeholder theory, organisations can ensure that the voices and concerns of all stakeholders, including those affected by the organisation, are heard and addressed meaningfully.

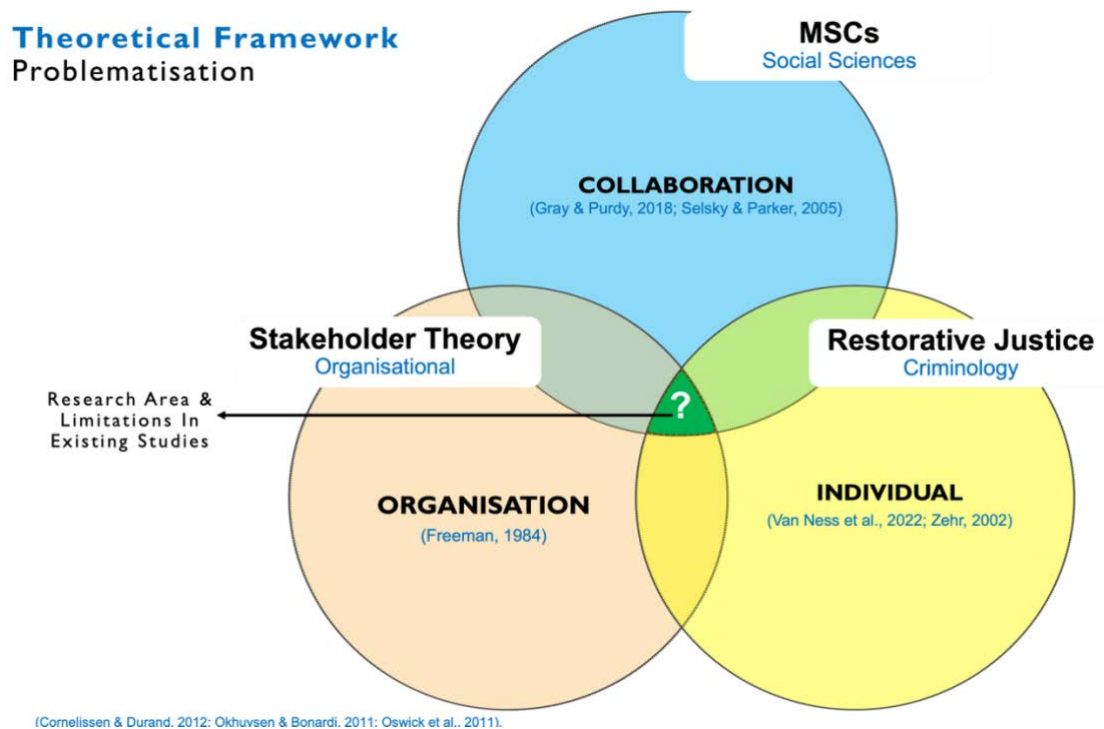
On the other hand, MSCs provide a framework for bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders across different organisations, including government agencies, businesses, NGOs, workers, community groups, and other key stakeholders to collectively address a common goal (Selsky & Parker, 2005). Restorative justice refines the collaborative approach

by distinguishing organisational misconduct as a legal breach and as a violation of individual stakeholder interests and human rights (Nadeem, 2021). In the context of forced labour, companies are expected to establish remediation procedures; however, these mechanisms remain insufficient, making it crucial to incorporate restorative justice into corporate remediation to meet the effectiveness criteria set by the UNGP (Schormair & Gerlach, 2020).

Therefore, the restorative justice framework can help organisations and businesses restore their neglected relationships with key stakeholders and facilitate mutual discussions on moral repair, both at the organisational level and across sectors, mainly through MSCs. This approach also shifts the focus from the macro to the individual level, providing a holistic understanding with a restorative impact, which is critical to addressing human rights risks. Moreover, restorative justice practices could help tackle the power imbalances often present in MSC models, striving for a fair and equitable resolution that benefits all stakeholders and prevents future harm.

Integrating the restorative justice approach is essential to ensure that the collaborative process is victim-centred, empowering all stakeholders, particularly victims, to have a voice and participate in decision-making, contributing to holistic healing, accountability, and long-term solutions to combat forced labour effectively. In essence, recognising the diverse needs, perspectives, and experiences of all stakeholders is vital in addressing the complexities of forced labour and working towards sustainable solutions. Finally, the intersection of stakeholder theory and restorative justice reveals a critical “space in the middle” that encloses diverse and intersecting concerns, stressing the constraints of relying on a single theory. Therefore, the intersection of stakeholder theory, restorative justice, and MSCs provides valuable insights into research areas and exposes limitations in current studies. This interplay recognises that forced labour involves complex dynamics that no single framework can adequately address (see **Figure 5**).

Figure 5 Theoretical Blending



Each theoretical lens contributes distinct perspectives: stakeholder theory underscores organisational interactions and value creation at the macro level; restorative justice prioritises individual experiences, dialogue, and healing at the micro level; and MSCs foster collaborative engagement across various stakeholders at the meso level.

Together, these perspectives enable a more nuanced understanding of engaging all stakeholders—including marginalised voices—in collaborative efforts within the Australian NAP. This research aims to support more effective interventions and policies attuned to the complexities of stakeholder dynamics, ultimately enhancing NAP outcomes in combating forced labour.

The next chapter presents the methodology guiding this research, detailing the design, data collection, and analysis used to explore stakeholder engagement and the Australian NAP's effectiveness in addressing forced labour.

3 Methodology

"Although process data are challenging, outcomes from analysis can generate new theory and insights into organisational phenomena." (Smith, 2002, p.383)

This quote captures the essence of what I aim to achieve in this study: harness process data to uncover new theoretical insights. This chapter introduces the research methodology used to address the central research question: Why do stakeholder voices matter, and how can they make a difference in addressing forced labour in the supply chain? To address this question, I apply a qualitative approach to explore forced labour within the framework of the Australian National Action Plan Against Modern Slavery. Scholars agree that qualitative methods are essential for enhancing our understanding of complex phenomena and dynamics (Köhler et al., 2023). The research process involves an iterative approach, navigating various complexities and transitions by shifting between emergent data, themes, concepts, dimensions, and relevant literature (Gioia et al., 2013; Locke et al., 2022). Thus, this approach is particularly appropriate for generating new insights in areas where prior research is limited, allowing for an in-depth analysis of nuanced perspectives.

Through a meticulously detailed methodology, I will demonstrate how the systematic analysis of process data can reveal new theoretical perspectives and enhance our understanding of organisational phenomena. Additionally, this chapter will outline the methodological framework, detail the data collection and analysis procedures, and describe how the incorporation of diverse stakeholder viewpoints enriches the research findings. I have also developed a research timeline to illustrate the main phases of the study (see **Figure 6**).

The timeline illustrates the progression of the writing process from 2020 to 2024. Key events include the closing date for submissions to NAP in 2020, the launch of NAP 2020-25 in 2021, the publication of Paper Promises Report 1/3 in 2022, the Broken Promises Report 2/3 in 2023, and the Australian Statutory Review Report in 2024. The process is divided into three main phases: Initial data collection, Secondary data collection & analysis, and Interview data analysis. The timeline also marks the author's PhD program milestones: Began my PhD Program, PhD Stage 1, PhD Stage 2, and PhD Stage 3. A red dotted line indicates a period of 5 months of interviews in 2024.

Year	Event	Category
2020	Closing date for submissions to NAP	Initial data collection: Public Submissions & NAP
2021	Gov. Launched NAP 2020-25	Initial data collection: Public Submissions & NAP
2022	Paper Promises Report 1/3	Secondary data collection & analysis
2023	Broken Promises Report 2/3	Secondary data collection & analysis
2024	Is it Fit for Purpose Report 3/3	Secondary data collection & analysis
2024	Australian Statutory Review Report	Interview data analysis
2024	5 months of Interviews	Interview data analysis

PhD Program Milestones:

- Began my PhD Program (2021)
- PhD Stage 1 (2022)
- PhD Stage 2 (2023)
- PhD Stage 3 (2024)

Other Milestones:

- UTS Ethics Approved (2022)

3.1 Research Strategy

A grounded theory approach was fitting because the object “is not to make [propositional] truth statements about reality, but, rather, to elicit fresh understandings” (Cornelissen 2017, p. 378) about stakeholder voice inclusion in MSCs. According to Langley (1999), a grounded theory approach involves a “systematic comparison of small units of data

(incidents) and a gradual construction of a system of 'categories' that describe the phenomena being observed" (p. 700). Grounded theory has been shown to be particularly well suited for the abductive exploration of phenomena (Suddaby, 2006) with little theoretical understanding (Corley, 2015), which is the case with forced labour in the supply chain. Contrary to an induction approach, which mostly generalises what has been found, an abductive form of reasoning builds on an idea (Reichert, 2019) and leverages learning (Van de Ven, 2007) that privileges theory construction (Tavory & Timmermans, 2019). This form of reasoning is critical and helped me gain a better understanding of who is and who is not a stakeholder.

Through abductive grounded theory reasoning, I first recognised an inconsistency in our understanding of the world (Andrew Van de Ven, 2007) and then incorporated a creative process (Thornberg & Dunne, 2019) of disciplined imagination (Van de Ven, 2007) to discover something new (Reichert, 2019). My reasoning behind this pathway was to gain a better understanding of stakeholder voice inclusion in the current MSCs to address forced labour in the supply chain. For instance, who gets to speak in the current collaboration models? In this research, a review of the forced labour and MSCs literature before and during data collection and coding revealed the importance of developing MSCs within an Australian framework.

Based on the familiarity with the relevant literature, MSCs addressing forced labour were identified and then abductive inferences applied to explore, evaluate, and develop them. Actual MSCs were then identified from the public submissions and interview data and explored using an abductive reasoning. Quotes from the public submissions and interviews are disseminated throughout Chapters one, four, and five to provide insights into the study participants' ways of thinking. In the following section, I present the research sample, followed by the data collection and analysis methods.

3.2 Sample Selection and Ethical Considerations

Why study the Australian National Action Plan Against Modern Slavery? To discover the unique interpretations of stakeholder inclusion in MSCs, I analysed perspectives from experts

in the Australian anti-slavery field. On 4 December 2019, the Australian Government invited public submissions regarding the “NAP to Combat Modern Slavery” consultation paper and received written submissions from stakeholders including peak bodies, civil society, and academia. The Australian Government was particularly interested in the community’s view on four questions. **Table 2** lists the questions asked by the Australian Government, the number of participants who addressed the question, and one sample quote.

Table 2 *Questions Asked by the Australian Government*

Question	Number of Respondents	Organisation	Sample Quotes
1. Do the 12 goals capture key areas of focus for Australia over the next five years?	41	Anti-Slavery Australia	We agree with the 12 statements outlined in the National Action Plan. However, we submit that they aren’t necessarily goals and that the National Action Plan must have the survivor and human rights at its core.
2. Should there be additional goals to address other areas of focus, emerging issues, or trends? If so, what should they be?	22	Global Compact Network	We encourage the Government to focus on promoting multi-stakeholder collaboration and partnership, particularly between business and civil society.
3. Are there ways in which the Government can better reflect the voices of victims and their lived experiences in the 2020-24 Plan and Australia’s response to modern slavery?	19	St. Vincent Health Australia Ltd.	St Vincent’s would recommend that, where appropriate to do so, the Government proactively engages with people with lived experience and reflects their voices in the draft National Action Plan. This includes survivors, as well as healthcare workers who have encountered victims and their families
4. Are there evaluation methods, data sources or metrics the Government should consider in developing an evaluation framework?	18	Harmony Alliance	The Government should employ a participatory approach to developing a monitoring and evaluation framework for the National Action Plan to Combat Modern Slavery.

As a researcher, I find that the NAP’s framework for involving different stakeholder voices supported the exploration of my research question: Why do stakeholder voices matter, and how can they make a difference in MSCs to address forced labour?

Particularly relevant were the government's questions closely aligned with the questions guiding my document analysis. For example, Question 2 asked: "Should there be additional goals to address other areas of focus, emerging issues, or trends? If so, what should they be?" This question stimulated responses advocating for MSCs. One participant highlighted this need, stating: "We encourage the Government to focus on promoting multi-stakeholder collaboration and partnership, particularly between business and civil society" (Global Compact Network). This focus on MSCs underscores the significance of my research, allowing me to explore the public submissions in relation to MSCs and stakeholder engagement.

Given the significance of the NAP, which reflects the efforts Australia prioritises to end forced labour in business operations, I based my study on 45 public submissions made to the NAP in 2020. **Table 3** (see Section 3.3) shows the organisations and individuals who submitted their feedback. In essence, the public submissions to the NAP inspired conversations between different key stakeholders across sectors about future strategies to address forced labour effectively. Through the public submissions, I explored the perspectives of stakeholders from different sectors, providing a solid foundation for analysing MSCs in addressing forced labour. Additionally, since these proposals were submitted around 2020, they offered valuable perceptions into the development of strategies over time, as well as participants' opinions on the broader Australian approach to tackling the issue.

I augmented the findings with semi-structured interviews with **16** key stakeholders associated with the public submissions, and experts in the field. "Semi-structured" means asking experts open-ended questions aligned with the main research question, followed by probing questions to deepen the exploration of their responses. The questions focused on key themes, such as collaboration frameworks, barriers to success, and the role of stakeholders. Following clearance from the UTS Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number: **(ETH21-6550)**), participants were recruited from different organisations, careers, and roles so the sample would represent stakeholder diversity. However, the recruitment approach had

limitations as not all key stakeholders with a stake in the issue of forced labour could be represented in this research.

At the beginning of my study, I encountered significant challenges in accessing survivors and victims of forced labour. Despite reaching out to various organisations to share my project and seek guidance in how to access the voices of workers and survivors—an approach supported by the literature on including survivors of human rights risks in anti-slavery research (Bick et al., 2017; Greenbaum et al., 2018; Kiss & Zimmerman, 2019; Lederer & Wetzel, 2014)—the responses were largely uncooperative. The complexities inherent in reaching these populations for research purposes are well-documented (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015) and often involve retrospective activities, which further reflects the multifaceted nature of the issue (Burn, 2017).

I aimed to explore survivors' voices on anti-slavery approaches and collaboration in Australia and how these could be improved based on their lived experience. However, during a discussion with a particular organisation, I realised that my notion of “voice”—as the ability of individuals to freely express their interests and influence decision-making (Dempsey, 2017)—differed from theirs. When I proposed speaking directly to survivors, the response was, “If you want to talk to survivors, I am the voice”. While this approach aims to protect survivors from re-traumatisation, it inadvertently denies them the opportunity to raise their voices and share their perceptions. Offering survivors a space to raise their voices is necessary for justice, valuable support, and restoration (Van Ness et al., 2022; Zehr, 2015).

Given the lack of access to victims/survivors of forced labour, I explored their voices through other key participants (e.g., academics and NGOs), expecting that their insights about stakeholder voice inclusion would shed light on stakeholders' voices. It is important to mention that one expert in this research has lived experience. I extended the findings with archival data and public documents (e.g., independent and government reports on the MSA) (see **Section**

5.1). To provide additional context to the research, I collected sources from the international sphere, such as policy and research.

The relevant public documents submitted to the Australian Government and semi-structured interviews with participants are an ideal source of research data to address my research question for several significant reasons. **First**, public submissions are a channel where participants openly express their personal ideas and/or concerns about current and future strategies and collaborations to address modern slavery in Australia. **Second**, the fact that those documents are publicly available allowed me to collect the data directly, facilitating communication with participants and experts in the field to invite them to participate in semi-structured interviews.

Third, the public submissions were written by experts in the anti-slavery field with a specific type of issue and audience in mind that is aligned with my research interest. Their key roles in the anti-slavery fight also facilitated the exploration of current and future collaborative solutions to address forced labour. **Four**, the semi-structured interviews allowed participants to describe and discuss their involvement, ideas, concerns, and suggestions in the public submissions. In turn, this allowed me to examine if the suggestions made in the submissions have evolved, fluctuated, or remained the same and if the government has implemented any of their ideas. Thus, an abductive reasoning triangulation was employed to enhance confidence in the findings, which facilitated a holistic examination.

Ethical Considerations

Following clearance from the UTS Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number: **ETH21-6550**), experts in the anti-slavery field were invited for semi-structured interviews. It is highly important to consider the protection of each participant. Therefore, I assessed if their involvement in and contribution to this project could cause them any form of stress. In this context, participants were fully aware of what the research involved, its content, and how the

information would be used. Furthermore, participants had the right to withdraw at any time for any reason. To protect the data, I created a research data management plan on Stash.

Participants were essential partners in this research project, underscoring the importance of building and sustaining trust, protecting their well-being, and managing risks throughout the research process. To achieve these goals, a comprehensive research strategy was implemented, which involved the following key elements:

1. Presenting the research project through a layered approach that facilitated clear and effective communication, ensuring all participants were well-informed about the requirements and implications of their involvement. The research materials and consent forms provided detailed information on the conditions of participation (see **Appendix 1**).
2. Ensuring that participants maintained an unconditional right to withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason, thereby prioritising their comfort and autonomy.
3. Designing the research to offer flexibility, allowing participants to select their preferred online platform for interviews, with choices including Zoom, Microsoft Teams, FaceTime, Skype, or telephone.
4. Establishing well-defined channels for personal and professional communication with all participants, to openly discuss concerns, issues, questions, or feedback at any time.
5. Providing all participants with contact details for Lifeline, to support them should the interview process trigger any negative experiences.
6. Guaranteeing that all participant information and data would be de-identified and remain confidential, securely stored, and used solely with participant consent.

This strategy was meticulously formulated to ensure adherence to the highest ethical standards and respect the rights and needs of all participants. Although the risk of stress among participants was considered very rare, I proactively developed a protocol as a

precautionary measure to manage potential distress and mitigate risks effectively. Moreover, I ensured that data collection strictly complied with the Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (NHMRC, 2007) and received approval from the UTS Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number: **ETH21-6550**), thereby upholding rigorous ethical guidelines throughout the study.

3.3 Data Collection

I focused on multi-stakeholder perspectives within the NAP against Modern Slavery, engaging from the 2020 submissions, civil society, academics, experts, and business consultants on forced labour. Policymakers, law enforcement, healthcare professionals, businesses, and survivors were not included as they did not make submissions to the NAP. Although I reached out to survivors through submitting organisations, direct engagement was not possible. I accessed these voices indirectly through expert interviews and public reports, aligning with my goal to examine stakeholder engagement within the NAP framework.

For my analysis, I identified 44 public submissions using the list available from the Department of Home Affairs (2020). **Table 3** shows the list of public submissions to the Australian NAP 2020–25 included in my research. It is important to emphasise that, given my research interviews with 16 out of 44 participants to the public submissions to the Australian NAP, it is essential to avoid generalising respondents' views or tokenising their voices. To secure various perspectives and mitigate bias, I included more than one expert from each relevant field in the study. Although the absence of government representatives among the study participants might have limited the range of perspectives, the inclusion of public documents, such as recent statutory reports, provided a comprehensive view of the government's stance on the Australian anti-slavery approach.

Table 3 *List of Public Submissions to the NAP 2020–25*

	Organisation	Sector
1	Anti-Slavery Australia	Legal and migration service
2	Assurian Consultants	Business
3	Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans	Civil Society
4	Australian Christian Lobby	Civil Society
5	Australian Human Rights Commission	Human Rights
6	Australia Lawyers for Human Rights	Human Rights
7	Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights	Human Rights
8	Be Slavery Free	Civil Society - Collective
9	Business & Human Rights Resource Centre	Business & HR
10	Cardinal Strategic	Business & Human Rights
11	Chartered Accountants ANZ	Civil Society - Collective
12	Cleaning Accountability Framework	Civil Society - Collective
13	Coalition Against Trafficking in Women Australia	Civil Society
14	Collective Shout	Civil Society
15	Employment Law Centre of Western Australia	Legal centre specialist
16	End Modern Slavery	Business
16	Freedom Hub	Civil Society
18	Global Compact Network Australia	Business
19	Harmony Alliance	Migration & Refugee
20	Holding Redlich	Legal centre specialist
21	Hope for Justice	Civil Society
22	International Justice Mission Philippines	Civil Society
23	International Organization for Migration	Migration & Refugee
24	Joint submission from Dr Kate van Doore, Griffith Law School & Rebecca Nhep, Better Care Network	Academics & Research
25	Joint submission from Dr Martin Boersma, University of Technology Sydney & Professor Justine Nolan, University of New South Wales	Academics & Research
26	Joint submission from Good Shepherd ANZ & The Salvation Army Australia	Civil Society
27	Joint submission from ReThink Orphanage Australia and ACFID Child Rights of Community Practice	Academics & Research
28	Joint submission from The Salvation Army Australia & Uniting Church	Civil Society
29	Law Council of Australia	Human Rights.
30	Mercy Foundation	Civil Society
31	Minerals Council of Australia	Advocacy for Minerals Industry
32	Monash University Trafficking and Research Group	Academics & Research
33	National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence	Civil Society
34	Professor Felicity Gerry QC	Academics & Research
35	Project Respect	Civil Society
36	Rimple Mehta, PhD Western Sydney University	Civil Society
37	SEXHUM Project	SEXHUM Project
38	Slavery Links Australia Inc.	Civil Society
39	St. Vincent's Health Australia	Health Sector

40	The Humanitarian Group	Civil Society
41	Unchained Business Services	Business
42	University of Western Australia Modern Slavery Research Centre	Academics & Research
43	Walk Free – Minderoo Foundation	Civil Society
44	Western Australia Forced Marriage Network	Civil Society

The details about this specific analysis are provided in the following chapter. Since the documents were publicly available, I did not need permission to read and include them in my research. During the early data gathering (collected between 2020 and 2021), I familiarised myself with the written structure and language of public submissions. Based on my abductive grounded theory approach, I used theoretical sampling, which seeks to leverage learning (Van de Ven, 2007) by expanding on what would be most meaningful to further develop emerging theory (Kataria et al., 2018, p. 461). The public submissions provided critical information on key stakeholders and MSCs, which supported the development of the interview questions.

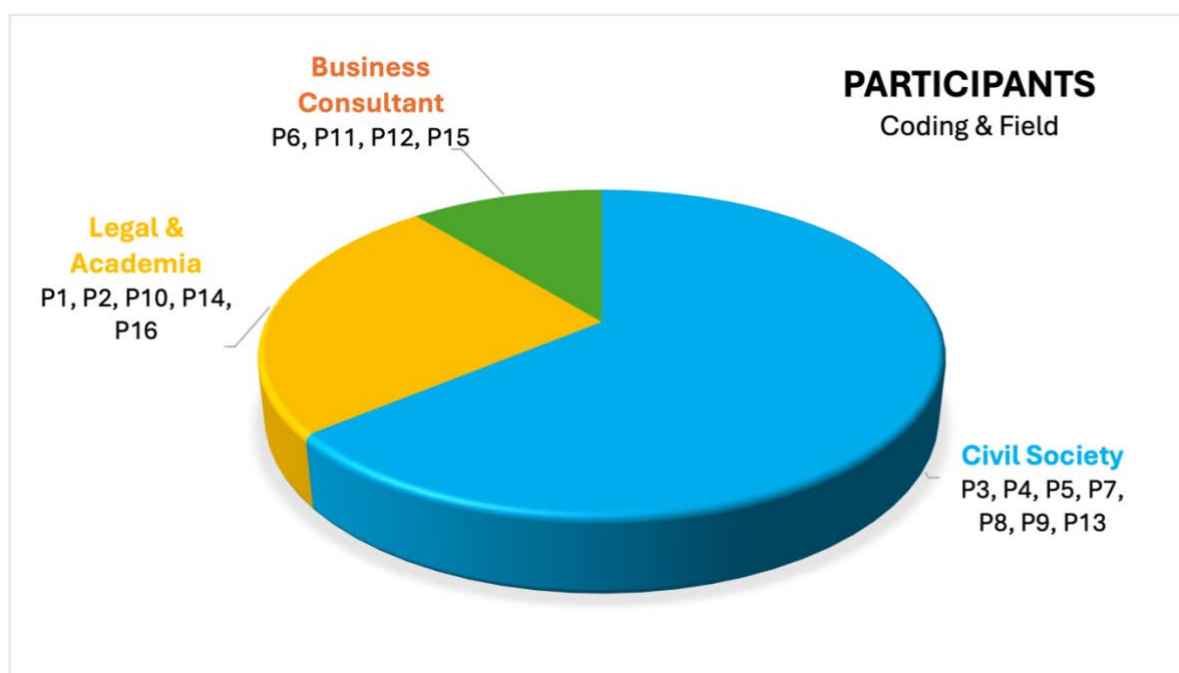
Semi-structured Interviews

The selection criteria targeted stakeholders actively contributing to the Australian National Action Plan Against Modern Slavery 2020–25 (NAP). I used the publicly available submission details on the government's website to recruit participants. Of the 44 public submissions to the NAP, 16 experts agreed to join this study. The rate of participation, affected by factors such as demanding schedules, organisational changes, or lack of responses, highlights the possibility that the insights obtained might not fully capture the wide array of opinions present within the NAP submissions. The respondent group included professionals from business consultants, civil society, and legal and academic sectors, all deeply involved in combatting modern slavery.

From 15 May to 27 October 2023, I conducted semi-structured interviews with individuals and experts in the field who had given their personal consent to participate in the research. With each participant, I conducted a one-to-one, semi-structured interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. **Figure 7** illustrates the distribution of participant groups based on

their respective sectors. The aim of the interviews was to explore the current collaborative efforts in place to combat forced labour, their effectiveness, and any challenges encountered. Furthermore, these discussions were designed to understand participants' current views and concerns, especially regarding stakeholder inclusion in these collaborative models.

Figure 7 *Participant Groups*



To maintain participant confidentiality, I used numeric codes for anonymity and categorised individuals according to their general professional domains, as outlined in **Table 4**. The detailed results of these interviews, which provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of Australia's strategic approach to combatting forced labour, are comprehensively documented in **Chapters Five, Six, and Seven**.

After discussing the public submission, I asked participants to share their thoughts about collaboration to address forced labour. The abductive reasoning guided my interviews to discuss with participants in detail the inclusion of stakeholders in MSCs. During the design phase of the study, I developed an interview protocol guide for conducting each interview. This

protocol included a set of sample questions (see **Appendix 2**), tailored to the unique experiences and perspectives of each interviewee. The specific purpose of asking participants about the inclusion of stakeholder voices was to explore and learn as much as possible about participants' perceptions, reactions, and insights in relation to MSCs to address forced labour.

Table 4 *List of Participants (semi-structured interviews)*

Interviewees	Description	Interviewed (d/m/y)
P1	Legal / academic	15/05/23
P2	Legal / academic	16/05/23
P3	Civil Society	23/05/23
P4	Civil Society	24/05/23
P5	Civil Society	25/05/23
P6	Business Consultant	30/05/23
P7	Civil Society	31/05/23
P8	Civil Society	1/06/23
P9	Civil Society	5/07/23
P10	Legal / academic	11/07/23
P11	Business Consultant	14/07/23
P12	Business Consultant	21/07/23
P13	Civil Society	30/08/23
P14	Legal / academic	12/09/23
P15	Business Consultant	04/10/23
P16	Legal / academic	27/10/23

After discussing the public submission, I asked participants to share their thoughts about collaboration to address forced labour. The abductive reasoning guided my interviews to discuss with participants in detail the inclusion of stakeholders in MSCs. During the design phase of the study, I developed an interview protocol guide for conducting each interview. This protocol included a set of sample questions (see **Appendix 2**), tailored to the unique experiences and perspectives of each interviewee. The specific purpose of asking participants about the inclusion of stakeholder voices was to explore and learn as much as possible about participants' perceptions, reactions, and insights in relation to MSCs to address forced labour.

A detailed set of open-ended questions tailored to each participant's specific role guided these interviews. I first invited participants to talk about their profession, role, and submission to the NAP, with questions such as: "Where do you work? What are your role, responsibilities, and duties? Tell me what your understanding of forced labour is". These simple requests encouraged people to share their unique experiences and their connection to the NAP. It also revealed their sensemaking about forced labour and the current anti-slavery strategies to address it. The participants' reflections on their role in and awareness of forced labour provided a fundamental link between unexplored phenomena and formal theorising (Murphy et al., 2017) to gain new theoretical insights

Questions primarily revolved around critical themes: the efficacy of Australia's current anti-slavery approach (**Chapter 6**), the various models of collaboration in place, and the identification of barriers and pitfalls that hinder successful collaboration (**Chapter 7**). Furthermore, questions sought to explore the successes achieved in these collaborative efforts and the role of businesses. A significant aspect of the inquiry was also dedicated to understanding how the government might better facilitate stakeholder inclusion and active engagement in MSCs (**Chapter 8**). This line of questioning was influential in gaining a comprehensive understanding of the complexities and dynamics involved in combatting slavery in the Australian context.

As participants reflected on their roles within the anti-slavery sector, I posed questions to explore the extent of stakeholder engagement in collaborative models designed to combat forced labour. These inquiries included, "Does the Australian Government encourage mobilisation and collaboration across broader stakeholder groups?"; "What are your views on multi-stakeholder collaborations (MSCs) between government, civil society, and businesses to address forced labour?"; and "Who do you believe should be included in these collaborations?"

Additionally, I encouraged interviewees to identify the shortcomings of the current Australian approach to tackling forced labour with questions such as, "What do you perceive as the gaps in the current approach?" and "How do you propose we begin to bridge these gaps?" I audio-recorded all interviews and transcribed them verbatim to ensure accuracy and thoroughness in documenting participant responses. This process facilitated critical interaction with interviewees and enabled me to observe their body language, which is essential for revealing unspoken emotions and reactions. Such observations help leverage familiarity with the participant and ensure veracity (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006).

3.4 Data Analysis

Like a detective, I engaged with the data with a sense of scepticism and scrutiny, continually challenging both my subjective interpretations and those of the participants. This approach aligns with the constructivist perspective of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000), which is particularly effective for exploring and understanding complex human phenomena such as forced labour. Grounded theory, initially formulated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and subsequently refined by other researchers (Charmaz, 2000, 2006; Suddaby, 2006), involves an interpretative process where meanings are collaboratively constructed. At the heart of this view, the grounded theory approach aims to stimulate further questioning to contribute to theory development. This methodological framework has been instrumental in addressing the research question posed in this study, facilitating a deep engagement with the data to unearth nuanced insights.

The grounded theory approach requires engaging deeply with data, moving back and forth between data collection, data analysis, and pre-existing knowledge or theories (Charmaz, 2006; Thornberg & Dunne, 2019). In this context, the NAP served as a cornerstone for highlighting key issues linked to collaboration in addressing forced labour. For example, one of the key questions posed by the government was: "Are there ways in which the Government can better reflect the voices of victims and their lived experiences in the 2020–

24 Plan and Australia's response to modern slavery?" This question stimulated broader perspectives related to collaboration and stakeholder engagement, which closely aligns with my research question and overall study. This process involved continually moving between the public submissions and the literature. The public submissions provided analytical insights that informed and refined the development of interview questions, while the new understanding from the NAP allowed me to compare these questions with the existing literature.

The constant movement between data and theory involves abductive reasoning, which requires particular attention to implicit data (pauses, body language, data, or surprising turns) as well as explicit data and the re-examination of the data and possible explanations (Priya, 2019). In the context of interviews, this requires not only analysing what participants explicitly say but also interpreting non-verbal cues and re-examining the data for potential alternative explanations. This implies moving beyond what I heard from participants or what I observed they do, encouraging a deeper exploration of the primary meaning. This approach of searching for clues suggests that "theory does not emerge from the data but is actively and imaginatively constructed by the researcher" (Mees-Buss et al., 2022, p. 418). During the data collection stage, notes were taken on specific details related to repeated information found in the data as well as during discussions with my supervisor. Thus, I advanced the research from the perspective that "data do not provide a window on reality, rather, the 'discovered' reality arises from the interactive process and its temporal, cultural, and structural contexts" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 524).

While templates may limit flexibility and potentially compromise discovery (Cornelissen, 2017), it is important to acknowledge that the true measure of rigour arises from how rigorously an approach is applied (Harley & Cornelissen, 2022). In this study, the templates developed effectively functioned as protocols for analysing and presenting findings. This success highlights that when templates are employed strategically and thoughtfully, they can proficiently support the specific demands of the research question, sample, and contextual

needs (Köhler et al., 2022). Thus, templates, when utilised appropriately, offer valuable tools that enhance the structure and rigour of academic research. This approach ensured interpretive rigour in my research.

It is important to acknowledge that the public submissions reflected diverse agendas; however, my analysis purposely focused on MSCs and stakeholder engagement in addressing forced labour. The initial document analysis informed the development of the interview protocol, safeguarding a clear framing. Moreover, I remained sensitive to the participants' diverse agendas during the interviews. To address this, I maintained a reflexive approach in the data analysis, carefully considering these influences while remaining focused on the research purpose (Van de Ven, 2007). Section 3.5, "Engaged Scholarship", discusses the reflexivity in my role as a researcher and outlines the steps taken to safeguard the quality and integrity of my analysis and interpretations.

Coding

Although coding is not the only way to find meaning (Saldaña, 2016), it is a recognised method whereby researchers observe and highlight the most significant themes or codes, position them in a convincing order to evidence their correlations and, therefore, their meaning (Kreiner et al., 2006). I focused on coding as a systematic approach that involves constant iteration in the analysis process (Locke et al., 2022) to generate excellence of research in grounded theory (Strauss, 1987). In this context, all data was subjected to a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which included creative, structured, and well-organised protocols for data reduction. Through an abductive approach, I implemented theoretical lenses from the beginning of my research and during coding (Kataria et al., 2018) to provide methodological and analytic flexibility and increase efficiency (Rheinhardt et al., 2018).

I coded and explored data using the NVivo 12 software program, which facilitates associations, intersections, and visual representation between codes. These NVivo codes played an essential role in checking whether I had understood what is noteworthy (Charmaz,

2006). **Table 5** summarises the approach I followed in my coding phase and the steps applied in each phase. It is not intended to be an all-inclusive list of my coding practice but to illustrate the key steps I followed in every phase and their implications for my research (Locke et al., 2022).

Table 5 *Illustrates my Coding Practice*

Coding phase	Coding steps
Generate codes	1. Immerse myself in the data 2. Explore the data through my research question 3. Draw on the literature 4. Develop categories of codes (open coding) 5. Iterative process 6. Evaluate the codes and refine them
Create groups	1. Refine codes and re-connect them in a more significant way (axial coding) 2. Have individuals and peers (not familiar with research) check coding 3. Discuss and determine final coding with supervisor (making sure connections between codes are reliable and justifiable) 4. Review my analysis and claims with my supervisor and peers to avoid biases in the process
Compare themes	1. Compare initial ideas that emerged from the data with the literature 2. Compare the literature with my analysis and claims 3. Develop general theme

(adapted from Locke et al., 2022)

The coding followed three phases: **First**, I read each document/transcript at least twice before starting the coding. Thus, I explored the data through my research question. This allowed me to deeply immerse myself in the data, establish familiarity with key ideas and concepts, and safeguard accuracy. I began by generating in-vivo codes directly from the interview data (Locke et al., 2022). Examples of these codes include “coordinate”, “engage”,

“develop”, and “disclose” (Chapter 6). I independently coded each document, exploring unique insights (from their particular field) that were aligned with the research question

Second, as my quest progressed, I reviewed the data, concepts, and terms from the in-vivo codes, and identified their relationships. This activity led me to additional coding, creating broader and more refined codes, and re-connected them in a more significant way by creating groups of codes. For instance, “The Paradox of Anti-Slavery Funding” (Chapter 6) includes quotes referring to the government requiring people to volunteer without financial support, while “Engaging External Stakeholder” includes quotes related to examples of stakeholder engagement in broader collaboration models. On an additional round of coding, I integrated first-order categories into a small number of theoretically grounded second-order categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Third, to achieve rigour with my theoretical reasoning (Cornelissen et al., 2022), I reviewed my analysis and claims with colleagues not familiar with or directly connected to my research. This approach is suggested by some scholars across various fields (Adler and Adler, 1987; Barker James papers 1993). I compared initial ideas and thoughts that emerged from the data with the current literature (data/theory) and data-data (Kreiner et al., 2006). This approach helped me understand the patterns observed in the codes about stakeholder voice inclusion in cross-sector collaborations to explain how the findings could contribute to the current theoretical conversations. The potential codes were discussed with my supervisor to determine a final coding. Here, the supervisor assisted as record keeper and as a second source of analysis to avoid biases in the process.

Overall, the analysis began with **open coding**, which fragments the data and allowed me to identify and categorise it (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I allocated wide-ranging open codes to segments of the text and implemented a “constant comparative” process to explore the data line by line (Kataria et al., 2018). Where I identified a theme in a certain section of the text, I assigned a code to that section, allowing the data to guide the initial codes. As a result, some

codes were connected to my theoretical framework (e.g., multi-stakeholder, partnerships, collaboration, and stakeholder voice), and others were developed in vivo (e.g., compensations, medical and mental health, and education).

The scope of coded text ranged from one single sentence to a series of paragraphs in the document. Where multiple phenomena coincided in the text, various codes were attributed. I generated a list of initial codes from the raw data and continued to upgrade those codes, eliminating old ones and adding new ones as I acquired new evidence and proceeded through the data multiple times (Charmaz, 2006). **Table 6** illustrates quotations and coding structures from public submissions, while **Table 7** (Chapter 5), **Table 8** (Chapter 6), and **Table 9** (Chapter 7) provide a similar overview of interview data across chapters.

Table 6 *Initial and Final Coding of NAP Public Submission Data*

Illustrative Quotes	1st Order	2nd Order	General Theme
Effective partnerships between public, private and community sectors are critical (<i>Australian Human Rights Commission</i>)	Multi-stakeholder	Partnerships	Chapter 4 Public Contributions to the NAP
Appointing and supporting survivors to actively participate in the National Roundtable and working groups (<i>The Salvation Army and Uniting Church</i>)	Survivor Inclusion		
We recommend close partnerships with civil society (<i>University of Western Australia</i>)	Stakeholder Inclusion		
The focus on prevention needs greater clarity in the National Action Plan (<i>Anti-Slavery Australia</i>).	National Strategy	Prevention	
[The need to develop] language that is understood by all stakeholders regardless of culture (Project Respect)	Development of Common Language		
The involvement of victims is critical (<i>Mercy Foundation</i>)	Inclusion of survivors		
Combination of policy and legislation is key to eradicating modern slavery (Professor Felicity Gerry QC)	Aligning Rights & Rules	Policy Making	
[Companies] should be required to conduct human rights due diligence, in line with the UNGPs (Business and Human Rights Centre)	Due Diligence		

Ensure that, in line with a human rights-based approach, trafficked persons are granted nonconditional residence permits, also taking into account humanitarian consideration (<i>ACRATH</i>)	Human Rights Center		
The Government should update its procurement policies to follow international best practice (Asst. Prof. Boersma & Prof. Nolan)	Government Procurement		
Taking action to address modern slavery in business operations and supply chains is good for business (End Modern Slavery).	Good Business Practice	Practice	
Mandate that due diligence is a necessary requirement in preventing and mitigating modern slavery (Asst. Prof. Boersma & Prof. Nolan)	Due Diligence in Practice		

During the next stage of coding, I implemented ***second-order coding*** or axial coding, which explores the relationships of categories, making connections between them (Kataria et al., 2018) to illuminate first-order codes in a more suggestive approach (Mees-Buss et al., 2022). This stage involves the researcher's active interpretation and understanding of what is truly happening in the participants' world to generate second-order codes (Mees-Buss et al., 2022). While open coding fragments data, axial coding tries to collect and relate data into groups (Charmaz, 2006) by combining first-order analysis (reflection of the subjects' views) and second-order analysis (reflective of researchers' interpretations) (Kataria et al., 2018).

This analytical framework assisted me in the coding process by helping me to generate and refine codes and re-connect them in a more significant way (Locke et al., 2022). This implied that "first- and second-order both involve the researcher's interpretations: first, deciding what is really going on here? And second, how do we explain it?" (Gioia et al., 2022, p. 240). This approach is coherent with grounded theory research conducted in the management field (Suddaby, 2006), allowing me to explore and categorise current collaborations in anti-slavery efforts. Thus, "theory does not emerge from the data but is actively and imaginatively constructed by the researcher" (Mees-Buss et al., 2022, p. 418).

Table 7 *Initial and Final Coding of Interview Data*

Illustrative Quotes	1st Order	2nd Order	General Theme
“Reading the three-year modern slavery review, you see this, you know, there's a lot of concern raised by small and medium sized businesses about the impact on them” (P10, Legal & Academia)	Effectiveness	Measuring MSA Impact	Chapter 5 Australia's Response to Forced Labour
“Australia is sort of failing in its own domestic law and policy and also failing to engage with international law and policy on modern slavery” (P16, Legal & Academia)	Inadequate		
“I think that's a real gap in Australia is that we don't have much of [...] genuine community-based advocacy type, organisation (P1, Legal & Academia)	Advocacy Gap		
“I really value that (national roundtable) as a tool for collaboration (P3, Civil Society).	Networking	Government-led Collaboration: The NAP	
“I would completely disband the national roundtable; I think it's an absolute joke. It's a complete and utter waste of time [...] What has the national roundtable achieved in 10 years of meeting, that it has achieved, 10 years of meetings. That's it” (P9, Civil Society)	Questioning		
“I think the roundtables should be much more, much broader” (P16, Legal & Academia).	Improving		
“Getting on those advisory groups has been proven difficult” (P14, Legal & Academia)	Inclusion	Policy Guidance: The Advisory Group	
“I think we just have governments like right now just relying on advisory boards of people who are academic about it” (P13, Civil Society).	Diversity		
“I don't think it's always a harmonious collaboration, I think it's full of tension” (P11, Business Consultant).	Tensions		
““there is no traction on prosecuting bad businesses, there's no process and it's no advocacy to come away from bad businesses who has been identified” (P15, Business Consultant).	Enforcement Failures	Corporate Transparency	
“We are not seeing shifts in business models, or responsible sourcing techniques [...] as a result of current law policy initiatives (P2, Legal & Academia).	Failing		

"One of the things that comes up quite a lot is that the supply chain reporting isn't going beyond the first tier" (P10, Legal & Academia).	Expanding		

Table 8 *Initial and Final Coding of Interview Data*

Illustrative Quotes	1st Order	2nd Order	General Theme
“I think governments [...] tend to kind of operate in a bit of a siloed fashion” (P14, Legal & Academia)	Coordinate	Perceptions of Current Collab.	Chapter 6 Collaboration Dynamics in Combating Forced Labour
“I don’t think they’re moving in any speed to make it happen” (P7, Civil Society)	Accelerate		
“there could be a lot done to actually develop a more collaborative approach to ensuring to assessing risk” (P6, Business Consultant)	Develop		
“There’s not that many examples of good”. (P9, Civil Society)	Increase	Engaging External Stakeholder	
“State governments and [...] agencies should be involved in a sort of multi stakeholder approach” (P7, Civil Society)	Involve		
“Very rarely [people] engage with external stakeholders, like unions or workers groups” (P1, Legal & Academia)	Engage		
“The government require people to do it as a volunteer [...] the great irony of that is we’re working about labour exploitation. And I would call that exploitation”. (P8, Civil Society).	Compensate	The Impact of Funding in MSCs Dynamics	
“People with lived experience networks don’t tend to be very well funded” (P4, Legal & Academia).	Support		
“The federal government brought in highly competitive funding grants, and that worked against collaborate” (P3, Civil Society)	Revise		
“I suspect that a lot of the information doesn’t get to the relevant people” (P1, Legal & Academia).	Distribute	Challenges in Data for Anti-Slavery Efforts	
“I’m surprised to say that the Australian Border Force seems to not be aware of entities who need to report and who haven’t” (P6, Business Consultant)	Monitor		
“Civil society organisations tend not to publish any data [...] they don’t even share de identified data either” (P7, Civil Society)	Disclose		

Table 9 *Initial and Final Coding of Interview Data*

Illustrative Quotes	1st Order	2nd Order	General Theme
“I don't think the systems exist clearly enough for a lived experience to be easy to find” (P16, Legal & Academia)	Inadequate	Systemic Gaps in Forced Labour	Chapter 7 Moving Forward: Stakeholder Inclusion in MSCs
“No one really knows what to do if they do identify someone. [...] I don't think people are equipped to know what to do” (P12, Business Consultant).	Unprepared		
“It's a question that we posed ourselves internally, what happens if we do identify a victim [...] There's not necessarily a clear pathway (P11, Business Consultant)	Confusion		
“There's still very much a siloed approach [...] the market overall is still immature” (P6, Business Consultant).	Isolation	Government and Business Synergy in Forced Labour Initiatives	
“Unions are not seen as necessarily by corporate Australia as a stakeholder” (P11, Business Consultant)	Recognition		
“There is a real separation between business and NGOs, and it's almost seen as they're in conflict with each other” (P16, Legal & Academia)	Conflict		
“Create meaningful representation that's democratized. So, it doesn't become a small club of people who are protecting an agenda and all saying the same thing” (P4, Civil Society).	Diversify	Designing Collaborative Solutions: Expert Insights on Forced Labour in Australia	
“Involve a [...] tripartite as a minimum conversation [...] to share perspectives and work towards a common goal” (P2, Legal & Academia).	Unite		
“there's no one sector fits all response; you have to consider the particular needs of the worker” (P12, Business Consultant).	Tailor		
“The biggest problem is in Australia [...] is that there is no [...] Federal human rights instrument [...] the human rights state charters are very vulnerable to political change” (P16, Legal & Academia)	Vulnerable	Corporate Remediation through Restorative Justice	
“If you're a criminal and you've killed someone, [...] you can have your lawyer present. Not if you're a victim of modern slavery” (P9, Civil Society)	Unfair		
“We really need victims of crime compensation as a national system” (P3, Civil Society)	Restorative Justice		

According to Charmaz (2006), the main idea behind this approach is to synthesise and illuminate larger sets of data by using the most substantial or most repeated earlier codes (e.g., codes linked to collaboration, partnerships, multi-stakeholder) to classify the data, identify patterns in which codes were interrelated, and generate grounded theory (Kataria et al., 2018). This methodical approach helped me examine my notions and biases about the phenomenon (Charmaz, 2006). I conducted inductive coding on the data, focusing on activities such as identifying patterns, undertaking comparative analysis across different units of information, and delineating the core themes (O’Kane et al., 2021).

As a part of the emergence of patterns (e.g., the five Ps: Prevention, Protection, Policy Making, Partnerships, and Prosecution, as discussed in Chapter 4), I engaged with the existing literature and employed abductive reasoning to guide my sensemaking efforts. Smith (2002, p. 384) suggests that “sensemaking is a personal activity to understand and to give meaning to the unfolding of events and actions over time”. This approach enabled me to systematically interpret and articulate the significance of these patterns within the broader context of my study.

Key concepts, codes, and themes were generated abductively from the raw data and codes were refined as I explored the data repeatedly. Those codes also helped me determine characteristics and features of the phenomenon. Insights from data coding guided me to the next step in the data analysis, allowing me to generate and develop theory iteratively from data codes and emergent categories. Similarly, I wrote memos and notes throughout the coding process to capture new codes and changes among those connections (Kataria et al., 2018).

The open coding of public submissions, or first-order coding, produced 118 subgroups, which subsequently facilitated the second-order coding into six major groups (refer to Chapter 4 for details). Conversely, the open coding of the interviews generated 17 subgroups, leading

to a second-order coding that identified three major themes (see Chapters 5, 6, and 7). This process enabled a reflective analysis of each position, enhancing the interpretation of the codes. After coding both the public submissions and the semi-structured interviews, no new themes, trends, or codes emerged from the data in relation to the research question.

To ensure the trustworthiness and accuracy of this qualitative research, I followed the guidelines set forth by Smith (2002) and Suddaby (2006), which emphasize a data-driven approach and a meticulous process for presenting findings. In the next section, I will share my professional journey and illustrate my personal orientation and commitment to engaged scholarship as a researcher in this dissertation.

3.5 Engaged Scholarship and Reflection

To illustrate my personal orientation and engaged scholarship as a researcher (Van de Ven, 2007), I adopt a set of five principles aiming to produce responsible research, aligned with the principles of responsible research in business and management (RRBM, 2024). **First**, this dissertation provides a service to society in theory and practice. This interdisciplinary research is anchored at the intersection of business and human rights to account for those primarily affected. In essence, the societal relevance of this research lies in its contribution to making progress on the SDGs and increasing our understanding in theory, theory development, and practice (shape policymaking) of the role of stakeholder voices in MSCs to address forced labour in the supply chain. **Second**, this research values plurality and multidisciplinary collaboration. Here, I explore forced labour in a participative way by embracing interdisciplinary research anchored at the intersection of business and human rights, allowing insights from different key stakeholders to benefit the research.

Third, this research implements a sound scientific method. Because forced labour is too complex and has little theoretical understanding, I take a qualitative grounded theory approach that allows me to explore the phenomenon from the perspective of those who experience it to gain new understanding. **Four**, this research pays particular attention to

stakeholder involvement. For instance, I incorporate critical stakeholders, such as experts in the anti-slavery field, businesses, academics, policymakers, government, and NGOs. Three scholars located in the law and business faculties of three Australian universities supervised this project.

Five, this research has an impact on diverse stakeholders and values broad dissemination. For instance, I will share the findings in a meaningful manner (journal publication and sharing results with the Australian Government and key stakeholders) to shape policymaking and account for those most affected. As Boyer (1996) eloquently said, “connecting the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems” (p. 19) is critical. Essentially, the engaged scholarship has helped me explore forced labour in a participative way, maintaining a strong relationship between academia and practice and allowing insights from different key stakeholders to benefit the research (Van de Ven, 2007).

My personal position as an engaged scholar has guided me to (a) formulate the research problem and question, (b) develop alternative theories to address my research problem, (c) design the research to compare alternative theories, (d) communicate and use the research findings, and (e) be reflexive in knowing who the research is for (Van de Ven, 2007). Thus, as a researcher, I have the responsibility to partner not only with other academics and experts in the field but also with other stakeholders such as governments, businesses, civil society, and the community in general to understand and address one of the major challenges of our time—forced labour in the supply chain. This means engaging with multiple stakeholders because the issue of forced labour is too complex for researchers to work in silos.

Personal Reflection

Reflecting on my unconventional path as a researcher, I realise how deeply my childhood experiences in Colombia have shaped me. Growing up in a country plagued by conflict, I was

a direct witness to widespread injustices and human rights violations. As a result, I naturally developed a passion for social justice, leading to an early career as a government detective agent specialising in intelligence and criminal investigations. I still vividly remember my first major investigation involving capturing a paedophile disguised as a clown at a children's party. This early experience reinforced my commitment to protecting the most vulnerable and addressing systemic injustices, shaping the trajectory of my professional and academic pursuits.

Working over a very strenuous and variable schedule, sometimes on call 24 hours a day, I recall spending long hours researching, planning, and conducting surveillance to apprehend criminals and help victims. My days and nights were often spent in brothels or conducting searches and raids in private houses across different cities in the country. The challenges of this job underscored the significance of collaboration with other government agencies, civil society, and the community. Working with international agencies like the DEA (involving five weeks of training at Quantico, VA), Interpol, and national law enforcement organisations, including the Dutch National Police and the Metropolitan Police Service, London (Scotland Yard), broadened my perspective and deepened my understanding of the transnational nature of organised crime, including its connections to drug trafficking, money laundering, and modern slavery. These collaborations also underscored the importance of MSCs in addressing complex problems.

But life is unpredictable. The loss of close colleagues in the field, the sudden passing of my father, and an unexpected mission assignment to a dangerous area—all occurring within a short period—led me to reflect deeply on my own life and appreciate how fortunate I am to be alive. In 2009, I decided to switch careers and start anew as a business student in France. However, my passion for social justice and my desire to protect others did not disappear.

This new adventure made me an immigrant with firsthand experience of adapting to a new culture and language, alongside its related vulnerabilities and challenges. Since then, I

got married, started a family, and repeated the experience of moving countries and continents four more times, realising a world tour from South America, Europe, Australia, and now the United States of America. In every country I lived, I naturally interacted, directly or indirectly, with migrants and immigrants going through all sorts of difficult situations, making them vulnerable and at risk of falling into one or another form of forced labour. Recognising this, I grew a desire to raise awareness and educate and empower immigrant communities about the realities and risks of forced labour.

Confined to a small apartment in Sydney during the early stages of COVID-19, I was deeply moved by news reports about forced labour in supply chains. It was then that I realised that my unique background equipped me with practical and academic skills to explore collaborative solutions to the global issue of forced labour. Through discussions with scholars, including my current supervisor, it became apparent that doctoral research in this field would be the perfect fit to combine my past practical knowledge acquired in the field as a detective agent, a passion for social justice, and a deep commitment to making a difference. Throughout my research, I have leveraged my professional background and my academic skills to bridge the gap between theory and practice, understanding the challenges of fighting forced labour and the immense value of expert collaboration. This personal and professional journey has informed my research and reinforced my dedication to supporting those who tirelessly work to address forced labour. I hope the new brick I bring to the edifice will contribute to a better and safer world.

The next section will explore the incorporation of perspectives from key stakeholders who contributed to the public submissions for the Australian NAP 2020–25. This includes representatives from diverse sectors such as academia, the financial industry, business, and civil society organisations. By integrating these varied viewpoints, the analysis will capture a broad spectrum of insights, thereby facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the thematic elements underpinning the research.

4 Public Contributions to the NAP

“It is imperative that our movement integrate survivors as equal members of our community. We are here to build with you.”

(Dang, 2018, p. 1)

Data from public submissions to the Australian National Action Plan (NAP) highlight the critical role of multi-stakeholder collaborations in anti-slavery strategies. Key stakeholders, such as civil society organisations, academia, workers, the business sector, and government agencies, among others, are essential voices in these dialogues. **Table 10** provides an illustration of the stakeholders that are critical to include in MSCs, the number of public submissions that support their inclusion, a sample quote, and the organisation they are affiliated with.

Table 10 *List of Critical Stakeholders Based on the Data*

Key Stakeholders	Number of Respondents	Sample Quote	Organisation
Health Care	3	Many victims of human trafficking and modern slavery are likely to present to an Emergency Department during the course of their exploitation, making health professionals uniquely placed to identify, respond and intervene in the trafficking ¹ . Yet the research conducted as part of our project indicated that: “trafficked persons were predominantly invisible within the health setting	St. Vincent’s Health Australia Ltd.
Law Enforcement	3	The National Action Plan must emphasise the collaboration, coordination, and cooperation between while also articulating roles and responsibilities for: Commonwealth, State and Territory governments, government departments and agencies, law enforcement, civil society, business and industry, and community.	Anti-Slavery Australia
Settlement	3	Similarly, the Humanitarian Settlement Providers (HSPs) provide settlement services to offshore humanitarian migrants arriving in Australia [...] Consequently, the Department of Home Affairs has a current data source that can be tapped into.	The International Organisation for Migration IOM
Survivors /Victims	5	The Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons writes that she is convinced that the involvement of victims is critical to ensuring that the measures taken to address trafficking benefit those in need, that unintended harmful consequences are anticipated and avoided; and that opportunities for change and improvement are identified in a timely way.	Mercy Foundation

Academia	4	Without high quality research the consequence is poor policy design. We recommend a more careful, engaged and consultative approach and the inclusion of independent experts on the Roundtable into the future.	Monash University
Business	5	We encourage the Government to focus on promoting multi-stakeholder collaboration and partnership, particularly between business and civil society.	Global Compact Network Australia
Government Agencies - Territories	16	We consider active engagement and collaboration between the Commonwealth and the states and territories is critical in order for the National Action Plan to be successful.	Chartered Accountants - ANZ
Multiple stakeholders	12	Modern Slavery will only be eliminated if there is strong collaboration between key stakeholders including: Commonwealth, State and Territory governments, Government departments and agencies, Law enforcement, Civil Society, Business and Industry, and Community.	Hope for Justice

This information is consistent with the general literature suggesting that the lack of stakeholder inclusion in MSCs is a major problem (ATMG, 2021; Bryson et al., 2015; Caruana et al., 2021; Foot, 2015; Lockyer, 2020; Page et al., 2015). But why is this happening? What is preventing stakeholder inclusion in collaborations? Are stakeholders considered as proxies/agents or as human beings with a voice in MSCs? This is certainly a serious concern for society because failure of stakeholder inclusion in anti-slavery strategies can result in increased forced labour and inadequate policy frameworks. Given this context, this chapter aims to explore whether current collaboration models (to address forced labour) are giving appropriate consideration to the inclusion of stakeholder voices in MSCs.

Because grounded theory centres on informants' interpretation, I had to be careful not to mix participants' interpretations with factual evidence. In other words, just because a participant mentioned something in their public submission does not mean it is true or accurate. Hence, I took the participants' interpretations as inspiration to continue exploring the data and the literature to understand the phenomenon more deeply. The findings inspired me to re-examine participant recommendations in the consultation's models to explore stakeholders—adopting the perspective of stakeholders as human beings with a voice as the unit of analysis. Thus, I began formulating a new framing structure through abductive reasoning (Charmaz, 2006), recognising similarities and differences between theory and the

raw data. To illustrate and document the robustness of my claims, I employed reports and participant quotes from the public submissions as consistently as possible. In essence, the meaningful quotes are intended to reflect the anti-slavery field in Australia, what is happening, and how to move forward. **Table 11** presents sample quotes and their coding structure drawn from public submissions.

Table 11 *Initial and Final Coding of NAP Public Submission Data*

Illustrative Quotes	1st Order	2nd Order	General Theme
Effective partnerships between public, private and community sectors are critical (<i>Australian Human Rights Commission</i>)	Multi-stakeholder	Partnerships	Chapter 4 Public Contributions to the NAP
Appointing and supporting survivors to actively participate in the National Roundtable and working groups (<i>The Salvation Army and Uniting Church</i>)	Survivor Inclusion		
We recommend close partnerships with civil society (<i>University of Western Australia</i>)	Stakeholder Inclusion		
The focus on prevention needs greater clarity in the National Action Plan (<i>Anti-Slavery Australia</i>).	National Strategy	Prevention	
[The need to develop] language that is understood by all stakeholders regardless of culture (Project Respect)	Development of Common Language		
The involvement of victims is critical (<i>Mercy Foundation</i>)	Inclusion of survivors		
Combination of policy and legislation is key to eradicating modern slavery (Professor Felicity Gerry QC)	Aligning Rights & Rules	Policy Making	
[Companies] should be required to conduct human rights due diligence, in line with the UNGPs (Business and Human Rights Centre)	Due Diligence		
Ensure that, in line with a human rights-based approach, trafficked persons are granted nonconditional residence permits, also taking into account humanitarian consideration (<i>ACRATH</i>)	Human Rights Center		
The Government should update its procurement policies to follow international best practice (Asst. Prof. Boersma & Prof. Nolan)	Government Procurement	Practice	
Taking action to address modern slavery in business operations and supply chains is good for business (End Modern Slavery).	Good Business Practice		

Mandate that due diligence is a necessary requirement in preventing and mitigating modern slavery (Asst. Prof. Boersma & Prof. Nolan)	Due Diligence in Practice		

Combining the results of my coding practice and the literature, along with my chapter question (asking whether current collaboration models to address forced labour are giving appropriate consideration to the inclusion of stakeholder voices in MSCs), I fragmented and structured my study into more abstract and theoretical categories. The categories are “partnerships”, “prevention”, “policy making”, and “practice in the supply chain”. The following section discusses each stage in detail.

4.1 Partnerships: Bridging Divides and Building Alliances

MSCs are voluntary collaborative efforts and social problem-solving mechanisms among organisations and governments. The Australian Government recognised the significance of involving multiple stakeholders in the consultation models to the NAP. However, the public submissions reflected uncertainty and concerns around collaboration models, roles, strategies, and structures to address slavery. These uncertainties and concerns suggest that participants perceive an obstructed and narrowly focused approach to collaboration, particularly within MSCs, where not all relevant stakeholders are included or connected. Therefore, the interpretative approach at this stage focuses on reconstructing the collaboration framework and re-examining the roles within MSCs to guarantee that all relevant stakeholders are included and connected.

Participants were dynamically reconstructing their perceptions about the NAP, reflecting on the current collaboration models, what is working, and what needs to change. Many participants identified a lack of communication in the Australian anti-slavery approach, noting that they do not know how the different elements/components of the approach work together. For instance, the Mercy Foundation stated that “collaboration requires

communication between agencies, civil society, and business. Roundtables, network meetings, forums, working groups etc. are examples of how collaboration can occur". Because participants came from various organisations, insights into which stakeholders should be included in collaboration models were highly visible in the documents.

Academics

"Effective action to address slavery is only possible if it is rooted in a strong foundation of evidence." (Cockayne, 2022)

Scholars are exceptionally well situated to drive progress in finding sustainable solutions to address forced labour. Various participants acknowledged the role of academics and the importance of their engagement in the anti-slavery conversations.

Since the establishment of the NAP, there has been limited engagement with academics and internationally-leading evidence and scholarship being produced by Australian researchers [...] we would argue that the direct engagement with and learning from academics has been limited at best. (Monash University Trafficking and Research Group)

This position is echoed by another participant who recommends "close partnerships with civil society (NFPs, academia, etc.)" (University of Western Australia Modern Slavery Research Cluster). Academics can play a significant role by providing a greater awareness and understanding of the problem that can be translated into education to influence policymaking that will benefit the wider community. As one participant said, "The WAFMN [Western Australia Forced Marriage Network] is currently engaging with research academics around some of the issues being addressed through the Network. Having a solid research, best-practice base for all strategic initiatives is a critical element of a successful Action Plan" (Western Australia Forced Marriage Network).

Academics have made significant efforts to explore and address exploitation. There are some examples of successful partnerships between academics and other multi-stakeholders to prevent exploitation in a particular field. As one participant highlighted,

CAF is a multi-stakeholder organisation made up of business, government, union and academic representatives [...]. Expertise from our academic research partners at the Centre for Business and Social Innovation at UTS, and industry organisations such as the Property Council of Australia and the Building Services Contractors Association of Australia also ensure the continual development and refinement of CAF's rating framework and are critical to its broader uptake. (Cleaning Accountability Framework)

This collaboration framework involves around 30 stakeholders bringing significant expertise to the cleaning industry to identify, investigate, and promote human rights. Another example of successful MSCs to combat child exploitation in overseas orphanages comes from ReThink Orphanages. "ReThink Orphanages Australia is a cross-sector network with members drawn from academia, child protection, not-for-profit, charity, tourism, faith-based and education sector" (ReThink Orphanages).

As we can observe, researchers and academics have a role to play in the anti-slavery field. Although this has been acknowledged and highlighted as a priority by the NAP, participants in their public submissions are calling for a broader and more inclusive approach.

The Business Sector

The business sector has been identified as part of the problem as well as the solution to address forced labour in the supply chain (Nolan & Boersma, 2019; Van Buren III et al., 2021). The business sector plays a critical role in the fight against slavery as a large proportion of manufacturing, goods, and services are outsourced, often to politically unstable countries with unhealthy labour conditions. It makes sense to involve the business sector and provide businesses with meaningful tools to address forced labour in their supply chains.

As one participant eloquently highlighted: “The National Action Plan should clearly articulate the role of civil society and business and industry and specify how we will work in conjunction with government stakeholders on key priorities and activities” (Anti-Slavery Australia). This multi-stakeholder strategy between the business sector and other actors has been echoed by other participants, “going forward, the Law Council suggests that there may be scope for greater business involvement in the Roundtable form” (Law Council of Australia).

The IOM further suggests that “an additional goal be created with regards to promoting better cooperation with local Australian businesses”. Forced labour exists in every stage of the supply chain; therefore, it is critical that all businesses, big and small, be involved. The following suggestion highlights this:

The Australian Government seeks out multiple business voices as this work progresses—not only the most informed and committed, but also industries and entities which are more reluctantly engaged. Smaller businesses which are not reporting entities but can play a leadership role across the SME sector in voluntarily reporting under the MSA should also be engaged. (Law Council of Australia)

These quotes by leading Australian organisations signal that strategic collaboration involving the business sector needs to be implemented faithfully in the Australian NAP rather than only include abstract references to it. A participant from a different organisation expressed a similar idea and added some concerns regarding the NAP’s limitations.

We want to draw the Government’s attention to a major weakness which is an absence of meaningful guidance to business as to how they should respond to instances of modern slavery found in their operations or supply chains. The Government needs to give guidance to businesses on how they can support victims of modern slavery in Australia, beyond reporting the crime to the AFP [Australian Federal Police]. (Walk Free Foundation)

But business cannot work alone. They need other stakeholders' unique skills and knowledge to increase the results. As one participant eloquently said, "The National Action Plan should clearly articulate the role of civil society and business and industry and specify how we will work in conjunction with government stakeholders on key priorities and activities" (Anti-Slavery Australia). Therefore, government agencies can serve as connectors that integrate and combine different stakeholder's strengths to advance the NAP.

Government Agencies

Government agencies have a significant role to play in the anti-slavery approach. They have access to comprehensive information and resources that can be re-directed to different stakeholders to advance the NAP.

There is extensive international evidence to support collaboration between law enforcement bodies and NGOs in victim detection and engagement. The literature and our own experience demonstrate that providing victim-survivors immediate access to support and legal advice enables them to make more informed decisions, which, in turn, raises their confidence in the State and enables them to be more effective witnesses. (The Salvation Army & The Uniting Church)

Although facilitating collaboration between and across governmental agencies is critical, the NAP has not articulated this well. The following quotes illustrate this: "The National Action Plan must emphasise the collaboration, coordination and cooperation between while also articulating roles and responsibilities for: Commonwealth, State and Territory governments, government departments and agencies, law enforcement, civil society, business and industry, (and) community" (Anti-Slavery Australia) and "The New Plan should identify the responsibilities and commitments of state and territory governments" (Law Council of Australia).

Other participants from different sectors echoed the same idea: “While Goal 12 emphasises collaboration across government and with non-government stakeholders, it does not deal with collaboration across Australia” (Employment Law Centre of Western Australia). Good Shepherd ANZ and the Salvation Army Australia also opined that “while the NAP identifies strengthening connectedness with states and territories as a key area of focus, it does not include a strategy to drive this work”.

This was confirmed by one participant from Western Australia (WA) who raised their concern about the lack of inclusion:

The Humanitarian Group is not an organisation invited to the National Round Table [...]. [W]e wish to raise that there is a lack of presence from WA-based organisations, which considering the size of the State and its remoteness is a concern. Victims are located throughout Australia and a response is needed from client-facing organisations to ensure that they are recognised and supported on a local level. (The Humanitarian Group)

Similarly, an ongoing collaboration with civil society should be pursued. As one participant said, “the Government should continue to communicate and collaborate with civil society to ensure that consultation and participation occurs during the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the 2020–2025 Plan, in particular the evaluation framework for the plan” (Australian Lawyers for Human Rights). Participants also highlighted that collaboration should consider the international collaboration aspect: “As modern slavery is a global problem that demands a global response, Australia should be promoting and collaborating with other countries to develop a global database of information that can be shared between governments” (Holding Redlich).

This was confirmed by other organisations. “IOM recommends the Australian Government expand its goal to explicitly mention international cooperation with other national governments and UN-related bodies in the Oceanic region as a priority to prevent modern slavery, protect victims and prosecute perpetrators” (The International Organisation of

Migration). One participant mentioned an important aspect about orphanages, suggesting that “the Australian Government work with its international partners in Alliance 8.7 to ensure that children living in overseas residential institutions are included in data gathered” (ReThink Orphanages Australia). Other participants raised concerns regarding sharing knowledge and data among stakeholders. As one organisation added, “we recommend the government focus on establishing an effective information-sharing regime which enables crucial details regarding identified survivors to pass between NGOs and from government agencies to NGOs” (Freedom Hub).

As these quotes show, the government plays a critical role as a key stakeholder in the anti-slavery approach and the development of the policy framework. In this context, participants also highlighted the lack of a common language to define and identify the phenomenon among all stakeholders. The next section will present what participants have suggested regarding the development of a common language.

4.2 Prevention: Unifying Voices for Collective Action

In addition to identifying critical stakeholders to include in the current conversations to address forced labour, the data from this research also revealed organisational complications around forced labour prevention. Drawing on participants' submissions to the NAP and my observations, I highlight the need for (a) a national prevention strategy, (b) the development of a common language among stakeholders, (c) the inclusion of survivors as active participants, and (d) multi-stakeholder partnerships to address some of the most acute complications that stem from the NAP. The following section discusses each one in detail.

A National Prevention Strategy

Prevention usually involves strategies, methods, or activities that seek to decrease a specific problem—such as forced labour. Although prevention is considered a national strategic priority of the Australian National Action Plan 2020–25, some participants expressed their concern

about the lack of vision, implementation, and effective measurements. As one organisation observed about the current Australian approach: “The focus on prevention needs greater clarity in the National Action Plan” (Anti-Slavery Australia).

Participants also mentioned that prevention plays a significant role in the organisational approach. “Prevention is critical both within Australia and in the region” (Hope for Justice). Another participant expressed concern regarding current prevention measures, saying that “prevention is a key focus of many civil society groups and included in one of the pillars. Yet little work has been done or agreement reached on how prevention is measured” (Be Slavery Free). This reasoning was also echoed by another participant who observed that “there are no set metrics that define success. Metrics should be based on a clear vision of what is to be achieved in the time frame of the Plan as set out through feasible objectives” (Monash University Trafficking and Research Group).

These quotes by some leading Australian organisations pointed out that prevention should be realistically implemented as part of the NAP instead of including vague promises. Implementing this prevention strategy also involves the inclusion of frontline responders within and across sectors. It is essential to mention that contrary to the approach in the United Kingdom², the Australian NAP does not provide a proper definition of “frontline responder” in the context of modern slavery. Although some organisations may identify obvious “frontline responders”, such as law enforcement, it is critical that the national strategy provides a clear definition and identifies those frontline responders. This will help to identify, communicate about, and address forced labour more effectively. As some participants eloquently recommended, “the government [needs] to include a clear definition of ‘frontline officials’ in

² A frontline / first responder organisation is an authority that is empowered to refer a potential victim of modern slavery into the National Referral Mechanism. (United Kingdom Home Office, 2024).

the NAP” (Global Compact Network Australia) and “identify [...] such first responders” (Law Council of Australia).

Frontline professionals can be the difference between freedom and slavery for survivors and society in general. Therefore, including education for broad groups of frontline responders is critical. For instance, one participant recommended:

Ensure training for public hospitals so emergency and midwifery service (and children’s hospitals/ children’s units of General Hospitals particularly the Refugee Clinics personnel on FM) are aware of human trafficking and exploitation in slavery-like conditions and know how to respond to the needs of a trafficked person. (Australian Catholic Religious)

Other participants highlighted the need to educate migrant workers who are closer to vulnerable individuals. This should include “[r]eviewing and strengthening information available and delivered to migrant workers by enhancing pre-departure briefings and introducing post-arrival briefings” (Anti-Slavery Australia).

One prevention strategy suggested in the public submissions is education to businesses and consumers where the government should “include references to increasing business’ understanding of these crimes and how companies may be involved” (Global Compact Network Australia). The IOM recommended this prevention tactic: “The government [should] provide relevant staff training, domestically and with supply chain companies on modern slavery and the role of international business in complying”. Another aspect is consumer awareness, which is also essential to preventing forced labour from happening. For example, Assurian Consultants suggested very specific strategies: “Consumer awareness can of course be raised through well targeted campaigns and through investigative journalism”.

Equally important for prevention were funding and public awareness. For instance, it is key to have consistent funding to assist organisations and their operations and programs to address forced labour. In this context, a common idea expressed by participants was that

“funding should be extended to a larger number of organisations, both nongovernmental and academic so the national response evolves beyond the vision of a limited few” (Monash University Trafficking and Research Group). Other participants considered that “additional funding should be provided to ensure that people who are trafficked and exploited can access specialised legal assistance services and qualified interpreters, including in regional, rural, and remote areas” (Law Council of Australia). As one organisation eloquently summarised, “there must be consistent and ongoing funding available for prevention initiatives such as awareness raising, community engagement, research, education and capacity building of government officials and service providers as well as workers, employers and the public” (Anti-Slavery Australia).

In summary, many participants agreed that the NAP must more clearly formulate prevention strategies. In building a national strategy, it is also important to develop a common language because it builds the foundations allowing stakeholders to understand the NAP goals, purposes, and expectations.

The Development of a Common Language

Although the language used in the public submissions may refer to the same phenomenon—modern slavery—there is confusion about how the term is used in the Australian context. What I have observed is that the Australian Government in its public consultation 2020–25 uses human trafficking, slavery, and modern slavery interchangeably. Although the NAP 2020–25 “uses the umbrella term ‘modern slavery’ to describe [...] trafficking in persons, slavery, servitude, forced labour, deceptive recruiting for labour or services, debt bondage, and forced marriage”, the term “modern slavery” is fragmented into trafficking in persons and slavery. For example, the following expressions are used: “trafficking of a chef” and “slavery in a brothel”.

Furthermore, the NAP 2020–25’s action section by organisations mentions: “Promote the Principles to Guide Government Action to Combat Human Trafficking in Global Supply Chains”. It is important to note that the government websites addressing modern slavery and

in public support for victims and survivors, the terms “trafficking” or “trafficked” are used (e.g., support for trafficked people program (STPP)). However, the importance of speaking the same language was emphasised by one participant who described the need to develop

language that is understood by all stakeholders regardless of culture, ideology, legal position, or other differences. This will assist in ensuring all stakeholders are operating within the same framework and share the same expectations and desired outcomes. (Project Respect)

Yet some participants challenged the use of the modern slavery term maintaining that

“modern slavery” is a phrase coined most recently by the business world to refer to auditing processes for supply chains, and to enact shadow barriers to trade against countries not upholding “human rights” standards like China and is therefore not appropriate for a national action plan combating the crime of trafficking. We encourage the Committee to re-align Australia with the language and approach of the Trafficking Protocol. (Coalition Against Trafficking in Women Australia)

This reflects controversial discussions over interpretations and a shift in the language used to refer to modern slavery (Boersma & Nolan, 2022). A participant emphasised the importance of not only being clear in the language used but also in the references made to the international legal frameworks:

The language used in the goals is ambiguous and does not effectively articulate the intent implied [...]. The authors assert that there is no universally agreed definition of ‘modern slavery’ or international standards that collectively capture obligations. It is unclear what international standards the government is referring to. [...] Therefore, the NAP must be explicit in its articulation of what international standards it seeks to uphold, including those to which we are signatory and therefore have specific legal obligations. (Good Shepherd ANZ & the Salvation Army Australia)

Based on the public submissions I reviewed, it appears that participants employed the terms “trafficking”, “slavery”, and “modern slavery” to address the same phenomenon. Therefore, having a clear and common language in the NAP is critical for the national strategy against modern slavery as the lack of agreement in the terminology used hinders effective discussions (Nolan & Boersma, 2019). Having a common language will also facilitate collaborations among stakeholders, including survivors/victims of forced labour. The following section presents participant suggestions made in the public submissions about the inclusion of survivors as active stakeholders in collaboration models.

The Inclusion of Survivors

Scholars state that the lack of survivors’ voices and perspectives in the dialogue is one of many reasons for the lack of agreement on the term being used (Bales, 2017). Some participants have echoed this in their public submissions, mentioning that “Australia’s response to trafficking has in the past been criticised for focusing too extensively on law enforcement instead of the rights of trafficked people” (Law Council of Australia). In this context, one organisation in particular raised serious concerns:

It is the somewhat discouraging experience of Anti-Slavery Australia that former clients of both Anti-Slavery Australia and various support programs are often inadequately supported while they are engaging in the criminal justice process and are thus unable to achieve their full potential [...]. Even in circumstances where they are eventually granted a permanent visa and offered safety and security in Australia, many survivors are still affected by their experiences, suffering from the effects of serious and sustained traumas, lack of support networks of any kind, struggle with ongoing homelessness, are ill-equipped to find employment, have limited English language skills and, despite permanent residency status, remain vulnerable to further exploitation or re-trafficking within Australia. (Anti-Slavery Australia)

In essence, Anti-Slavery Australia is warning that the current solution is making the problem worse for victims and survivors. They suggest implementing a holistic trauma centre approach that covers every angle of survivors' restoration. One participant considered that survivors ahead on the restoration path could be meaningfully included in the anti-slavery conversations and their voices reflected in the NAP's current goals: "Victim advocates from within countries of modern slavery perpetration should have an active voice in strategy development. Such actions could be taken up in the existing goals identified" (End Modern Slavery).

Informants consistently reported how the inclusion of survivors as stakeholders could improve the overarching anti-slavery approach:

The Salvation Army has long supported survivors of modern slavery to have a voice of their own through the Freedom Advocates program. We have supported people who have received assistance from our own services as well as those of other anti-slavery NGOs to transform their experiences of abuse and exploitation into empowerment. (The Salvation Army Australia & Uniting Church)

The involvement of survivors as active participants in the conversations has also been discussed in the international sphere. One participant cited the United Nations Special Rapporteur on trafficking, saying "the involvement of victims is critical to ensuring that the measures taken to address trafficking benefit those in need [...] and that opportunities for change and improvement are identified in a timely way" (Mercy Foundation).

A participant from a different organisation concluded that for Australia to ensure equal participation in its response to forced labour, it is important to "include a specific victim-survivor engagement mechanism, including, but not limited to, a survivor advisory group that is represented on the National Roundtable" (Good Shepherd ANZ & the Salvation Army Australia). An example of survivors' involvement as active members in the current conversations came from a joint submission:

The Salvation Army has long supported survivors of modern slavery to have a voice of their own through the Freedom Advocates program [...] Freedom advocates have appeared before parliamentary inquiries, joined staff in private meetings with policy makers, informed media articles and television series, met with public servants through the international working group on trafficking and slavery, and attended the National Roundtable. (The Salvation Army Australia & Uniting Church)

The inclusion of survivors as active stakeholders in the collaboration models could also improve victim identification. As one participant said, “the NAP strategies intending to increase victim identification should be based on what survivors say would be helpful to be recognised and enable them to leave” (Monash University Trafficking and Research Group). These accounts have been echoed by organisations in a different field, suggesting that “the government should consider formally convening a group of survivors to provide input on Australia’s anti-slavery programs and policies” (Walk Free Foundation).

Many participants agreed that the NAP should be based on a victim-centred approach. For example, “the National Action Plan must have the survivor and human rights at its core” (Anti-Slavery Australia). However, one particular answer was ambiguous in its meaning: “The Australian approach has focused predominantly on children and women who are at risk or victims of forced marriage and has taken an individual rather than community-centred approach” (Australian Muslim Women’s Centre for Human Rights). The ambiguity highlights uncertainty about the focus on forced marriage or the preference for individual over community approaches. My research explores both micro-level experiences and macro-level systems to provide a comprehensive understanding of effective responses.

These quotes reflect the lack of agreement among some stakeholders on where the NAP should focus. This highlights the need for more inclusive collaboration models involving survivors among other actors and the development of a common language that relates to all stakeholders. Such collaboration models are referred to here as “multi-stakeholder

collaborations” or MSCs. The next section will go deeper into what participants suggested in terms of multi-stakeholder collaborations.

Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

Many participants in the public sector recognised in their public submissions the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships involving participants and organisations from different societal sectors. These stakeholders work together and provide their unique knowledge, skills, and resources to address forced labour. As one organisation eloquently summarised it, “effective partnerships between public, private and community sectors are critical to ensuring that all sectors work together and open communication channels to collectively eliminate risks in supply chains” (Australian Human Rights Commission).

Participants from different organisations and backgrounds expressed similar ideas. One participant suggested that “facilitating opportunities for multi-stakeholder dialogue and collaboration will also be essential” (Minerals Council of Australia). Another participant proposed the inclusion of “a think tank” approach, which involves a body of experts providing guidance on a particular matter, such as forced labour. “A think tank for developing strategies and actions that include seeking remedy in across-border contexts should be developed with stakeholders including government, business, unions, ILO, IOM and non-government and civil society victim service providers” (End Modern Slavery). This reflects the creative thinking in many of the public submissions.

Other participants echoed similar ideas, emphasising the importance of practical mechanisms to enact change: “We also suggest that the Government seeks to support established methods to enact change such as the promotion of multi-stakeholder collaboration, accessible online training, and regular reporting to assist organisations in furthering their impact” (Global Compact Network Australia). Another participant supported this suggestion: “It would also be beneficial to build the capacity of a diverse cross-section of organisations by including a broader category of organisations that may encounter victims of

modern slavery (i.e., to include the family violence sector, Centrelink, emergency service personnel and other frontline services) rather than those solely focused on anti-slavery” (Good Shepherd ANZ and the Salvation Army Australia). It is important to note that the Australian Government has not defined who frontline responders are in the context of modern slavery. Accordingly, one participant encouraged “the Government to include a clear definition of ‘frontline officials’ in the NAP” (Global Compact Network Australia).

In contrast, some participants who suggested MSCs called for a decentralised approach. The reasoning behind a decentralised approach is to provide stakeholders with more self-government and responsibility in the anti-slavery response.

As stated in our paper, there is abundant international evidence to support de-centralising the operational response to modern slavery and proven models that may be adapted to the Australian context to strengthen connections between the national response and local stakeholders. (The Salvation Army Australia & Uniting Church)

While many participants proposed the inter-agency approach, other organisations explained how this collaboration should look to build an evidence-based practice. According to one participant, “there should be exchange of knowledge and research between the various parts of government dealing with responsible business conduct issues” (University Western Australia Modern Slavery Research Cluster).

Regarding the exchange of knowledge, another organisation suggested that “[f]irewalls be implemented between public services and immigration enforcement, noting that this would allow for better collection of disaggregated data by government agencies, especially on undocumented migrants” (Australian Lawyers for Human Rights). This organisation also addressed the evaluation processes: “[The] government should implement appropriate monitoring and evaluation processes that are ongoing, integrated and cross-sectoral” (Australian Lawyers for Human Rights). As we can observe, diverse collaboration mechanisms are available involving stakeholders from sectors that would not be connected

otherwise. As one participant from a different organisation summarised: “Facilitating opportunities for multi-stakeholder dialogue and collaboration will also be essential” (Minerals Council of Australia). So far, I have explored participants’ views on MSCs with governmental agencies, non-governmental organisations, scholars, survivors, businesses, and other actors.

These findings have significant implications for the Australian NAP and raise some concerns based on my observations. For example, are policy decisions in the context of the NAP informed by carefully recognised empirical evidence and basic human rights? A better understanding of this could inspire governments to rely on research to inform policy, program decisions, and strategies to address forced labour. The public submissions discussed in the next part reveal multiple perceptions and sensemaking as participants search for strategies to advance the NAP beyond its traditional boundaries. In the next section, I explore perspectives on policymaking that connect business and human rights, highlighting innovative approaches proposed in the submissions.

4.3 Policy Making: Aligning Rights, Business, and Global Perspectives

The data from this research revealed that an Australian national strategy should integrate a holistic approach by embedding human rights into business operations. Fundamental human rights are basic rights and freedoms that entail protection, equality, and justice for everyone. Despite many efforts to promote human rights, the concern is that human rights abuses and labour rights violations are increasing significantly in the global supply chains (ASPI). The recent COVID-19 pandemic has only intensified the humanitarian cost across global supply chains (Boersma & Nolan, 2022). Therefore, as one participant identified, a “combination of policy and legislation is key to eradicating modern slavery” (Professor Felicity Gerry QC). An evidence-based approach will be required to achieve this goal. Accordingly, “the government should be committed to implementing an evidence-based response to modern slavery” (Be Slavery Free).

A procurement-linked policy on modern slavery is also critical to address forced labour from every angle. As two participants said, “to leverage government spending, a procurement connected policy concerning modern slavery should be developed” (Boersma and Nolan). This also involves “developing guidance to assist government and non-government agencies to deal with modern slavery risks in supply chains” (Australian Human Rights Commission). According to some participants, it is critical to explore a best practice approach for business. However, there needs to be more clarity on the specific obligations and the best approach for businesses to address human rights risks in their operations (Nolan & Bott, 2018; Index, 2022). Consequently, many participants in the public submissions expressed the familiar idea of integrating business and human rights in policymaking. But what does that look like? Participants offered different perspectives.

For example, End Modern Slavery suggested “[t]he Commonwealth should reconsider developing a National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights”. Another participant went further and explained that the NAP should include “an additional goal to engage the Australian business sector to understand and combat modern slavery” (Australian Lawyers for Human Rights). The Law Council of Australia reinforced the reasoning behind the business and human rights approach by saying: “A National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights, on the other hand, would provide a coordinated and concrete plan to help business enterprises meaningfully respect all relevant human rights in conformity with the UNGPs.⁹”. These findings have significant implications for the broader domain of business. More than business efforts are required. There is no proper guidance; therefore, a well-developed national strategy and a regulatory framework are critical for businesses to improve their compliance with human rights.

Businesses: Profitable and Sustainable

When reflecting on how businesses can operate in a profitable and sustainable manner while promoting human rights, one participant cited the United Nations suggesting that “to

demonstrate commitment to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the Government should follow through with its previous commitment to establish a national action plan” (Salvation Army Australia & the Salvation Church).

Because businesses often impact the human rights of their workers and communities in their operations, they are responsible for taking action on human rights and labour rights across their supply chains. Therefore, the development of a National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights, as one participant said, “will equip Australian business to meaningfully take account of emerging human rights trends and allow them to demonstrate that they are working to identify, prevent, address and mitigate any involvement in instances of modern slavery” (Global Compact Network Australia).

In this context, participants and experts on business and human rights advocated for due diligence whereby companies “should be required to conduct human rights due diligence, in line with the UNGPs” (Business and Human Rights Centre). This implies “requiring a higher level of commitment from the business sector” (Australian Lawyers for Human Rights). For instance, “the Government should ‘name and shame’ entities that do not comply with the Modern Slavery Act, as well as entities that are found to have modern slavery in their supply chain” (Boersma and Nolan). This was echoed by a participant from a different sector, who suggested that the government should “strengthen the ‘naming and shaming’ enforcement mechanism” (Slavery Links Australia).

Publicly naming and shaming human rights violators has become a critical strategy in the human rights field for two reasons. **First**, publicly naming and shaming can cause intense criticism. According to participants, this approach will entail repercussions from the general public, in particular from consumers. For instance, “businesses can be subjected to intense backlash where their supply chains are revealed to involve modern slavery, which is damaging to their reputation and encourages broader compliance” (Law Council of Australia). The **second** reason is effective persuasion. In this regard, participants revealed that a failure to

comply means that “it will therefore be for consumers, investors, and non-governmental organisations to engage and/or apply pressure where they believe a business has not taken sufficient steps” (Boersma & Nolan). However, scholars suggest that “naming and shaming” may be effective mostly for larger organisations, which face significant reputational and penalty risks (Rasche, 2011).

One participant also considered this approach an “inadequate enforcement mechanism” (Holding Redlich). A public submission highlights strong evidence suggesting “that laws mandating social disclosure requirements, which rely on soft enforcement mechanisms to reduce non-compliance, may not be the most effective mechanism to achieve corporate accountability” (Boersma and Nolan). Achieving greater understanding and uniformity in this regard will inspire deeper organisational commitment.

According to some scholars, the business response to forced labour in global supply chains has been limited to the evaluation of due diligence (monitoring supply chains) and reporting (Van Buren III et al., 2021), which has become a “cosmetic compliance” (Nolan & Bott, 2018, p. 3) rather than a true commitment. In this context, a participant and expert in the field suggested, “there must be clear measures of accountability, moving away from the current model of reporting on processes and activities in the absence of robust evidence of impact, quality or effectiveness” (Monash University Trafficking and Research Group). Another participant emphasised the importance of corporate reporting by observing that

[i]t would also be helpful to develop policy in relation to criminal investigations into corporate reporting of slavery in supply chains. This is underdeveloped. One example is slavery in illegal logging. Failure to use due diligence in the import of illegal logging is a criminal offence. (Professor Felicity Gerry QC)

This demonstrates the necessity for the policy framework to extend beyond basic due diligence. To measure the NAP’s impact on different stakeholders, many participants suggested monitoring and evaluating the initiatives of the Australian NAP. For instance, some

participants said that the “plan should include a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system” (Business and Human Rights Centre) subject to “independent oversight” (Monash University Trafficking and Research Group).

Another participant added that “the evaluation framework should be based on a sound theory of change embedded at the strategic level, structured through a logic model that articulates what the Department [Home Affairs] expects to happen as a result of particular actions” (The Salvation Army Australia and The Uniting Church). By developing a holistic evaluation framework, “the Australian government has a real opportunity to prove the impact of its policies” (Walk Free Foundation). This is particularly noteworthy because implementing a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system is essential to effectively address forced labour. To facilitate an impartial approach, a participant recommended the government “monitor [...] the effectiveness of the steps taken by public sector agencies to address modern slavery risks in their supply chains” (Australian Human Rights Commission). Implicitly but significantly, the government needs to lead by example.

Many participants highlighted the need for establishing an independent oversight mechanism to identify and respond to human rights risks in supply chains and promote MSCs. As the Australian Human Rights Commission described in their submission, “an Australian Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner would promote collaboration between private, public and community sectors in identifying and responding to modern slavery risks in supply chains, raise awareness of modern slavery and contribute to oversight of the legislation” (Australian Human Rights Commission). Establishing an Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner is important to promote accountability and transparency. A particularly vivid expression of this came from the Australian Lawyer for Human Rights: “Such an appointment is fundamental in ensuring the voices of victims are heard, their lived experiences validated, and support for victims is adequately identified and provided”. This is certainly a serious concern for workers who are survivors/ victims of forced labour.

These findings have significant implications for the NAP and society in general. A holistic approach embedded in human rights and the establishment of an Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner would positively impact the development of a nationally consistent strategy to address forced labour in the supply chain. Therefore, the voices of survivors—the workers—must be included in the current collaboration models. The next section will explore stakeholder voices and human rights through the public submissions.

Stakeholder Engagement and Human Rights

Based on the public submissions, the dominant narrative regarding human rights in the policy framework encourages social change. Many participants agreed that it is critical to infuse business operations and the Australian national strategy with human rights best practice. This also involves, as one participant mentioned, “the development of strong drivers towards compliance” (Australian Human Rights Commission). Hence, “by ensuring transparency and accountability of reporting entities, victims will be empowered to report and speak out about modern slavery” (Australian Lawyers for Human Rights). A participant shared this view, saying that “victim advocates from within countries of modern slavery perpetration should have an active voice in strategy development. Such actions could be taken up in the existing goals identified” (End Modern Slavery).

The essence of these suggestions is that victims/survivors should be included in the consultation process. But is this the case? Despite some efforts, according to one participant, “the voices of migrant workers themselves are too often overlooked in the process of combating modern slavery, both within Australia’s own backyard and within the complex international supply chain model” (IOM). Therefore, it is important to “appoint [...] and support [...] survivors to actively participate in the National Roundtable and working groups” (The Salvation Army Australia & Uniting Church). These comments highlight the critical role played by key stakeholders.

Although some participants emphasised the importance of including survivors/victims as active stakeholders in the consultation process, other participants considered that the “government can best reflect the voices of victims in the 2020–25 Plan by prioritising the inclusion of organisations who work directly with survivors. This should include the stakeholders involved in the 2020 consultation roundtables” (Freedom Hub). It is worth noting that unlike the US approach, which has an official advisory group composed of experts and survivors to inform the national anti-slavery approach, Australia lacks such a multi-stakeholder approach. One participant gave further details about the US advisory group, “in fact, it is essential that victim-survivors outside of organisational reach are included. One example that may be adapted to the Australian context is the U.S. Advisory Council on Human Trafficking, which is comprised of eight survivor leaders who bring their expertise and experience to advise and provide recommendations to the government to improve federal antitrafficking policies” (Monash University Trafficking and Research Group).

Other participants considered the involvement of survivors in the conversations as mostly related to raising awareness. For example, according to the Mercy Foundation, “for victim/survivors that do wish to share their experience, consideration should be given to establishing a program that specialises in preparing victim/survivors for this experience through personalised advocacy training”. Although awareness grounded in evidence is critical for informing the national strategy, survivors interpret their involvement as dynamic stakeholders capable of contributing to policymaking.

On this matter, Dang (2018) clarified the importance of involving survivors as stakeholders in anti-slavery conversations: “We want to talk about policy change. We want to design social service programs and lead our own organisations and programs. We want to build grassroots solutions and to sustain ourselves. Like all humans, we want self-determination and autonomy, coupled with interdependence and community support” (p. 1). This example clearly illustrates survivors’ desire to be part of the conversations as active stakeholders. Another example comes from a survivor peer researcher group in the United

Kingdom which proposed that “survivors should have the option of engaging in research and policy as peers and not just as recipients of support” (ATMG, 2021, p. 10).

An additional comment from a different organisation provided a list of stakeholders that could be part of the advisory group. “The framework should engage victims/survivors, vulnerable persons and groups, specialist and community organisations, organisations and experts with strong gender expertise, and other stakeholders in the evaluation of the impacts of the 2020–25 plan” (Harmony Alliance). The suggestion for strong gender expertise comes from empirical evidence showing that women and girls are unequally impacted by modern slavery. On this point, a participant recommended that “a gender-sensitive approach be adopted in developing the Plan and that due regard be paid to the voices and needs of women and girls, both in terms of the Plan’s development process and stated goals” (Business and Human Rights Source Centre).

As we can observe from those quotes, on the one hand, a few participants of the NAP suggested that survivors can have a voice through an organisation or a third person. On the other hand, participants, survivors, and scholars advocate for their meaningful inclusion as active stakeholders in the collaboration models. In this context, Hope for Justice in their public submission added that “although many of the recommendations above are based on information from organisations working directly with survivors, it would be valuable to invite victims/survivors to participate in the process of formulating the National Action Plan”. The question I raise here is whether the Australian Government sufficiently empowers survivors and offers them the proper support and protection if they want to use their voices to shape policymaking.

As we are witnessing here, the literature and the empirical evidence recommend survivors and other key stakeholders as essential and as active participants in the collaboration models to address forced labour. Yet how to do this effectively remains a challenge. In this context, I wonder whether stakeholders are considered in MSCs as

proxies/agents or as human beings with a voice. Are all stakeholder voices viewed equally in the collaboration models? A better understanding of these dynamics around stakeholder inclusion in collaborations could result in increased and meaningful partnerships to prevent forced labour. In the next section, I present the perspectives on practice in the supply chain and stakeholder commitment in humanising businesses.

4.4 Practice: Embedding Humanity in Business Operations

Although the reasoning behind companies respecting human rights, referred to as corporate social responsibility (CSR), has in recent years expanded to include business and human rights (Nolan & Frishling, 2019), it has been present for over three decades, with business and human rights operating very much on a parallel path. Accordingly, the literature and the public submissions call for more clarity on the specific responsibilities of businesses (International Labour Organization et al., 2022). Concerns about human rights violations in business are increasing, while consumers seem to expect multinationals to promote human rights in their business operations. So, what can we expect from businesses?

Some participants to the NAP acknowledged that “taking action to address modern slavery in business operations and supply chains is good for business” (End Modern Slavery). As scholars suggest, this practice will ensure their own long-term well-being (Carroll & Buchholtz, 1993). Unfortunately, many businesses proclaim to be on a human rights journey without presenting tangible actions to prevent forced labour in their operations (Nolan and Boersma, 2019). In this context, and to ensure that forced labour is adequately addressed in supply chains, some participants suggested a “mandate that due diligence is a necessary requirement in preventing and mitigating modern slavery” (Boersma and Nolan). This also involves multi-stakeholder collaborations within and across sectors.

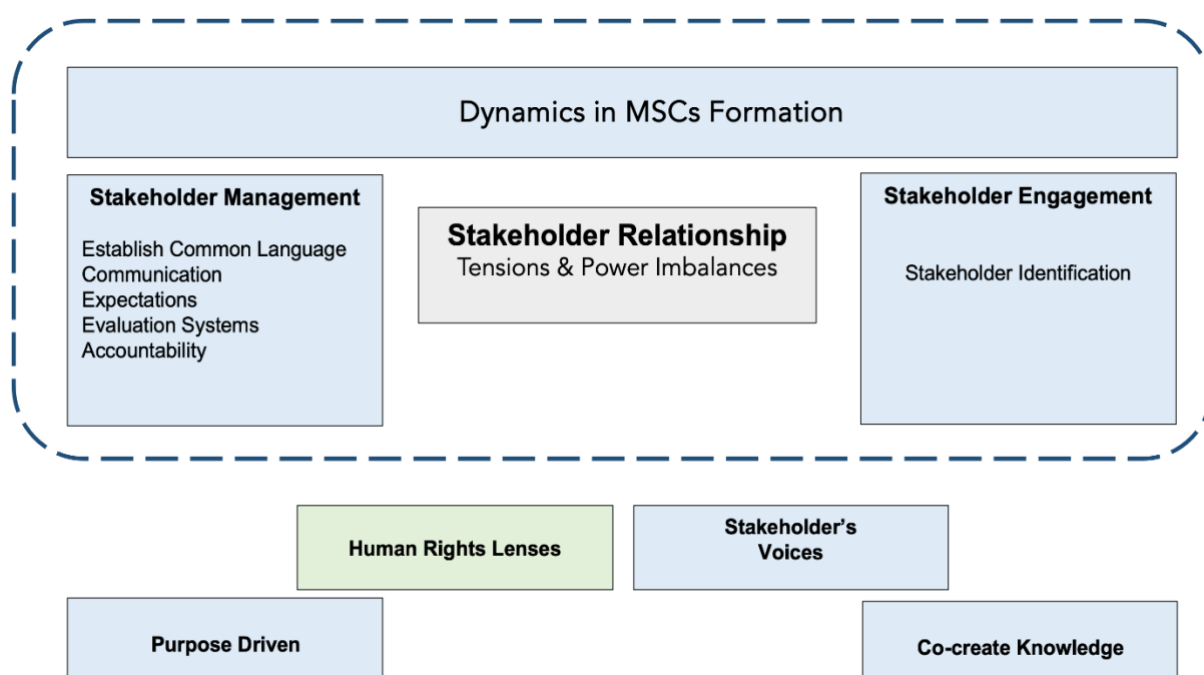
In this context, although MSCs often explore collaboration across multiple sectors as a unit of analysis (Bryson et al., 2006; Gray & Purdy, 2018; Selsky & Parker, 2005; Suárez & Esparza, 2017; Weber et al., 2021), this chapter’s unit of analysis are the key stakeholders—

the individuals who are a part of those MSCs. Some authors have highlighted a broad focus on the “relationship” between stakeholders and their affiliation with an organisation (Dentonie 2016, Roloff 2008, Parmar et al., 2010). This chapter, which is closer in spirit to Foot’s (2015) and Lockyer’s (2020) collaborative work, concentrated on MSCs and the inclusion of stakeholders as human beings with a voice as a unit of analysis. The results build on a growing body of research on MSCs suggesting that the lack of stakeholder inclusion in MSCs is a major problem (ATMG, 2021; Bryson et al., 2015; Caruana et al., 2021; Foot, 2015; Lockyer, 2020; Page et al., 2015). In essence, this chapter sheds light on stakeholder inclusion in current collaboration models to address forced labour.

Based on this frame of reference, I present a *preliminary model* that builds on my analysis to theorise the inclusion of stakeholders as active participants with a voice in MSCs (see **Figure 8**). While this model does not incorporate all suggestions to the NAP, it captures participant views on stakeholder management and engagement to develop a more holistic approach to addressing forced labour. Addressing tensions and power imbalances is essential to establish a connection between stakeholder management and engagement. The data indicate that current collaboration models often lack a human rights perspective and fail to incorporate stakeholder voices despite their critical role.

The human rights lens serves as a medium that fuses stakeholder voices, aiming to co-create policymaking that leads to practical applications in the supply chain. The success of MSCs relies on the effective blending of these elements. Please note that my analysis here is not intended to make broad generalisations but to provide analytical insights to inform my interview questions in the next chapter. Likewise, those interviews will shape the subsequent chapters.

Figure 8 *Preliminary Model of the Dynamics in MSC Formation*



This is a preliminary view of the dynamics of the MSCs. The dynamics around MSC formation is about meaningful multi-stakeholder inclusion, driven by a clearly defined common language and collaborative purpose in which human rights play a critical role towards stakeholder legitimacy. The development of significant collaboration models towards sustainable solutions seems to support the argument of earlier researchers (e.g., Boersma, 2018; Boersma & Nolan, 2022) that the inclusion of human rights plays a key role in the success of MSCs in addressing forced labour in supply chains. But how is this perceived by stakeholder theory?

The inclusion of stakeholders as human beings with a “voice” is strongly connected to the human rights perspective. Here I refer to voice (voice with a meaning) as an individual’s faculty to freely share and express their own interests (voice that carries value) to influence decision-making processes (Benoit-Barné & Martine, 2021; Dempsey, 2017). Although voice is an important stakeholder characteristic, it is not a criterion by which stakeholders are categorised. For instance, Phillips (2003) has classified stakeholders as having normative and

derivative legitimacy. On the one hand, normative stakeholders are individuals to whom the organisation has an ethical responsibility to prioritise their well-being (e.g., financiers, employees, customers, suppliers, and local communities).

On the other hand, derivative stakeholders are those groups or individuals who can damage or benefit the organisation without having a moral obligation from the organisation (e.g., competitors, activists, terrorists, and the media) (Phillips, 2003). Some scholars have raised concerns about classifying stakeholders in silos, which can be problematic and damaging to building trust among stakeholders (Crane, 2020). As Crane (2020) warns, the proposed stakeholder classification will only make the problem worse, suggesting that the approach of an organisation towards one stakeholder has consequences for other stakeholders. This information is critical and needs to be considered for MSCs.

If we implement Phillips' (2003) classification, could we conclude that stakeholders mentioned in the public submissions, including survivors/victims of forced labour, belong to the normative group? The answer is unclear. Some scholars suggest that stakeholders are viewed inside the organisation through the lenses of stakeholder fairness and within the sphere of "private associations" rather than the "basic structure of society" (Phillips, 2003). The essence of Phillips's argument is that "private associations" are the base of organisational ethics rather than basic human rights. However, stakeholders are not mere proxies for social tasks but human beings with names, faces, and children (Freeman, 2017, p. 6) whose motivations, beliefs, and behavioural tendencies can influence organisation's value creation (Bundy 2019).

In this context, what about stakeholder legitimacy? Can we consider key stakeholders mentioned in the public submissions, in particular survivors, as legitimate stakeholders? Although it is important to note that the concept of legitimacy remains ambiguous in the stakeholder literature, "a stakeholder may be legitimate due to a moral obligation or based on the power to affect the organisation and its stakeholders" (Phillips, 2003, p. 26).

Although I am not advocating for uniform organisational behaviour towards all stakeholders, I maintain that identifying stakeholders' essential needs to evaluate the legitimacy of their demands is critical (Crane, 2020). This is undoubtedly a severe concern for society and the global economy, in particular for individuals who have contributed to an organisation's value creation through the worldwide supply chain. At this point, I want to raise some concerns provoked by the sceptic in me. How will organisations use the human rights perspective in the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda to respect workers' rights if human rights are not the baseline for stakeholder fairness?

If the narrative among stakeholder theory related to stakeholders is based on “private associations”, could that be part of the reason for the confusion and disregard from the business sector? If stakeholder theory is a theory of organisational management and ethics (Phillips, 2003, p. 480), why is it that some workers who provide value to the organisation and individuals who are part of the community have been neglected from the theory? If stakeholder theory also refers to value for each other (Freeman, Harrison, & Wicks, 2007), where “no stakeholder stands alone in the process of value creation” (Freeman, 2017, p. 6), why has this theory not paid close attention to the exclusion of stakeholders?

In this context, scholars have suggested that without legally binding standard mechanisms supervising human rights risks, organisations will continue to avoid examining their supply chain (Boersma & Nolan, 2022) and, therefore, ignore key stakeholders in their business operations.

4.5 Chapter Insights

This chapter drew data from the public submissions to the National Action Plan Against Modern Slavery and explored whether current collaboration models (to address forced labour) are appropriately considering the inclusion of stakeholder voices in MSCs. The chapter further identified key stakeholders that need to be considered in the Australian anti-slavery field. For instance, academia, civil society organisations, workers, the business sector, and government

agencies are essential voices to be included in the anti-slavery dialogue. The lack of stakeholder inclusion in MSCs is a serious moral and strategic issue that places powerless stakeholders, such as survivors, at risk of exploitation by organisations. MSCs have a unique position that can contribute to the co-creation of knowledge to fight forced labour. This knowledge can be translated into a tangible national strategy that can impact policymaking and influence good practices in the supply chain. Therefore, identifying key stakeholders to be included as human beings with a voice in MSCs is critical to addressing forced labour. This also includes survivors/victims of forced labour who contribute to the evidence-based approach.

Because forced labour in the supply chain is a transnational crime that affects us all, it also needs the involvement of multi-stakeholders across different disciplines, fields, social layers, and cultures. In today's economic globalisation and supply chain fragmentation, forced labour has heightened the interest in organisations' ethical behaviour and human rights (Crane, 2020). The development of meaningful collaborative efforts, including stakeholders as human beings with a voice, may be influential in improving a new approach to ethical and sustainable solutions. This is consistent with the view of a group of survivor peer review researchers that bridge the evidence and the inclusion gap: "Collaboration is not always easy to achieve when it involves people with different skills, assumptions, values, and priorities—but it is precisely these different perspectives that can add value to research" (ATMG 2021, p 14).

In response to the research question about stakeholder inclusion in the collaboration models, further exploration and analysis are required. To do so, I used the analytical insights from the data and my observations from this chapter to inform the interview questions. The next chapters systematically examine the contributions of policymakers, academics, and experts to the Australian National Action Plan Against Modern Slavery (2020–2025), aiming to assess the initial impact of Australia's Modern Slavery Act on corporate reporting and

action, as well as identify the genuine challenges in addressing forced labour, as highlighted by field experts.

5 Australia's Response to Forced Labour

“I just think there’s no assessment of the outcomes or the impact of those roundtables and reports. And it’s literally, you know, they will call it collaboration, but to what extent does it ever get down where we can see, you know, a pilot or region or industry or, you know, in a particular sector where there’s something actually happening?”

(P9, Civil Society)

This quote articulates scepticism about the effectiveness of Australia’s anti-slavery collaboration models, which, despite intentions to foster dialogue and problem-solving, often fail to produce tangible outcomes. The respondent questions the practical application of “collaboration”, suggesting that it may represent a superficial approach rather than a genuine strategy. Another participant observed, “I think it would be really useful to just have evidence of what is effective, who is effective, what models are affected?” (P1, Legal & Academia).

In this context, I ask how is the early impact of Australia’s MSA influencing collaboration and action? Furthermore, how do government-led collaborations function and operate? These questions not only frame the subsequent analysis but also establish a context for examining the MSA’s real-world implications. The findings from this chapter contribute to the research question: *Why do stakeholder voices matter and how can they make a difference in multi-stakeholder collaborations to address forced labour in the supply chain?* Thus, this chapter explores the common ground in relation to current collaboration models and their actual effectiveness in addressing forced labour. This exploration is critical for assessing how stakeholder input influences the efficacy of measures against forced labour.

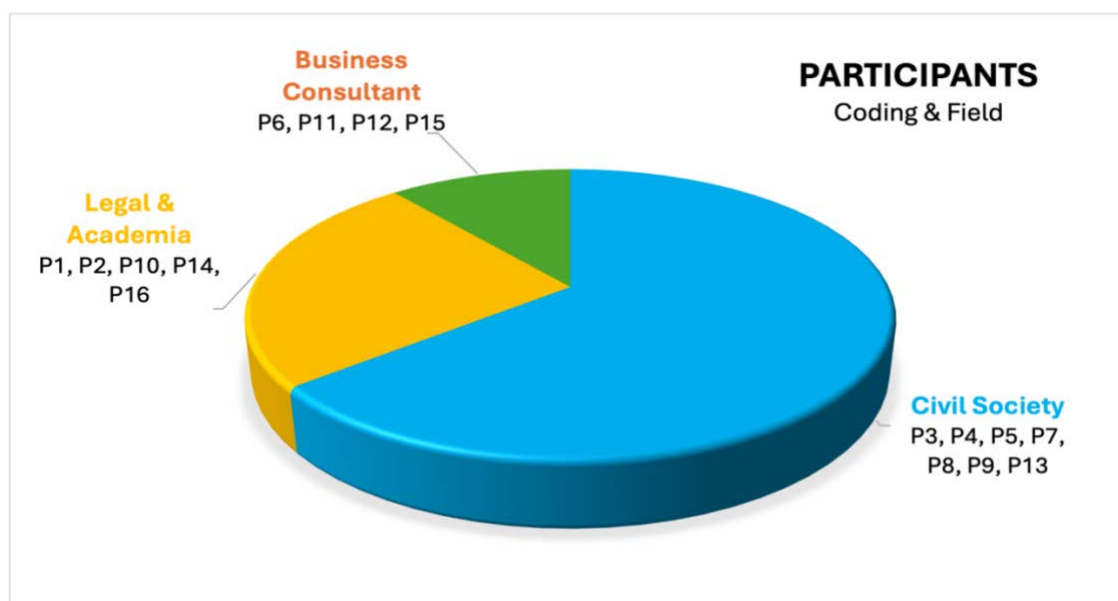
Building upon initial investigations, this study engaged directly with 16 experienced professionals in the Australian anti-slavery field (refer to Chapter 3 for comprehensive details). To guarantee the highest level of privacy, participants were assigned numerical identifiers and categorised based on their broad areas of expertise, as illustrated in **Figure 9**. I then extended

the findings with archival data (e.g., independent and government reports). Before presenting the interview findings, it is important to note the three-and-a-half-year gap between the public submissions to the NAP (January 2020), which were explored in the previous chapter, the longitudinal independent reports (2022–2023), the most recent government report *The Statutory Review* (May 2023), and the interviews conducted with experts on these submissions (May–October 2023).

This lapse of time is crucial for two reasons. **First**, it allowed me to conduct a more comprehensive analysis of the long-term impact and effectiveness of the strategies and policies initially proposed in the NAP. **Second**, the extended timeframe helped identify new trends, emerging issues, and evolving dynamics in the fight against forced labour, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the current landscape.

The aim of this study extends beyond simply verifying the presence of collaborative frameworks. It seeks to deliver an in-depth evaluation of the established mechanisms designed to tackle this issue, shedding light on their operational success and identifying opportunities for enhancement.

Figure 9 *Research Participants' Codes and Professional Sector*



The interview questions were crafted to be open-ended, thus facilitating fluid dialogue within the structured parameters of a semi-structured interview (see **Appendix 2** for sample questions). Initially, these discussions centred on Australia's anti-slavery measures and government-led collaborative frameworks. **Table 12** provides illustrative coding examples and relevant quotations for this chapter. This initial focus serves as a foundation for the subsequent chapters, which further explore the collaboration dynamics (**Chapter 6**) and the power in collaboratively tackling forced labour (**Chapter 7**).

Table 12 *Development of Initial and Final Interview Coding for This Chapter*

Illustrative Quotes	1st Order	2nd Order	General Theme
"Reading the three-year modern slavery review, you see this, you know, there's a lot of concern raised by small and medium-sized businesses about the impact on them." (P10, Legal & Academia)	Effectiveness	Measuring MSA Impact	
"Australia is sort of failing in its own domestic law and policy and also failing to	Inadequate		

engage with international law and policy on modern slavery.” (P16, Legal & Academia)			Chapter 5 Australia’s Response to Forced Labour
“I think that’s a real gap in Australia is that we don’t have much of [...] genuine community-based advocacy type, organisation.” (P1, Legal & Academia)	Advocacy Gap		
“I really value that (National Roundtable) as a tool for collaboration.” (P3, Civil Society).	Networking	Government-led Collaboration: The NAP	
“I would completely disband the National Roundtable; I think it’s an absolute joke. It’s a complete and utter waste of time [...] What has the National Roundtable achieved in 10 years of meeting, that it has achieved, 10 years of meetings. That’s it.” (P9, Civil Society)	Questioning		
“I think the roundtables should be much more, much broader.” (P16, Legal & Academia).	Improving		
“Getting on those advisory groups has been proven difficult.” (P14, Legal & Academia)	Inclusion	Policy Guidance: The Advisory Group	
“I think we just have governments like right now just relying on advisory boards of people who are academic about it.” (P13, Civil Society)	Diversity		
“I don’t think it’s always a harmonious collaboration, I think it’s full of tension.” (P11, Business Consultant)	Tensions		
“There is no traction on prosecuting bad businesses, there’s no process and it’s no advocacy to come away from bad businesses who have been identified.” (P15, Business Consultant)	Enforcement Failures	Corporate Transparency	
“We are not seeing shifts in business models, or responsible sourcing techniques [...] as a result of current law policy initiatives” (P2, Legal & Academia)	Failing		
“One of the things that comes up quite a lot is that the supply chain reporting isn’t going beyond the first tier.” (P10, Legal & Academia)	Expanding		

This chapter begins by providing a contextual background on the MSA, in the section "Evaluating the Effectiveness of the MSA". It offers an in-depth review from independent and governmental evaluations, focusing on the initial impact of the MSA on company reporting and actions. The narrative then shifts to explore government-led collaboration frameworks, notably

the National Roundtable on Human Trafficking and the Modern Slavery Expert Advisory Group. The discussion culminates with an examination of corporate responses to forced labour.

5.1 Evaluating the Effectiveness of the MSA

“Reading the three-year modern slavery review, you see this, you know, there’s a lot of concern raised by small and medium-sized businesses about the impact on them.”

(P10, Legal & Academia)

This quote highlights concerns raised by small and medium-sized businesses regarding the impact of the MSA on them. The Australian MSA is both a key topic of debate and a central tool in addressing forced labour. Its reliance on reporting mechanisms has been criticised for creating gaps between intentions and practices (Christ & Burritt, 2023). This section reviews independent reports and the Statutory Review to examine these gaps and offer a nuanced understanding of the MSA’s role in addressing forced labour in Australia.

Independent reports from the Human Rights Law Centre, such as *Paper Promises* (Sinclair et al., 2022), *Broken Promises* (Dinshaw et al., 2022), and *Australia’s MSA: Is It Fit for Purpose?* (Marshall et al., 2023), identify significant compliance gaps in high-risk industries, with many companies failing to meet MSA reporting standards or address forced labour risks effectively. The outcomes of the official three-year Statutory Review of the MSA, completed on 25 May 2023 and led by Professor John McMillan AO, synthesise stakeholder insights and independent evaluations, offering strategic recommendations.

Further commentary from the Australian Human Rights Institute at the University of New South Wales and the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre advocates for integrating HRDD to enhance corporate accountability. The Australian Human Rights Commission criticises the current approach to forced labour reporting as not being taken as seriously as required, recommending the appointment of an Anti-Slavery Commissioner to

strengthen enforcement. These perspectives underscore the urgent need for stricter enforcement and mandatory due diligence measures to ensure the MSA's effectiveness.

Independent Reports on Australia's MSA

Several independent studies have been conducted by organisations like the Australian Council of Superannuation Investors, Monash University Business School, and the Human Rights Law Centre. I will focus here on the reports produced by the Human Rights Law Centre, chosen for their longitudinal nature and alignment with the objectives of this research. These reports include *Paper Promises* (Sinclair et al., 2022), *Broken Promises* (Dinshaw et al., 2022), and *Australia's MSA: Is It Fit for Purpose?* (Marshall et al., 2023). The report ***Paper Promises? Evaluating the Early Impact of Australia's Modern Slavery Act on Company Reporting and Action*** (Sinclair et al., 2022) critically examined the impact of the MSA on the mitigation of modern slavery within Australian supply chains. Through the analysis of 102 company statements across sectors with high vulnerability to modern slavery risks—namely, the garment industry in China, healthcare in Malaysia (specifically rubber gloves), fruit picking in Australia, and the seafood sector in Thailand—the study scrutinised the extent to which companies comply with the MSA's reporting criteria.

The findings present a troubling scenario: only 23 out of 102 companies (approximately 23%) fully align with the MSA's compulsory reporting requirements. This shortfall underscores a significant misalignment between legislative aims and corporate conduct. Furthermore, the analysis highlights that 52% of companies fail to adequately identify or disclose key forced labour risks, underlining inconsistencies in addressing forced labour risks, with smaller companies often outperforming larger ones. Therefore, the report suggests enhancing corporate responsibility and legislative impact through several strategies, such as the development of comprehensive remediation processes, the adoption of proactive measures to combat forced labour, and the consideration of penalties for non-compliance. Scholars emphasise the need to foster genuine HRDD practices within corporations, ensuring

accountability that moves beyond procedural formalities to achieve substantial compliance with human rights norms (Nolan & McCorquodale, 2022).

The report ***Broken Promises: Two Years of Corporate Reporting under Australia's Modern Slavery Act*** (Dinshaw et al., 2022) advanced the initial evaluation of corporate compliance with the MSA by examining 92 “second round” statements from the original sample. This selection, slightly reduced from the initial 102 due to some companies not publishing subsequent statements, was pivotal in facilitating a longitudinal insight into the Act’s impact within the Australian corporate environment. The report findings reinforced the consensus among scholars that “the MSA was a useful first step in regulating business and human rights in Australia, but the time has come for more robust regime if we are serious about tackling modern slavery and human rights abuses” (McGaughey et al., 2024, p. 87).

The report offers three key recommendations: **First**, amend the MSA to strengthen enforcement and oversight of reporting requirements. **Second**, mandate HRDD for companies to address modern slavery risks, with clear accountability for non-compliance. **Third**, foster collaboration between the Australian Government and businesses to enhance the legal framework and improve practices against modern slavery.

The final report, ***Australia's Modern Slavery Act: IS IT FIT FOR PURPOSE*** (Marshall et al., 2023) critically evaluated the efficacy of the MSA against its intended legislative goals within the Australian corporate and supply chain context. Leveraging survey and focus group data from 2022 and 2023, the report revealed significant gaps between the Act’s objectives and its practical application, particularly benefiting victims-survivors of forced labour and the prevalent view among stakeholders that, despite the MSA enhancing awareness, it predominantly serves as a mechanism for superficial adherence.

Scholars argue that without penalties and the complexity of supply chains, the MSA struggles to enforce corporate accountability against forced labour (McGaughey et al., 2024; Nolan & McCorquodale, 2022). Therefore, improving business relationships with suppliers and

key stakeholders such as trade unions is critical (Nolan & Frishling, 2019). This is particularly important as poor communication between organisations and suppliers can lead to unauthorised subcontracting to inferior facilities, with suppliers attempting to navigate rigid contractual obligations (Baumann-Pauly & Trabelsi, 2021). In essence, the report advocates for more meaningful compliance by aligning the MSA with international standards, mandating HRDD and the appointment of an Anti-Slavery Commissioner, which was later advertised. It also calls for penalties and government contract exclusion for non-compliance.

Overall, the collective findings of these extensive reports emphasise the urgent need for businesses to take substantial action against forced labour and push for governmental reforms of the MSA, moving beyond mere compliance. This shift represents not only a legal requirement but a significant ethical commitment, as recognised by scholarly consensus (Nolan & Frishling, 2019; Wettstein, 2021). To complement these reports, researchers developed The Good Practice Toolkit: Strengthening Modern Slavery Responses to guide businesses, government, and organisations on the MSA and HRDD, emphasising stakeholder engagement and collaboration (Nolan et al., 2023). The objective is to bridge the gap between policy and practice, ensuring effectiveness and inclusivity in Australia's approach to tackling forced labour. I now turn to an analysis of the official report, assessing the effectiveness of legislative measures against forced labour as outlined in the Statutory Review Report of Australia's MSA.

Three-Year Statutory Review of Australia's Modern Slavery Act

The statutory review, mandated by the MSA, began on 31 March 2022 to assess the first three years of the MSA's operation. Led by Professor John McMillan AO, the report concluded with the release of findings on 25 May 2023, providing a detailed evaluation of the Act's effectiveness and underlining areas for improvement (McMillan, 2023). The statutory review was informed by a wide array of inputs, including submissions, online questionnaires, and surveys. Additionally, it entailed consultation with 285 organisations, along with 65 further

discussions involving government officials within Australia and internationally. Contributors involved stakeholders across various sectors, including businesses, government bodies, civil society, academia, labour unions, charities, and professional associations.

Although the statutory report acknowledges and incorporates insights from independent reports and involves consultations with researchers, it refrains from explicitly endorsing or pre-assessing their findings (McMillan, 2023). This hesitation is consistent with some research on collaborations to address the SDGs, demonstrating that governments frequently “raise questions about the ‘legality, governance and accountability’ of MSCs models, particularly when these initiatives challenge public sector interests” (Eweje et al., 2021, p. 194).

On 25 May 2023, the Australian Government released a report with thirty strategic recommendations to enhance the Act's effectiveness. A central recommendation calls for decreasing the reporting threshold from AU\$100 million to AU\$50 million, thereby expanding the scope of entities covered under the MSA (McMillan, 2023). Subsequent research has indicated that a high turnover threshold implies several medium- to large-sized businesses are beyond the law's scope; the research further criticises the legislation for lacking penalties for non-compliance (Pryde et al., 2024). The 2023 Report also recommends establishing a mandatory due diligence system, expanding reporting criteria and detailing procedures for high-risk scenarios along with punitive measures for non-compliance or misinformation.

A central proposal is the creation of a Commonwealth Anti-Slavery Commissioner role to oversee compliance and monitor at-risk industries (McMillan, 2023). This position is crucial for fostering collaboration by serving as a central authority to coordinate efforts, align stakeholder priorities, and promote collective action across sectors to combat forced labour. On 30 November 2023, the Federal Government announced its intention to establish this position, signalling a commitment to combating forced labour, though it has not yet been implemented (Australian Attorney-General's Department, 2023). The report has generated

mixed opinions among experts regarding Australia's Modern Slavery Statutory Review, as the following section outlines.

Expert Commentary on Australia's Modern Slavery Statutory Review

The Human Rights Law Centre's publication on May 26, 2023, evaluates the Statutory Review Report (Human Rights Law Centre, 2023). The article supports the report's recommendations and urges the Australian Government to enforce them but critiques the report for failing to propose a legally enforceable obligation requiring corporations to proactively prevent forced labour, exposing a significant legislative gap. Scholars argue that rigorous legal frameworks are necessary to mandate corporate responsibility in combating forced labour (Nolan & Boersma, 2019). The current voluntary approach permits excessive corporate discretion, undermining the legislation's purpose.

To address this issue, Nolan advocates for incorporating HRDD into the legal framework, which would require companies to thoroughly assess and address the human rights impacts of their operations. But what does HRDD truly entail? It is an extensive and anticipatory process demanding that businesses not only assess and integrate but also act upon and disclose both the direct and indirect human rights implications of their operations (McGaughey et al., 2024; Nolan & Boersma, 2019; Tobalagba, 2020). This process is seen as vital for enhancing corporate accountability and legislative efficacy in addressing modern slavery. Sinclair adds to this discussion by emphasising the global responsibility of businesses to actively address exploitation in their supply chains. She views the findings of the Statutory Review Report as crucial to setting practical standards that can significantly improve the conditions of individuals within these supply chains, providing clear guidance for the Australian Government.

Complementing these discussions, an independent article published in July 2023 by the Australian Human Rights Commission, titled "What businesses need to know about the Modern Slavery Review", (Finlay & Turl, 2023), highlights a concerning trend, namely that

modern slavery reporting is not being treated with the seriousness it requires. This observation supports scholarly critiques of the disclosure-based model, which depends on transparency-driven regulation by businesses and subcontracted market enforcement yet clearly lacks robust State-based enforcement mechanisms (Harris & Nolan, 2022). These analyses suggest that appointing an anti-slavery commissioner could bridge these critical gaps by providing the necessary oversight and coordination to enhance the impact of the MSA.

Thus, the Statutory Review and independent reports on Australia's MSA reveal substantial gaps between the law's intentions and actual corporate compliance in high-risk sectors like garments, healthcare, horticulture, and seafood, among others. However, more than a year on, "the Australian government has still not responded to the review recommendations. (Nolan, 2024, p. 1). Overall, the findings from public and independent reports indicate a significant shortfall in companies fully meeting the MSA's reporting requirements, highlighting the necessity for more robust enforcement and the introduction of mandatory due diligence measures. Additionally, recommendations for establishing the role of a Commonwealth Anti-Slavery Commissioner, which will be announced soon, aim to bolster accountability and collaboration.

Now that we have examined public and independent reports on Australia's response to forced labour, the study participants' insights regarding current collaboration models to address this issue will be examined next.

5.2 Government-led Collaboration: The National Roundtable

The National Roundtable was "set up by the Australian government [...] currently under the auspices of the Attorney General's department" (P8, Civil Society). In theory, its main goal is to provide a fair platform for all participants to share insights on eradicating slavery. A participant confirmed the diversity of voices represented at the Roundtable:

There's some very large civil society organisations in there [...] there are union bodies [...] government departments are part of it [...] Human Rights Commissioner as part of the Roundtable. So, there is a fair coverage of the types of voices there. (P8, Civil Society)

While some participants portray the Roundtable as an effective and inclusive collaboration framework, others have raised concerns. For instance:

I am not sure what the ongoing process is for any changes or having new members [...] I haven't seen anything that might indicate if there is a process where that can happen. (P8, Civil Society)

A respondent from a different sector even articulated a sense of exclusion from these roundtables, particularly for those not affiliated with certain organisations or industries:

I haven't found the roundtables particularly inclusive; it was very difficult to be involved if [...] not a member of an NGO or a university or invited [...] they're not going to get an invitation because you don't look like you're an expert in the field. So, I think it was quite an exclusive organisation. (P16, Legal & Academia)

As we can observe, respondents from two different sectors identified critical tensions within the roundtable collaboration framework. Thus, while two participants found it effective and valuable, the other two criticised its lack of clarity and transparency, which can limit inclusivity. This lack of inclusivity may contribute to perceptions of bias or unequal representation within the framework. Researchers state that favouritism constitutes a breach of trust because it undermines anticipated standards of fairness (Crane, 2020). While favouritism directly undermines trust through partial treatment, 'representational' issues generate additional tensions by questioning the legitimacy of stakeholders within collaboration frameworks. Echoing this, scholars state that conflicts in collaboration frameworks frequently originate from "representational" issues, determining which stakeholders are considered legitimate experts (Gray & Purdy, 2018). To further illustrate this point, one respondent

highlighted the overrepresentation of NGOs at the Roundtable that are not directly involved in compliance with the MSA:

And the members of the Roundtable, like, quite frankly, their kitchen table, teeny weeny not for profits [...] they don't have supply chains and not having to write modern slavery statements and not complying with the act. (P9, Civil Society)

This comment suggests a perceived hierarchy among stakeholders in roundtable discussions, where entities, especially smaller NGOs not involved in drafting modern slavery statements, are deemed less integral to anti-slavery conversations. It also undervalues their contributions, like victim support, human rights advocacy, and awareness-raising, thereby hindering meaningful collaboration. On the other hand, one participant noted that civil society organisations struggle to secure a role in government-led collaboration models:

It's very hard for civil society organisations to get a seat at the table. So, once they have it, they don't want to give it up [...] and that potentially could be a barrier to letting new voices in if you have established voices. (P10, Legal & Academia)

Studies indicate that the public sector often excludes NGOs from decision-making roles and provides them with limited opportunities for meaningful collaboration (Rajabi et al., 2021). This issue is controversial for two reasons. **First**, these organisations represent vulnerable populations and excluding them can lead to biased policies that neglect these groups' needs (Jones & Lutze, 2016). **Second**, when civil society organisations secure a seat, some refuse to renounce it, limiting other stakeholders' involvement and collaboration. In this context, scholars recommend selecting partners with a significant interest in and expertise on the issue at hand, ensuring that all relevant stakeholders are included (Waddock, 2013). Echoing this, another participant mentioned:

It's important that we factor [in] the whole of stakeholders that affect human rights purpose, that affects the human rights movement. You know, if Australian business is not

in that space, let's put them on the Roundtable [...] that's really important that we keep those key people in there. (P15, Business Consultant)

This comment stresses the need to include diverse stakeholders from business and civil society, especially those often marginalised in human rights discussions, for comprehensive and effective advocacy. As one respondent suggested:

I think the roundtables should be much more, much broader [...] in relation to Indigenous issues. [...] you've got to have indigenous people at the same table. (P16, Legal & Academia)

The effectiveness of this model often falls short in practice, particularly in governmental engagements with diverse stakeholder groups. For example, one participant highlighted a significant deviation from the Roundtable's intended purpose:

There's no connection by the Australian Government. They never ever bring NGOs together in the same room as business, they always keep them separate. They talk to business over here, they talk to not-for-profits over here. (P9, Civil Society)

This practice of holding discussions in separate groups directly contradicts the foundational aim of the Roundtable to foster inclusive and egalitarian dialogue. However, as scholars have argued, governments often convene partners and shape the collaborative agenda based on their own perspectives and authority (Gray & Purdy, 2018). These practices compromise collaborative integrity, potentially biasing outcomes in favour of more powerful participants. Adding to this, a participant from a different sector raised concerns about the fragmentation of groups in collaboration models and its potential consequences:

I'm not particularly impressed with the roundtable system diversified into separate groups; that could be even more risky that you haven't got a holistic approach to what needs to be done. And it increases that separation between tackling organised crime and slavery in supply chains. (P16, Legal & Academia)

This division severely undermines opportunities for the essential collaboration and dialogue needed to address forced labour. Direct stakeholder cooperation and face-to-face interaction are crucial for fostering trust and mutual understanding, key to achieving effective solutions (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Working groups related to the roundtables exemplify this approach: “The working groups coming out of the Roundtable are probably where that kind of collaboration is best facilitated” (P4, Civil Society). Additionally, another respondent shared their experience with working groups:

when we did the working group around issues with supply chain [...], we had a group of businesses involved in that collaboration who were very active and engaged. And I think [...] the discussions there [...] got more active and more engaged. (P7, Civil Society)

This comment highlights that active business participation in supply chain working groups enhances discussions and collaboration effectiveness, underscoring the importance of engaged stakeholders for achieving meaningful outcomes. Echoing this, another participant from a different sector stated:

I think there should be more company-level business stakeholders in the Roundtable, [...] like large employers in Australia that have 60,000 employees throughout the country. I think that's certainly an opportunity to engage. (P12, Business Consultant)

This suggests a gap in the Roundtable's composition regarding major business involvement in combating forced labour. However, another participant questioned the actual contribution of business representatives.

I can remember they've been peak business bodies [...], and a number of them, they attend infrequently. And even if they do attend, they pretty much say nothing at the meeting. So there's not a lot of benefit to that. (P7, Civil Society)

This objection suggests that business entities' sporadic attendance and lack of active engagement do not significantly contribute to the Roundtable's objectives. The reason, as

some scholars suggest, may be that some parties withhold information or effort in partnerships to gain or retain power, hindering collaboration (Gray & Purdy, 2018).

A further issue is stakeholder exclusion. One participant expressed their concern: “We’re not a party to the National Roundtable because we’re not sort of civil society enough” (P12, Business Consultant), suggesting bias towards specific civil society organisations. Scholars suggest that when some stakeholders cannot participate equally due to limitations in resources or status, the process becomes susceptible to manipulation by more powerful actors (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Therefore, it is critical to support broad participation and ensure all stakeholders are treated equally.

Roundtable Frustration

One respondent pointed out limitations in the Roundtable’s approach, particularly in managing domestic issues and gender-related aspects, contributing to dissatisfaction with its overall effectiveness:

I think there’s a very significant focus on migrants and transnational or international issues. There was very little recognition of problems within Australia [...] there’s a focus almost to ignore issues that relate to women just trying to look at it in a gender-neutral way. (P16, Legal & Academia)

The “start over” approach commonly triggered by new government administrations in collaborative models further complicates matters, as highlighted in stakeholder frustrations:

Every time there’s a new government in place, we keep going back to the drawing board [...] it is important to have genuine people on the Roundtable, making sure that when that change happens from government, we still have people that are passionate about moving things forward, even though the government systems have changed a bit. Because everyone will change the system to suit their principles of leadership. (P15, Business Consultant)

This emphasises the vital need for consistent engagement and genuine dedication in collaborative efforts, regardless of political changes. Moreover, repetitive and unproductive meetings were also underscored as a source of frustration, as mentioned by one participant:

It's just literally captive government bureaucrats saying, "Oh, isn't this great? [...] we need a survivor compensation" [...]. Everyone says the same stuff every year [...] like you could have hit the replay button; nothing has changed. (P9, Civil Society)

This comment highlights the need to reassess whether these collaboration models are merely ceremonial, which would require a shift in the National Roundtable's goals towards more results-driven initiatives. Additionally, a critical review of the research quality presented by stakeholders may be needed, as underscored by one participant:

The Australian Institute of Criminology, like, gave a report on [...] people who would come out of trafficking situations, survivors [...]. They did this whole 50-page report on the most, the highest need for people escaping from sex trafficking was housing. I could have told you [...] it's that kind of research where it doesn't progress anything. (P9, Civil Society)

This comment reflects a broader sentiment that the research, while potentially valuable, often states the obvious and does not significantly advance the understanding or resolution of key issues. For instance, it fails to explore

the drivers or the intersection of [...] international student fees [...] housing shortage, is that maybe driving people into sex trafficking, sex business? [...] I came all the way to Canberra to hear that. And then the ambassador for anti-human trafficking, you know, read out the list of countries that she visited, and it's like, again, what's the impact? What are we measuring? (P9, Civil Society)

This critique underscores a deep concern about the depth and practical relevance of the research, questioning its capacity to probe into the root causes and assess the effectiveness of anti-slavery initiatives.

These differing stakeholder perspectives highlight critical tensions regarding the Roundtable's operations, with stakeholders questioning its effectiveness and whether the limited frequency of meetings exacerbates broader concerns about its impact. As highlighted by a participant from civil society: "It only meets twice a year. But there are some correspondences that happen in between those meetings, and between the NGOs on the roundtable" (P8, Civil Society). This suggests that while the frequency of meetings is limited, ongoing interactions continue to engage stakeholders. In contrast, another participant expressed significant concerns about government representatives' neglect undermining the Roundtable's impact:

Supposedly, the government ministers are meant to attend twice a year. This was the one they were meant to attend. The Attorney General stayed for another half an hour [...] Penny Wong, the Foreign Minister didn't come. Justine Elliot didn't come, Amanda Rishworth didn't come [...] great. That was some ministerial roundtable. (P9, Civil Society)

This absence of high-ranking officials raises questions about the government's commitment to addressing modern slavery effectively and collaboratively. Considering this, it becomes apparent that a more balanced representation and engagement of stakeholders in the Roundtable is needed. Scholars suggest that improving collaborations demands a unified approach to recognising and evaluating "impact", critical for assessing their effectiveness and contributions more accurately (Van Tulder et al., 2016). Moreover, successful collaboration on any issue demands a connection to tangible plans and concrete actions to keep people engaged (Ansell & Gash, 2008).

In this context, the government can create more inclusive and effective collaboration models; however, their approach

seems very closed door and if you don't know people, then how do you get into that door? [...] And I think that they should also not work in a top-down approach [...] they

need to work from bottom up, and maybe also a level playing field. (P14, Legal & Academia)

In essence, these observations highlight the need for government agencies to adopt a more transparent approach to stakeholder input. Feedback from experts revealed a prominent dichotomy: while a few acknowledge the roundtable potential for collaboration, many express dissatisfaction with unclear membership processes and the exclusion of key stakeholder voices. It also emphasises the importance of exploring collaborations from multiple levels of analysis, which is the focus of this study, to provide a holistic perspective. Addressing these critical issues will enable the roundtable to truly fulfil its intended role as an effective mechanism in the global fight against modern slavery, including forced labour.

As I conclude the discussion on the National Roundtable, I transition to examining another government-led initiative: the recently established Modern Slavery Expert Advisory Group. This introduction prompts a critical evaluation: Does this new collaborative framework function effectively, or does it replicate the limitations observed in the roundtable? The exploration of this question will further illuminate the challenges and potential of government-led efforts in addressing forced labour.

5.3 Policy Guidance: The Modern Slavery Expert Advisory Group

"I have no idea what the modern slavery expert advisory group does. I have no idea what they do. I don't know what they've achieved." (P14, Legal & Academia)

This comment from a respondent, an expert in the anti-slavery domain, underscores critical issues concerning the visibility and impact of the Australian Expert Advisory Group on Modern Slavery. Established in 2020, the group's mandate is to "advise on the effective implementation of the Act in Australia." (P2, Legal & Academia). Government advisory boards play an essential role in addressing pivotal issues. As one participant mentioned, "looking at the government, what they've tended to have is advisory boards." (P10, Legal & Academia)

However, participants also noted the challenges in securing a position on these advisory groups, stating that “it’s really hard to get into to get yourself an invitation to those things” (P16, Legal & Academia). These comments underscore that access to advisory groups involves complex, opaque selection processes, not just professional qualifications, highlighting the need for transparent and equitable criteria to ensure fairness. Scholars suggest that this aspect in the development and formation of collaborations increasingly relies on hierarchy as the primary governance mode (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998).

The transparency of these advisory groups has been consistently questioned. The opacity within these collaborative frameworks complicates public understanding and accountability, potentially diminishing their effectiveness in influencing policy and practice. As one respondent stated,

I don't know what advice they've [advisory group] ever given. I don't know. I don't know if I don't know that because I've not looked it up [...]. Now, the website tells me absolutely nothing about what they've done. I have no idea what they've done. (P14, Legal & Academia)

The combination of these issues raises questions about the equitable formation and operational integrity of government advisory boards, potentially undermining the Australian Expert Advisory Group on Modern Slavery’s role in effectively tackling forced labour. If experts in the anti-slavery field are uncertain about the group’s activities, how can we expect the broader public to be informed and engaged? This gap between “expectation and track record” raises questions about the effectiveness of MSCs (Eweje et al., 2021, p. 194). The government failure to disclose information about the group’s outcomes undermines transparency and creates doubts about the rigour of the selection criteria and formation processes, suggesting significant inequities or inconsistencies in its establishment.

Stakeholder Representation

The nature and influence of the voices included in the Advisory Group have also raised concerns. Both the transparency of the selection processes and the qualifications of those selected have been questioned. According to one participant, the group initially consisted predominantly of “business and business representatives [...] there was no trade union representation, there was very little civil society representation” (P2, Legal & Academia).

Describing the group’s makeup, one participant noted:

There was, like, all these corporates on there, and a couple of academics that no one had ever heard of. And, like one or two NGOs, and no trade unions, like none of the kind of really like hard-hitting academics were involved. Like, just it was a really strange lineup.
(P11, Business Consultant)

Following the comments from experts in different fields, the evident lack of diversity within the Advisory Group becomes apparent. It is crucial to address this issue, as unresolved representational deficiencies can lead to the failure of such collaborations (Gray & Purdy, 2018). This situation raises critical questions: Who determines membership in these advisory groups? And what criteria are used for selection? As one respondent stated:

Who gets on these advisory groups? So the processes behind, you know, government choosing who gets on these advisory groups [...] So there’s two parts to it, right?! So there’s the yes, it’s a good idea. And then to who gets on those advisory groups, so and [...] who makes those decisions?” (P14, Legal & Academia)

Scholars suggest that using public engagement processes like advisory groups does not guarantee that participants find their involvement meaningful, nor does it ensure that these processes are inclusive, fair, and transparent (Page et al., 2015). Moreover, the risks associated with such a selection approach were further elaborated by the same respondent:

If it's left in government, they may decide that they weren't the people who might be for them, you know, people who might have similar political beliefs as the current government in. (P14, Legal & Academia)

Another participant from a different organisation confirmed these concerns:

The government [...] tends to choose people who might not be critical on certain things. [...] like having nobody with supply chain expertise on the advisory board. (P10, Legal & Academia)

These comments reflect the government's tendency to select individuals who echo its views, reducing the quality and effectiveness of collaborative models. Management scholars argue that prioritising certain stakeholders over others, based on the "subjective nature of criteria for judging fairness", can lead to significant repercussions (Crane, 2020, p. 277).

In this context, one participant highlighted the prevailing practice of invitation-based selection, noting the difficulty in securing an invitation: "I think Australia has a bit of a tradition of inviting of asking, who do we know?" (P16, Legal & Academia). This reliance on invitations can perpetuate exclusion, limiting the diversity of voices and contributing to the ambiguity surrounding inclusion on the advisory board. Research indicates that governments often see NGOs as passive, more focused on slogans than action, and criticise their lack of transparency (Rajabi et al., 2021). Such biases underscore the critical need for enhanced transparency and impartiality in the selection criteria.

Accordingly, scholars suggest that careful process design is crucial in mitigating power imbalances and enhancing diversity, ensuring that all stakeholders impacted by the problem are provided with the opportunity to participate (Gray & Purdy, 2018). These issues underscore the need for a thorough critical examination of the group's inclusivity and selection criteria, ensuring it effectively encompasses diverse perspectives essential for a comprehensive approach to modern slavery.

Stakeholder Expertise

The concept of “expertise” within the Advisory Group is a subject of continuing debate. As participants suggested:

There was a call for expressions of interest, and the government chose the people they wanted. And I did think, yes, these are all ... these are experts. But are they experts in the specific issues that are raised by the Act? (P10, Legal & Academia)

Further discussing stakeholder participation in these models, respondents observed that “government should be consulting with the experts in the area. And I just don't think that really happens regularly” (P14, Legal & Academia). Another participant observed about the selection process: “I'm not really sure; I gather that they are looking for very experienced leaders in business and heads” (P13, Civil Society).

These comments collectively underscore widespread scepticism about the adequacy of stakeholder representation and expertise in multi-stakeholder collaborations. Complementing this view, scholars have found that when MSC stakeholders are homogeneous—sharing similar organisational types, sectors, or underlying values—their priorities and interests are more likely to align, facilitating consensus and collaboration (Selsky & Parker, 2005). One participant expressed concerns about a divergence in expertise selection,

I know there was concern [...] the first two academics they selected, although they were very good people on broad issues of modern slavery, neither of them was a supply chain expert. They were both more in the sexual exploitation of children [...] which isn't what the Modern Slavery Act does. (P10, Legal & Academia)

Furthermore, the practical experience of advisory group participants is crucial. One participant emphasised a gap between academic research and hands-on experience:

They've studied it at universities and done research, but they've never actually worked with survivors [...]. We've still got this big divide between practitioners and people that are heading now advisory boards for government and heading advisory boards for corporates and companies. (P13, Civil Society)

This observation raises concerns that the lack of practical experience with survivors among some advisory members may lead to an oversight of the depth and practical insights needed to effectively tackle the complexities of forced labour. Such a shortfall underscores the challenges and tensions inherent in formulating policies that fully grasp the nuanced realities faced by those affected.

Group Dynamics

Stakeholders typically enter collaboration models with diverse objectives, organisational structures, and cultural backgrounds (Weber et al., 2021), which can lead to significant tensions among them (Boersma, 2018; Quayle et al., 2019). As one participant illustrated:

As a multi-stakeholder space, there's a lot of decoding that has to happen before we can get, you know, those sorts of voices into like the business offices to sort of, you know, to connect the dots there, a lot of work to do to make sure that's done safely and effectively. (P12, Business Consultant)

The participant's reference to "decoding" suggests a process of conversion and adaptation, guaranteeing that wide-ranging viewpoints are transferred in a way that is understandable and applicable within and across different sectors and stakeholder groups. This attitude is critical for promoting effective and meaningful cooperation.

A sense of frustration was also a prominent element in the discussions, reflecting stakeholders' disappointment with the lack of transparency and accessibility regarding the Advisory Group's activities and outcomes:

Why is something like this, which is a major national advisory group. Why haven't they got ... Why isn't there somewhere on the website that talks about the work that they've done? I don't know what they've done. (P14, Legal & Academia)

This response highlights perceived deficiencies in transparency and trust regarding the Advisory Group's activities and achievements. It also points to broader issues of accountability, as the lack of information undermines trust in the Advisory Group's effectiveness. While trust typically develops through the process of collaboration (Gray & Purdy, 2018), it remains a critical determinant of success in such interactions (Sloan & Oliver, 2013).

Echoing this point, one participant underscored the importance of trust, respect, and mutuality in collaborative interactions: "I think those issues around trust, respect, and mutuality are really, really important" (P4, Civil Society). Trust plays a critical role in promoting effective relationships essential for collaboration and value creation (Barney & Harrison, 2020). Reinforcing this perspective, another participant articulated the practical impact of trust dynamics: "As you build trust, you get more response. If you've got less trust, you have less response and less engagement" (P12, Business Consultant).

These statements collectively illustrate a direct and measurable relationship between trust and the level of response and engagement in collaborative frameworks. Scholars suggest that limited communication channels and information exchange between stakeholders foster mutual distrust, further emphasising the need for robust communication strategies in these settings (Rajabi et al., 2021). Such insights compellingly argue for the strategic development of trust to amplify both participation and the overall effectiveness of these collaborations.

Moving Forward

How can the Advisory Group implement a more holistic and effective approach to collaboration? One participant mentioned, "communication for me is key" (P14, Legal &

Academia). Other participants shared valuable insights aimed at enhancing the group's efficacy, highlighting the need for clear objectives:

They've got a purpose or an objective, but [...] I've sat there for a while [...] starts at nine o'clock, it goes to four o'clock. There's just report after report [...] for me, a useful conversation would be like, what happens after. (P9, Civil Society)

In this context, a structural change in the Advisory Group was proposed by another participant, suggesting a shift towards a more action-oriented mission: "Change the structure of the Advisory Group and change its mission to make it a much more positive requirement that government is actually seeking positive change" (P16, Legal & Academia).

This would involve gathering "business, civil society, and government more regularly" (P11, Business Consultant) and moving beyond infrequent meetings to more continuous engagement: "It's got to be more than [...] an advisory group that meets three or four times a year" (P14, Legal & Academia). Moreover, stakeholders with lived experience are critical to include in these collaboration models. For instance, "workers and survivors of forced labour are the ones who are less likely to be getting into those bodies [collaboration models]" (P2, Legal & Academia). This may be due to the lack of genuine community-based advocacy organisations. As one expert stated, "we don't have that sort of genuine community-based advocacy-type organisation" (P1, Legal & Academia). Another respondent highlighted that "it's a big issue to leave survivor voice out. But it's also a very fraught situation as to how to best support survivor voice to be included" (P8, Civil Society).

Therefore, developing strategies to effectively engage workers in anti-slavery conversations is crucial. One participant emphasised

You mustn't treat them [...] as always, the subjects of research. They should be involved in the discussion, give them a voice [...]. But unless you've got systems set up, you're never going to find anybody with lived experience. (P16, Legal & Academia)

Including survivors in conversations without adequate system support or consent can lead to significant risks of re-traumatisation. Echoing this, another participant stated:

So now there's that lived experience advisory group. But the bureaucrats are so terrified of them. They don't even know what to say or ask [...] to consult on. It's like, oh, great, we've got survivors of slavery in the room. Yay. Okay, what do we do now? (P9, Civil Society)

These comments emphasise the importance of adequately preparing stakeholders for meaningful engagement with others, ensuring conversations are respectful, well-informed, and constructive while providing them with the agency to choose their level of participation. This approach aligns with the restorative justice framework, suggesting that survivors should also take the lead in shaping the direction, format, and engagement of alternative justice practices (Yu et al., 2018).

In essence, the exploration of the Advisory Group highlights the need for significant reform to improve its efficacy and integrity. Concerns centre on the group's lack of transparency and the ambiguousness of its activities and achievements, which undermine its role in combating forced labour. Legal, academic, and civil society experts underscore the necessity for a transparent, inclusive, and action-oriented approach. Effective reform requires clear and public selection processes that ensure diverse and competent representation, including stakeholders directly affected by forced labour. Additionally, the group must integrate practical insights with theoretical knowledge to provide relevant and actionable advice.

As we move forward, the government must lead by example, demonstrating the values of transparency, accountability, and collaboration it demands from corporations in their anti-slavery collaboration initiatives. By embodying these principles, the Advisory Group can enhance its credibility and contribute more effectively to the fight against forced labour. This approach will not only improve the group's policy impact but also strengthen Australia's overall efforts to eradicate forced labour, ensuring that the national Modern Slavery Expert Advisory

Group can fulfil its intended role as a pivotal element of the national anti-slavery strategy. Building on these foundational principles, the next section explores corporate responses to forced labour.

5.4 Corporate Response to Forced Labour

“All of these companies doing their risk analysis. But no one knows, no one knows what that data says because they will provide a very, very, very brief overview in their modern slavery statements.” (P1, Legal & Academia)

This respondent’s observation highlights the opacity in corporate reporting, where brief and superficial modern slavery statements obscure the tangible due diligence undertaken by businesses. This observation aligns with Doorey’s (2011) argument that organisations may avoid disclosing details about their supply chains, emphasising the importance of meaningful transparency to enhance corporate accountability. The MSA requires companies to disclose only their practices rather than mandating proactive measures (Sinclair & Nolan, 2020). This has unveiled a phenomenon known as the “transparency fallacy”, positing that mere transparency does not necessarily engender socially responsible behaviour (Islam & Van Staden, 2021). This issue is further compounded by the low prevalence of human rights policy commitments among Australia’s largest publicly listed corporations, reflecting broader gaps in corporate and cultural engagement with transparency and accountability (Wheeler, 2019). To address this, one respondent emphasised:

I think what we need to have is a greater articulation, a good map, perhaps even a greater prescription of what companies should be up to [...]. If they’re now up to their third or fourth modern slavery statement, we need to really see some sizable changes happening, it’s not happening. (P6, Business Consultant)

One participant suggested that a possible reason for the lack of commitment observed in reports could be attributed to concerns over cost:

I think the pressure is that organisations have come up with a notional cost. And they've said we can't afford to report. I don't believe those notional cost figures. But equally, I think human life is more important than in the administration. So, you've got to find ways for businesses to be able to report it. (P16, Legal & Academia)

This perspective prompts a critical question: Are financial constraints compromising the depth of reporting, necessitating a re-evaluation of how costs are prioritised over the moral duty to address human rights issues? Numerous multinational corporations face multiple overlapping reporting obligations with varying focuses, which underscores this challenge (McGaughey et al., 2022). This also emphasises the critical need for more transparent and meticulous reporting mechanisms that allow for a greater understanding of how businesses are addressing issues of forced labour.

In an era characterised by increasing public demand for corporate accountability, it becomes imperative for business managers to grasp the interplay between their ethical practices and the foundational business model of their companies (Freeman et al., 2019). Nonetheless, the implementation of efficacious reporting strategies remains insufficiently developed, resulting in stakeholder dissatisfaction concerning the ethical standards of businesses. This sentiment is reflected in the following participant comment:

They [businesses] should actually feel empathy for the people who are being harmed, right, they should actually care, they should be motivated [...] not just tick box compliance with the law, but actually be concerned about the well-being of people. (P7, Civil Society)

This highlights the importance of nurturing authentic empathy and ethical responsibility within business practices. As scholars suggest, "managers should put themselves in the shoes of those who are going to be touched for better or worse by corporate action" (Gibson, 2017, p. 210). However, many organisations, especially in sectors with significant social and environmental effects (e.g., mining), utilise stakeholder input as a figurative camouflage "to avoid substantive action" (Acuti et al., 2024, p. 1). Scholars warn that increased regulation

may not change corporate practices, as it could shift the focus to performing due diligence rather than ensuring it effectively eradicates human rights risks in supply chains (Schrempf-Stirling & Van Buren III, 2024). Consequently, a thorough investigation into the motivations and determinants that result in varying levels of business engagement with reporting laws becomes imperative. Such scrutiny is vital for unravelling the intricacies of compliance and fostering a culture of transparency (McGaughey et al., 2022). As one participant noted,

having to consider human rights in whatever business decisions and making. I know that those things are often already happening on paper, and that's not necessarily preventing human rights abuses. (P11, Business Consultant)

In their business models, companies can improve transparency, engage stakeholders, and enhance human rights compliance across their supply chain (Baumann-Pauly & Trabelsi, 2021). While there is an increasing awareness of forced labour issues, participants articulated that current reporting practices have not led to significant changes in corporate strategies. Whether these laws can catalyse significant advancements in labour standards remains a contentious issue (Sinclair & Nolan, 2020). This inaction could be attributed to several factors. One participant explained:

Companies are still trying to establish the foundations for effective modern slavery due diligence [...] trying to map suppliers that they buy directly from [...] So to track and trace those suppliers and engage with those suppliers, [...] I don't think we're at that level yet. I think the market overall is still immature. (P6, Business Consultant)

This indicates that organisations are still developing due diligence mechanisms and facing supply chain management challenges, raising questions about how to effectively address forced labour. Moreover, organisations' limited understanding of forced labour risks and reliance on ineffective audits and self-reporting by suppliers underscores the need for a robust due diligence framework beyond basic compliance (LeBaron et al., 2022; LeBaron et al., 2017; Simpson et al., 2021). As scholars suggest, HRDD should be viewed as a

continuous process, necessitating ongoing critical evaluation and adaptation (Nolan & Frishling, 2019).

One issue regarding due diligence is that the current framework of the MSA may (un)intentionally overlook smaller businesses. As one participant queried: “Does that due diligence go down to the smallest operations? Why don’t we make sure that it goes down to the smallest operation?” (P16, Legal & Academia)

Another respondent added,

at the moment with the Modern Slavery Act, it’s sort of a yes, no, you’re either big enough to have to report or you’re not. And if you’re part of somebody else’s supply chain, then it’s up to the company that is reporting to come back to you and say, we need information from you. (P10, Legal & Academia)

The two-fold approach generates a gap where smaller entities within larger supply chains may not be adequately studied or included in the reporting process. This sentiment is reflected in previous research, which has articulated concerns that minimal disclosure requirements, despite pursuing standardisation, may not genuinely foster transparency (Islam & Van Staden, 2021; Nolan, 2017). Does this imply that organisations falling below the threshold of minimal disclosure are exempt from the responsibility of upholding human rights? Scholars have noted that companies primarily inspect the first tier of their supply chains, neglecting the deeper layers where incidents of forced labour are more likely to occur (Frishling, 2024; McGaughey et al., 2022; Van Buren III et al., 2021).

Ethical Path, Clear Advantages

Alongside the imperative for regulatory compliance, recognition of the intrinsic business advantages associated with adopting due diligence practices is growing. To guarantee consistent compliance with human rights standards across industries, governments need to specify due diligence protocols clearly and establish penalties for non-compliance (Nolan &

Boersma, 2019). However, participants raised concerns about the lack of understanding regarding due diligence:

We do need a greater articulation of what due diligence is and really kind of have very clear kind of articulation of what companies need to do. So, I think that's probably where there needs to be harmonisation. (P6, Business Consultant)

Other participants raised concerns about the lack of oversight, "I find it very surprising that there really is no oversight [...] of the due diligence by those organisations that have committed to reporting" (P16, Legal & Academia).

In the absence of clear pathways for due diligence, corporate misconduct can significantly harm an organisation's stakeholders and the company's credibility (Vives-Gabriel et al., 2023). This dual focus not only underscores the ethical obligations of businesses but also highlights the strategic benefits that enhance corporate reputation. Strategic scholars agree that corporate ethical behaviour fosters consumer trust and mitigates operational risks (Freeman et al., 2019). As one participant eloquently said,

if you're not engaging in due diligence on modern slavery, then really, it reduces the quality of your business so that I think it should be part of compliance within quality management. (P16, Legal & Academia)

Scholars state that a corporation's active responsiveness to its environment serves as a significant indicator of business success and is a crucial determinant of organisational performance (Crane, 2020). This perspective aligns with stakeholder theory, which asserts that sustainability is inherently valuable as it considers the well-being of all stakeholders (Freeman et al., 2021).

By implementing thorough due diligence programs, Australian businesses not only achieve meaningful compliance with the MSA but also emerge as global leaders (Nolan &

Frishling, 2019). To illustrate this, another participant emphasised the positive impact of positioning business practices with stronger global standards and objectives:

I think there's some companies that have realised and with the SDGs – ESG reporting [...] changing policy to align with business human rights and Sustainable Development Goals, changing procedure, changing practice on the ground, actually does lead to profits. (P9, Civil Society)

Similarly, scholars agree that the future of human rights is set to transform as international companies acknowledge the critical role of robust SDG and ESG performance in maintaining their brand image and cultivating consumer confidence (Baumann-Pauly, Nolan, & Posner, 2016). Building on this perspective, another participant mentioned:

I think at the moment, we're hearing a lot about the work that people are doing from the business end, and they're hearing less about the impacts. (P8, Civil Society)

Within this framework, scholars argue that the processes of scrutinising, assessing, and reporting on companies' genuine practices and results are crucial for evaluating present adherence to human rights standards and for formulating strategies for enhancement (Baumann-Pauly, Nolan, & Posner, 2016). Further, the *Paper Promises* report (Sinclair et al., 2022) underscores the critical role of government in leveraging its commercial power to ensure that companies address human rights and modern slavery issues with the seriousness they demand.

Government Leading by Example

Despite measures to scrutinise public procurement, critics point out a significant disparity between the reporting rigour required of the Australian Government compared to businesses. Expressing frustration, a participant noted:

The thing that I find most frustrating with the government response [...] they have an exemption to say business so that the government doesn't have to report in the same

way that business [...]. The government tends to follow business rather than sort of lead.
(P9, Civil Society)

To further illustrate this point, the same participant stated.

The Australian Department of Defence, which published a two-page summary ... And they've got, what is this? They spend 60 billion a year or something [...] it's the same at the state government level. (P9, Civil Society)

This observation raises a crucial question: If the government fails to lead by example, how can organisations effectively navigate the complexities of HRDD? The report *Australia's International Engagement Strategy on Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery: Delivering in Partnership* (March, 2022) mentions that Australian agencies have bolstered safeguards against forced labour in government procurement. The statutory review suggests that the government could “lead by example in setting a high standard for modern slavery reporting” (Report, 25 May 2023, p. 80). Yet, despite these theoretical positions, firsthand accounts from participants highlight a significant gap between policy intentions and their implementation. Therefore, scholars argue that it is vital to identify and understand the complex nature of forced labour risks for effective policy execution (Nolan & Frishling, 2019). As one participant mentioned, “to really demonstrate [...] the effectiveness of the actions that we've taken. [...], we need to measure things on a qualitative level” (P6, Business Consultant). In line with this, another participant emphasised the need to reevaluate procurement practices: “I think assessing contracts in relation to value rather than price and integrating human rights measures within the procurement practice process” (P11, Business Consultant).

This perspective implies a move beyond traditional cost-centric procurement to prioritise ethical considerations. But does recognising the problem suffice without enforcing accountability? A Civil Society participant pointed to a systemic failure: “Some businesses don't want to get involved” (P15, Business Consultant). Echoing this, studies reveal an increasing scepticism towards voluntary compliance mechanisms, with questions arising

about their efficacy in the absence of external motivators such as consumer demand, regulatory enforcement, or the possibility of legal action (Boersma & Nolan, 2022). This underscores the need for a more robust framework to ensure corporate accountability and effective compliance with standards.

Scholars argue that market-driven enforcement is insufficient for addressing forced labour (Harris & Nolan, 2022). They recommend strengthening regulations through financial penalties and a government oversight agency for tighter compliance and governance, leading to transparent enforcement. This also underscores the importance of forging meaningful partnerships with suppliers as a key strategy. One participant mentioned such collaborations, underlining the importance of

capacity building with suppliers, not just expecting suppliers to fall into alignment, but actually enabling both alignment and also partnership to actually drill down and down the supply chain. (P6, Business Consultant)

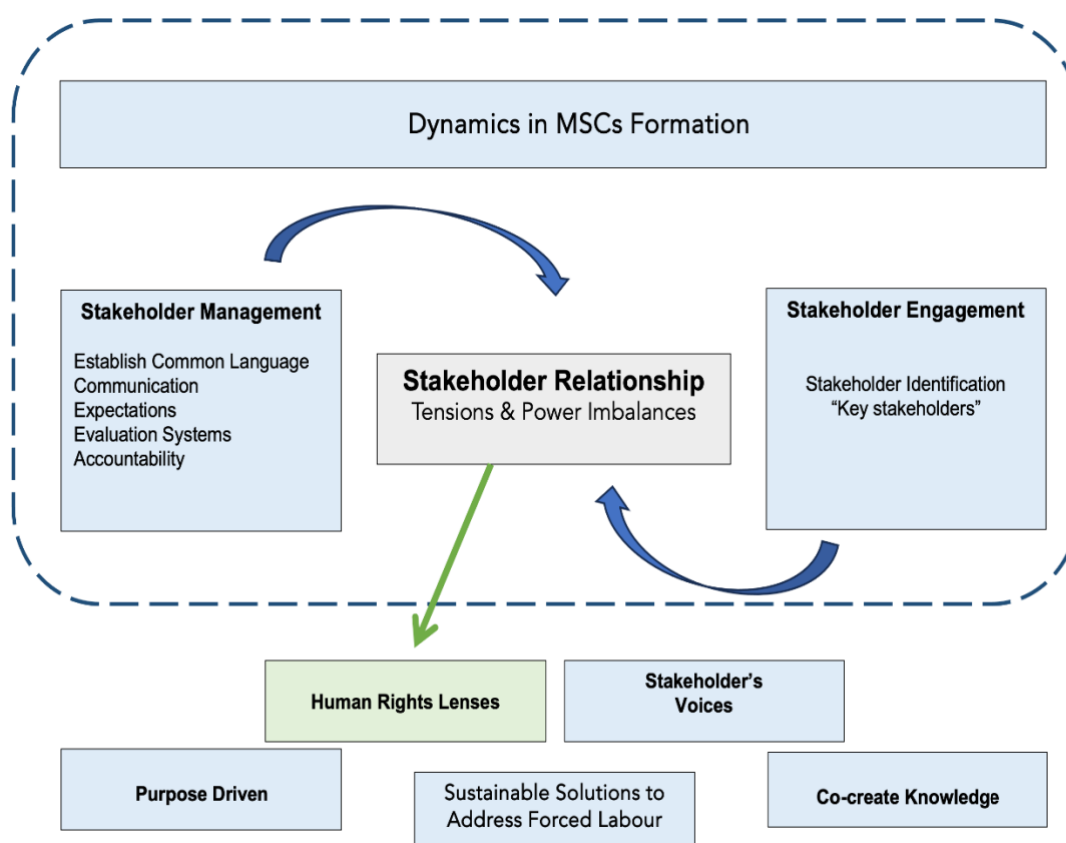
Despite the recognised importance of collaboration, studies have shown that “suppliers have consistently reported ‘culture of fear’” due to constant demands for price cuts and bullying (New, 2015, p. 702). These conditions underscore the necessity for a re-evaluation of buyer-supplier interactions, advocating for the advancement of ethical and fair procedures that address the root causes of forced labour, thereby creating a more fair and responsible supply chain ecosystem. How can these complexities be navigated without exacerbating the situation for those already impacted? Scholars emphasise the complexity of understanding labour risks, given their wide spectrum and interconnected nature, requiring a holistic and multifaceted approach (Boersma et al., 2022). This approach suggests the potential for collaboration with independent entities capable of addressing the nuances of forced labour. Echoing this sentiment, a participant stated:

I don't think that those collaborations can function properly without the sort of independent actors [...] to sort of mediate discussions and elevate certain voices and temper others.
(P11, Business Consultant)

The collaborative approach, which emphasises open dialogue and the inclusion of varied perspectives, is critical for developing lasting solutions in combating forced labour. It highlights the essential role that independent mediators play in ensuring that solutions are both fair and effective, demonstrating how essential these partnerships are for fostering significant progress in the fight against forced labour.

Based on the findings from this chapter, I developed a preliminary model detailing collaboration dynamics and stakeholder engagement within MSCs to address forced labour (see **Figure 8**). This model will evolve as I present further findings in the next chapter. The current findings highlight a significant disconnect between theoretical collaboration models and their practical application.

Figure 10 *Development of the Model of the Dynamics in MSC Formation*



Stakeholder management operates at the macro level, while stakeholder engagement functions at the micro level of analysis. This dynamic highlights the need for independent intermediaries who can balance the unequal levels of influence among stakeholders. These intermediaries guarantee that all perspectives, especially those of marginalised stakeholders, are heard and valued in the conversation. A key issue with government-led models (e.g., roundtables) is their failure to develop a common language, clear goals, and a focus on tangible outcomes. Scholars suggest that stakeholders must develop a shared understanding of their collective goals (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Effective collaboration requires robust mechanisms that integrate stakeholder management with the development of a common language, clear goals, alongside stakeholder engagement through proper identification.

However, this dual approach often leads to tensions and power imbalances (e.g., stakeholder exclusion, limited government and business responses to forced labour),

hindering meaningful integration. These persistent challenges underscore the critical role of a human rights lens as a cornerstone strategy. By exploring current Australian responses to forced labour, this chapter has illustrated the need to re-evaluate existing MSCs to raise awareness and drive action. Reassessing MSCs will improve communication, accountability, and stakeholder identification to better address this issue. The integration of a human rights lens will create more effective and sustainable MSC models that are better equipped to combat forced labour while ensuring that stakeholder voices are heard and valued.

5.5 Chapter Insights

How is the early impact of Australia's MSA influencing company reporting and action? And how are government-led collaborations actively addressing forced labour? The three-year statutory review of the MSA has underscored substantial discrepancies between legislative goals and actual corporate practices, revealing deficiencies in the Act's reliance on reporting mechanisms. Recommendations from the review, such as lowering the reporting threshold and appointing a Commonwealth Anti-Slavery Commissioner, alongside advocacy for integrating HRDD, highlight the need for stronger enforcement and mandatory due diligence to enhance the MSA's effectiveness. This calls for significant reforms to ensure that the Act fulfils its purpose in combating modern slavery in Australia.

The government-led National Roundtable on Modern Slavery and the Australian Expert Advisory Group on Modern Slavery have encountered significant challenges related to inclusivity, transparency, and effectiveness. A key issue with both bodies is their lack of clear outcomes and public transparency about their advisories and accomplishments, which undermines their credibility. The Roundtable, intended as an equitable discussion platform, faces criticisms for operational inefficiencies and exclusivity that limit comprehensive stakeholder involvement. Likewise, the Expert Advisory Group, tasked with advising on the MSA, suffers from substantial transparency issues that obscure its activities.

In essence, a key issue with these government-led collaborative models is that, despite bringing stakeholders together, they lack a common language, clear goal orientation, and a focus on producing tangible outcomes. Therefore, the government urgently needs to reassess these bodies to improve transparency, broaden stakeholder participation, and refine selection criteria. Implementing these steps is essential to ensure these collaborative frameworks effectively contribute to Australia's national strategy against modern slavery through inclusive dialogue and meaningful action.

Experts in the field have raised concerns about the absence of clearness in corporate disclosures under the MSA. Corporate disclosures often lack depth, are limited to first-tier suppliers, and fail to implement due diligence processes, leaving deeper supply chain layers and smaller businesses within these chains overlooked. Moreover, the absence of rigorous oversight fails to ensure the authenticity of compliance reports, undermining the MSA's effectiveness. Moreover, the government's approach has been characteristically reactive, following rather than setting the agenda for robust anti-slavery practices, thereby failing to establish and enforce stringent standards that could drive substantive change. Additionally, experts champion the integration of ethical practices, such as ESG standards and SDGs, highlighting their dual benefits of aligning with compliance requirements and enhancing business reputation and profitability.

These initiatives are crucial for developing a comprehensive strategy to eradicate forced labour across global supply chains. They aim to engage stakeholders actively, ensuring accountability and supporting their inclusion in transparent collaboration models. As such, this chapter has shed new light on our understanding of MSC models to address forced labour. By exploring insights from experts in the anti-slavery field, this chapter has demonstrated how the government needs to **(1)** reassess these MSCs to improve transparency, **(2)** capitalise on broad stakeholder participation across sectors, and **(3)** foster inclusion and democratic dialogue within MSCs, ensuring that stakeholder voices are heard and valued.

Although these elements highlight the complexities and challenges inherent in the process, they can also create more effective and sustainable MSC models that are better equipped to address the issue of forced labour. This strategy promotes effective and consistent measures to combat forced labour, fostering a robust network of accountable and supported stakeholders. It also underscores the significant role of MSCs, setting the stage for the next chapter, which will explore the potential and complications of these collaborative efforts in combating forced labour.

6 Collaboration Dynamics in Combating Forced Labour

“There’s obviously a power imbalance and a lot of workers don’t feel like they can raise issues when they happen. So yeah, bringing workers together and, you know, providing them with an avenue to raise concerns is really critical.”

(P11, Business Consultant)

This comment captures the essence of this chapter and serves as a relevant opening to the discussion in this section, emphasising the significance of anchoring collective efforts in concrete objectives to maintain engagement and prioritise collective action. Therefore, the current situation in Australia regarding collaboration models to tackle forced labour needs exploration. As one participant said, “I don’t really think we’re moving fast enough on the SDG 17” (P15, Business Consultant). This statement also underscores concerns over the slow progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 17 (SDG 17), essential for promoting collaboration across governments, businesses, and civil society to achieve all other SDGs.

Despite some organisations’ support of the UNGP, SDGs, and national laws (Howard-Grenville et al., 2019), the business responsibilities and collaboration mechanisms to address forced labour remain unclear (International Labour Organization et al., 2022). Furthermore, the conditions of those impacted by corporate practices have remained the same (Wettstein, 2021, p. 313), suggesting a disconnect between what is expected of these frameworks and the real-world results. This disconnect prompts an examination of Australia’s collaboration models to address forced labour and the barriers hindering their success. What collaboration models exist in Australia to address forced labour, and what are some of the barriers that hinder collaboration? This chapter contributes to the research question: Why do stakeholder voices matter, and how can they make a difference in multi-stakeholder collaborations to address forced labour in the supply chain?

This chapter leverages the knowledge of seasoned experts (as quoted and classified by expertise in Figure 9 of the previous chapter) to study collaborative models against forced labour and the challenges to their successful implementation in Australia. Participants responded to open-ended questions (see **Appendix 2**) to explore Australia’s anti-slavery policies and stakeholder collaborations. Given the interpretive nature of qualitative research, the analysis offers a coherent interpretation while acknowledging that participants’ perspectives may have been shaped by other influences—such as institutional roles or strategic interests—not fully explored here. Thus, reflexivity was balanced to maintain the clarity and flow of the narrative. This is further discussed in Chapter 3. Table 13 presents coding examples and pertinent quotations that illustrate the themes discussed in this chapter.

Table 13 *Development of Initial and Final Interview Coding for This Chapter*

Illustrative Quotes	1st Order	2nd Order	General Theme
“I think governments [...] tend to kind of operate in a bit of a siloed fashion.” (P14, Legal & Academia)	Coordinate	Perceptions of Current Collab.	Chapter 6 Collaboration Dynamics in Combating Forced Labour
“I don't think they're moving in any speed to make it happen.” (P7, Civil Society)	Accelerate		
“There could be a lot done to actually develop a more collaborative approach to ensuring to assessing risk.” (P6, Business Consultant)	Develop		
“There’s not that many examples of good.” (P9, Civil Society)	Increase	Engaging External Stakeholder	
“State governments and [...] agencies should be involved in a sort of multi-stakeholder approach.” (P7, Civil Society)	Involve		
“Very rarely [people] engage with external stakeholders, like unions or workers groups.” (P1, Legal & Academia)	Engage		
“The government require people to do it as a volunteer [...] the great irony of that is we’re working about labour exploitation. And I would call that exploitation.” (P8, Civil Society)	Compensate	The Impact of Funding in MSCs Dynamics	
“People with lived experience networks don’t tend to be very well funded.” (P4, Legal & Academia)	Support		

"The federal government brought in highly competitive funding grants, and that worked against collaboration." (P3, Civil Society)	Revise		Challenges in Data for Anti-Slavery Efforts
"I suspect that a lot of the information doesn't get to the relevant people." (P1, Legal & Academia).	Distribute		
"I'm surprised to say that the Australian Border Force seems to not be aware of entities who need to report and who haven't." (P6, Business Consultant)	Monitor		
"Civil society organisations tend not to publish any data [...] they don't even share de-identified data either." (P7, Civil Society)	Disclose		

This chapter explores the complex landscape of collaborations to combat forced labour within Australia's strategy, focusing on four key themes. It begins by discussing "Perceptions of Current Collaboration Models", analysing how these partnerships are recognised in terms of inclusiveness, limitations, and effectiveness. The discussion then shifts to "Engaging External Stakeholders: A Crucial Step in Addressing Forced Labour", identifying key stakeholders that could contribute to effective collaboration. The third theme, "The Paradox of Anti-Slavery Funding", stresses the urgent need for increased funding and underlines ethical concerns arising from the lack of support for organisations combating forced labour. Lastly, "Challenges in Data Sharing for Anti-Slavery Efforts" discusses the critical role of data sharing in tackling forced labour, emphasising present inadequacies and the need for improved data exchange among stakeholders. The chapter ends with chapter insights, which comprehensively summarise the findings discussed and how they contribute to and advance the overall research.

6.1 Perceptions of Current Collaboration Models

"People are very busy, kind of doing their own thing." (P14, Legal & Academia)

This comment captures a critical issue—the absence of unified action among stakeholders, resulting in a siloed approach. In response to this, one participant highlighted MSCs as crucial

in the anti-slavery field: “Collaboration is essential. It has to be at the core of everything that is done to address modern slavery, forced labour in supply chains” (P14, Legal & Academia).

Although participants agreed that MSCs are essential to addressing a common issue, some were unsure whether they even existed, reflecting the lack of available information about collaboration models and their outcomes. For example, one participant tentatively suggested, “I think they [collaborations] do exist” (P11, Business Consultant), while another affirmed that “it does exist” (P4, Civil Society). Another participant yet pointed to its occurrence in specific settings, such as, “I think you do see some of it, but it is so often on that level of advisory boards” (P10, Legal & Academia). Others described collaborations as “emerging” (P6, Business Consultant). Other participants questioned the subjective interpretation of these frameworks, “multi-stakeholder collaboration can mean many different things to different people” (P2, Legal & Academia).

These comments highlight the difficulties in achieving a shared understanding of MSCs, thus preventing stakeholders from aligning their goals, actions, and impacts. Scholars argue that many MSCs fall victim to collaborative inertia, often due to power imbalances, distrust, and other factors, resulting in “slow progress, ultimately failing to produce tangible outcomes” (Gray & Purdy, 2018, p. 68).

Four years after the NAP 2020–25 highlighted collaboration shortfalls, the issue persists, underscoring a significant dichotomy within the field. As noted and “echoed [...] in the national action plan that collaboration is an issue” (P3, Civil Society), this challenge continues to be a focal point of contention. As one participant mentioned,

I have questions as to whether they [government] will actually proceed with that. [...] They kind of captured it in the plan [NAP], but I don’t think they’re moving in any speed to make it happen. (P7, Civil Society)

Scholars suggest that government organisations are more likely to apply power and dominate MSCs, even if these collaborations are mainly voluntary (Gray & Purdy, 2013). For instance, one participant mentioned that

government can be sometimes pretty bad at calling a meeting at really short notice. So rather than potentially going out [...] to consult with people that when are you available? Often, if government sets up a meeting, it just sort of says, “Well, we’re holding the meeting on this date, and at this time, and if you can turn up, good for you. And if you can’t, too bad”. That’s not very collaborative towards facilitating participation. (P7, Civil Society)

This observation is critical for two reasons. **First**, successful collaboration models rely on the meaningful participation of all key stakeholders with a common interest (Selsky & Parker, 2005). Scheduling meetings without key stakeholders’ consent neglects and excludes critical voices needed for the solution. **Second**, the lack of acknowledgment of stakeholders as valuable contributors creates a chain reaction of distrust and stereotyping (Ansell & Gash, 2008), which exacerbates power imbalances and reinforces hierarchical structures, thereby hindering meaningful collaboration. These findings align with research showing that government agencies often control MSCs, even when voluntary (Gray & Purdy, 2013), and resist ceding control over forums that discuss issues impacting their reputation (Head, 2022).

Confirming this dichotomy, some participants shared personal perceptions based on their experiences and sectors, further highlighting the complexities in achieving effective collaboration. For instance, one expert observed the lack of collaboration: “I don’t think I’ve seen any effective collaboration” (P16, Legal & Academia). Similarly, a respondent from a different sector said, “I don’t feel that there’s the collaboration that there should have been” (P13, Civil Society). The differing perspectives make it difficult to recognise a clear path for improving collaboration models. For example, one participant noted that while collaboration

“has existed on some aspects and on others not particularly where a stalemate has emerged. Feels very hard to see a way forward” (P7, Civil Society).

It is crucial to note that these collaborations come with inherent limitations (Boersma, 2018; Quayle et al., 2019). Echoing this sentiment, another participant from a different sector highlighted the constraints of these collaborative efforts, especially in the absence of a clearly defined objective.

It’s very important to have those different perspectives and to bring people together into the same room [...] multi-stakeholder groups, working together with a common goal [...]. Where [this] perhaps works less well is where there’s no defined sort of output as such. (P2, Legal & Academia)

This comment is important because having a clear goal fosters harmony within the collaboration and leads to more successful outcomes. Reflecting on this, another respondent added: “We collaborate well on issues on getting change made. But supporting that change becomes very divisive because we all want to be the big key players in that” (P13, Civil Society).

In essence, the success of these MSCs stems from their clear goal orientation and focus on producing tangible outputs. This aligns with literature that emphasises the importance of developing MSCs with clear, achievable goals and a shared vision (Bryson et al., 2015; Eweje et al., 2021; Gray & Purdy, 2018; Whittington, 2003). Thus, it is vital to improve and regularly evaluate collaborative strategies to set clear, attainable objectives and, in particular, to protect the well-being of crucial stakeholders like workers and survivors of forced labour.

Division and Exclusion in Collaboration

Building on the discussion of collaboration challenges, another participant expanded on the issue of segregation by illustrating the potential risks associated with limited inclusive dialogue:

There is always a danger that if you’re not having some kind of plenary meeting that you can sort of divide and conquer, or, you know, just maintain much more control over the

system [...] ensuring that you don't have critical voices [...] or you can do it by talking to people in silos, and then coming to a conclusion on your own. (P10, Legal & Academia)

This comment reveals the possible strategic manipulation of dialogue processes to suppress diverse and critical perspectives in decision-making environments. Despite recognising the crucial role of collaboration, such partnerships remain in their initial phase, described as “we’re still very much at the early stages” (P1, Legal & Academia) and “emerging, but also [...] something that needs to be realised” (P6, Business Consultant). A participant observed that “in some spaces, the collaboration is more effective than others” (P4, Civil Society). One participant provided more details:

We’re seeing different pockets of collaboration occurring between companies through peak body groups, academia, working to work together, and also probably internationally. (P6, Business Consultant)

Others highlighted collaboration in the civil society sector noting that “within civil society, there is collaboration” (P14, Legal & Academia), and “there is a lot of collaboration across civil society” (P10, Legal & Academia). But is collaboration the prevailing trend across all areas of civil society? A participant from the civil society group offered a contrasting perspective, criticising some organisations for:

Trying to do all of it, you know, so then it becomes competitive, sort of, yeah. What’s your part in the chain of ending slavery? Let’s focus on that. (P13, Civil Society)

This comment aligns with research indicating that collaboration conflicts arise from varying partner goals, strategies, and attempts to control outcomes (Crosby & Bryson, 2010). For instance, a participant from the civil society sector mentioned that although “there’s opportunity for specific survivor voice groups to be part of it” (P8, Civil Society), their involvement is notably absent. Other respondents mentioned that

there are some civil society organisations that effectively stifle the voice of survivors. They effectively argue survivors need to be protected from engaging in discussion. So, it's strange, whereas I think that denies the survivor agency. (P7, Civil Society)

In a counterfactual scenario, victims and survivors of forced labour struggle to self-organise and articulate their views and needs in a structured manner. This is exacerbated by the diversity among this population, highlighting the need for an NGO to unify their voices. However, protective measures in some organisations [un]intentionally silence survivors and workers, diminishing their autonomy. This was evident during a meeting of the National Roundtable where survivors were invited to participate:

Survivors were able to come to that meeting. But there was a debate, and there were certainly civil society organisations that oppose survivors being at the table on the basis that we represent the voice of the survivors and survivors needed to be protected. I don't agree with that. (P7, Civil Society)

This account raises critical questions about the legitimacy and ethics of representing survivors without their direct participation. As one participant eloquently said, “how they [survivors] can gain legitimacy is a big question” (P2 Legal & Academia). It underscores a critical gap in advocacy approaches, as echoed by another participant: “Organisations can't speak for survivors” (P15, Business Consultant). This raises a critical question: Under what conditions is one NGO more legitimate than others? Further complicating this narrative is the “double suffering” experienced by survivors: “People suffer twice; they suffer at the hands of the traffickers. And then they suffer at the hands of the state” (P16, Legal & Academia).

This comment illustrates a systemic failure where survivors and workers often have their voices suppressed, first by their captors and then by some organisations that [un]intentionally ignore their perspectives. How can we empower these individuals if their voices are consistently silenced? The notion of “voice” lies at the core of this issue. Building on this, excluding survivors from relevant discussions disempowers them:

I think it's completely disempowering for them [...] the responsibility of the agency is possibly to make a survivor aware of risks around trauma [...] for an agency to further take their freedom away from them in the notion of protecting them, actually feels quite perverse, feels quite ironic in that sense. (P7, Civil Society)

This comment illustrates that organisations often disempower survivors by silencing them, underlining the need for change in representation. As one participant quoting Sophie Otiende (CEO of the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery) mentioned: “If you do not have an intentional pathway for those survivor leaders to be the CEO of your organisation to replace you, then you have failed your purpose” (P9, Civil Society).

This approach emphasises the importance of incorporating stakeholder insights to foster broader collaboration. The management literature suggests that extending cooperation beyond organisational aims to embrace societal interests can improve common efforts (Van Tulder et al., 2016). However, none of these components can thrive in isolation (Nolan, 2016). This argument advocates for exploring the problem through the lens of restorative justice—a theory that focuses on the individual and collective healing (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2011; Van Ness et al., 2022; Zehr, 2002b; Zehr et al., 2022). This approach makes collaborations both inclusive and ethically sound. However, it's unclear how widely businesses are adopting collaboration models to combat forced labour.

Business Collaboration with Stakeholders

“We do need to go towards the human rights due diligence law, and that would certainly support stakeholder engagement.” (P1, Legal & Academia)

For this due diligence law to be effective, as one respondent stated, it must be “very carefully and clearly defined [...] to be very sort of worker-centric in its formulation” (P2, Legal & Academia), emphasising the importance of centring these laws around the rights and well-being of workers. Scholars agree that a multi-faceted approach is essential for protecting human rights (Baumann-Pauly, Nolan, & Posner, 2016). Thus, one participant mentioned that

“in order to be sustainable, the company really needs to pay attention to all of its stakeholders, and that definition [related to stakeholders] should be [...] really broad” (P2, Legal & Academia).

This raises questions about the actions that businesses take to enhance collaboration in this area. As one respondent suggested,

“I don’t know whether those corporates who are reporting are collaborating with their supply chains” (P16, Legal & Academia).

While businesses claim a commitment to human rights compliance, there often exists a disconnect between professed ethical standards and practical execution: “I think a lot of it is talk and not actual implementation” (P14, Legal & Academia). These comments signal the necessity for a meticulous review of business interactions with suppliers and other key stakeholders including the community.

As a broader stakeholder group, we’re not seeing with adequate voice in companies’ activities is often local communities, as well as workers in supply chains. (P2, Legal & Academia)

This comment highlights the exclusion of local communities and supply chain workers in corporate decision-making, calling for more inclusive stakeholder engagement. Echoing this, management literature emphasises the importance of businesses fostering a healthier society to ensure their long-term sustainability and well-being (Carroll & Buchholtz, 1993). However, despite the clear benefits, some businesses hesitate to include key stakeholder voices, such as workers, in their programs: “Some businesses are still risk averse in introducing survivors into their programs and their conversations or consultations” (P15, Business Consultant).

As Gibson (2017) noted, “there is no philosophical reason to discount powerless parties” (p. 200). In essence, workers must have a voice, which requires the presence of

effective unions and forums for their expression (Nolan, 2016). In this context, “very rarely are companies engaging effectively or even at all with trade unions” (P2, Legal & Academia). This is concerning because trade unions are crucial in addressing forced labour as they empower workers, uncover abuses, and advocate for corporate responsibility and collaboration among stakeholders.

Contrary to this perspective, another participant highlighted a prevalent siloed mentality within unions, which hinders effective collaboration:

From the Australian Council of Trade Unions down, across the board, [there are] really no unions that kind of think the Modern Slavery Act or the modern slavery crimes are relevant to them. They think in silos. (P9, Civil Society)

These findings highlight a two-fold issue: businesses are failing to effectively engage with unions, while unions may be neglecting the significance of the forced labour issue within their own agendas. This paradox highlights the urgent need for improved communication and substantial collaboration across sectors. Reflecting this, the recent US TIP report on Australia emphasised the need for improved dialogue and collaboration among government agencies and other critical stakeholders to address forced labour (U.S. Department of State, 2024). Moreover, industries’ hesitation to address forced labour and the lack of transparent collaboration are evident:

It looks as though industries are not keen to tackle modern slavery. And the consequence will be that there is no collaboration. If you’re not making the effort to do it, then you’re not going to be collaborating with anyone. So, I don’t think the existence of collaboration is at all clear. (P16, Legal & Academia)

This comment advocates for a clear roadmap prioritising collaboration and demonstrating its effectiveness. As one participant added, “there could be a lot done to actually develop a more collaborative approach to assessing risk and verifying that risk (P6, Business Consultant). One participant highlighted examples of industry-specific collaboration,

particularly among mid-tier construction firms working collectively to address shared supply chain risks

Mid-tier construction firms [...] actually working together to identify risks in a common pool of suppliers [...] We'll see [...] more collaboration around sort of different products, particularly the high consumables, where there's also correlation with a good marketing sort of communication campaign. (P6, Business Consultant)

Although recent academic discussions indicate that corporate social responsibility is frequently viewed as a marketing tactic rather than a genuine commitment (Nolan & Boersma, 2024), respondents suggest that collaborations linked to consumer products could be more valued, with consumers playing a key role. This underscores the need to explore and assess collaboration engaging broad stakeholder groups.

6.2 MSCs Across Sectors: Engaging External Stakeholders

“My sense is people engage with their internal stakeholders. Very rarely do they engage with external stakeholders, like unions or workers groups. So, I think we've got a massive gap there. And I think genuine multi-stakeholder collaboration is going to have to have more on the ground experience. And then whoever's relevant.”

(P1, Legal & Academia)

This comment underlines the role of external stakeholders in providing insights that internal stakeholders might neglect. Being more familiar with workers' realities, groups such as workers and unions provide practical experience-based solutions to the issue. When exploring business initiatives in collaboration, one participant expressed the sentiment that “there's not that many examples of good” (P9, Civil Society). Other participants referred to it as business “psychological distancing” (P6, Business Consultant), which posits that individuals perceive problems as occurring somewhere else. Similarly, scholars argue that the persistence of forced labour can be attributed to corporations' psychological distance (Simpson et al., 2021).

Conversely, scholars suggest that stakeholders find it challenging to “see a relationship between their own actions and structural outcomes”, leading them to distance themselves from their responsibilities (Young, 2003, p. 7). One participant illustrated this by suggesting that limited business engagement in discussions on forced labour may stem from perceived legal risks:

Sometimes companies will feel that if they are engaged in these discussions, that there's like an admission of fault or liability, and it gives the lawyers and the senior managers like, you know, they will have a heart attack in the Senate and don't get involved in that.
(P12, Business Consultant)

The same participant further explained that this issue is particularly problematic because the forced labour field is “certainly one where businesses feel like they can get it wrong quite quickly” (P12, Business Consultant). To address these concerns, collaborative spaces embedded in trust and developing a common language are vital. Moreover, participants suggest that asking stakeholders questions such as “What are you guys working on? And how can we help you win your engagement?” (P12, Business Consultant) fosters collaboration and enhances understanding of organisational needs. Another participant from a different sector emphasised that successful collaboration needs to be connected to tangible and concrete actions:

Collaboration around any issue, it requires it to be connected to tangible and quite concrete action for people to stay engaged in it. It's one thing to say collaboration is important. But if it's not facilitated around things that are very concrete, people lose interest very quickly, and it will be deprioritized. (P4, Civil Society)

Expanding on this perspective for concrete actions, another participant mentioned that “there needs to be a lot more of a national approach to campaigning around how to identify modern slavery” (P14, Legal & Academia). Building on this, a respondent from a different sector mentioned, “the Law and Policy sort of status that we have at the moment is not

generating that type of multi-stakeholder approach” (P2, Legal & Academia). This also requires collaboration between states government and territories and their respective agencies:

State governments and state-based agencies should be involved in a sort of multi-stakeholder approach [...] I have questions as to whether they’ll actually proceed with that [...] they kind of captured it in the plan [NAP], but I don’t think they’re moving in any speed to make it happen. (P7, Civil Society)

These comments underline Australia’s current limitations, highlighting the need for more robust and strategic action and collaboration.

Collaborations Across Sectors

Despite the lack of understanding and collaboration, some participants cited examples of increasing awareness and proactive measures among different sectors. As one participant said, “there’s no one sector fits all response” (P12, Business Consultant). In this context, one participant said,

there’s a growing awareness around the formation of peak body consortiums cohorts of organisations working together [...] So this is happening in the banking, for example, the Australian Banking Association. (P6, Business Consultant)

This observation indicates an emerging awareness and action in collaborative practices within specific sectors. As one participant confirmed, “certainly, bilateral relationships and engagements [...] it’s still a collaboration, those happen absolutely all the time” (P12, Business Consultant). In this context, a participant highlighted the Human Rights Resources and Energy Collaborative (HRREC) as a standout model for industry-focused collaboration, uniting various stakeholders:

I think that’s been a really good initiative. And it’s really those agencies, those organisations working in collaboration rather than [...] competitors in the space. [...] I

think that's an interesting model. And it was very much just led by local people who said, right, we really need to improve our work in this area, so what could we do collectively? (P1, Legal & Academia)

The HRREC's strategy showcases how major business players can leverage economic power and teamwork to uplift labour standards. One participant highlighted the Cleaning Accountability Framework (CAF) as an independent multi-stakeholder initiative focused on improving labour practices in the cleaning sector: "I think CAF [...] is probably one of the more concrete ways in which corporates can properly address the risks" (P11, Business Consultant).

Although the CAF certification serves as a model for focused collaboration, concerns about the voluntary nature of participation and the level of commitment among its members give rise to questions about its overall effectiveness. Commitment to collaboration entails accepting outcomes, even if they don't align with a stakeholder's full support (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Research suggests some leading firms resist supporting CAF initiatives to address forced labour, possibly due to its voluntary nature, resulting in reduced compliance levels (Rawling et al., 2021). Therefore, depending solely on corporate goodwill and voluntary initiatives falls short of addressing the gravity of forced labour (Nolan & Boersma, 2019).

One participant mentioned the activities of the UN Global Compact Network Australia (UNGCA), particularly its role in encouraging businesses to make

"An entity-level commitment to 10 principles across human rights [...] help businesses to meet those commitments [...] and convening different actors and multi-stakeholder initiatives" (P12, Business Consultant).

Despite the UNGCA collaborative platform's intent to promote ethical responsibility and involve a broad spectrum of stakeholders, one participant expressed confusion over the precise actions and roles undertaken by this framework, as indicated by the following

statement: “I don’t know what exactly they do at the Global Compact” (P9, Civil Society). This remark signals broader issues of communication and visibility that the UNGCA and similar organisations need to address. If experts in the anti-slavery field involved in this research are uncertain about these collaboration frameworks, it raises concerns about the general public’s understanding in Australia.

Efforts to eliminate forced labour require a wide-ranging approach, with research as the key foundation. Academics bring a rigorous approach that can assist in identifying the root causes of forced labour and assess the efficacy of different interventions. Echoing this, one participant mentioned the role of the Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery Research Network as a prime example. As articulated by one respondent, the network’s efficacy is primarily derived from its capacity to convene

Researchers in the field of forced labour [...] take the opportunity to share new research that they’ve been involved in. And that there is also this sort of central data point, so that that research is accessible to members of the network [...] So it is going to be interesting to see how that plays out. (P2, Legal & Academia)

While collaborative initiatives in Australia are rare, they play a significant role in uniting diverse groups to combat forced labour. However, their impact is often diminished by challenges such as knowledge gaps, communication issues, and voluntary participation, which restrict the efficiency of these collective efforts. Addressing these challenges requires mutual recognition and acknowledgement among stakeholders foster a shared understanding of the field (Gray & Purdy, 2018). The goal is to develop collaboration models that overcome silos of knowledge and role overlap, and develop communication channels, thereby boosting the effectiveness of actions against forced labour. However, there are also significant barriers to collaboration, such as lack of trust and fear among stakeholders, that must be explored.

Barriers to Business Collaboration

Despite the recognition of trust as an essential component in the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement and collaboration models (Bryson et al., 2006; Gray & Purdy, 2018; Selsky & Parker, 2005), the issue of insufficient trust continues to be a significant barrier (Sloan & Oliver, 2013). To illustrate this point, when inquiring about substantial obstacles to collaboration, one participant noted that businesses may exhibit reluctance in disclosing critical information:

I think there are lots of probably legal and regulatory and privacy barriers that probably just need to be worked through [...] from a business perspective; it's the fear of competitive advantage, you know, that you might share competitive information. And also fear of criminal sanctions for directors. There's a lot of fear around disclosing information that could have repercussions either for the business, or for the directors, and I don't think we've really dealt with that concern. (P1, Legal & Academia)

Within this framework, although there is an expectation for business engagement in collaborative models, trust cannot be mandated or presumed to exist from the outset; rather, it often requires significant time to develop (Sloan & Oliver, 2013). In the context of business reporting, companies may view modern slavery reports as confidential, hindering collaboration.

I do think it's still a fear. I think businesses would be fearful about people looking in, they probably see it as a private thing, not a public thing, and human rights is public, and businesses is private. So, I think that dichotomy could be challenging. And so, it's about kind of trying to come in the middle ground between private and public. (P14, Legal & Academia)

This comment highlights a tension between the need for privacy and the need for transparency, underscoring the complex interplay between trust, collaboration, and public accountability in anti-slavery strategies. Moreover, many firms feel overwhelmed by the constant demand for information and struggle to engage in authentic dialogue (Acuti et al.,

2024, p. 2). This gap between what is expected from businesses and what actually happens on the ground shows a limitation in the traditional model of collaboration to prevent forced labour (Eweje et al., 2021).

Another barrier to collaboration is the boundary between perceiving human rights as a public issue and business behaviour as a private matter. To promote this middle ground, it is essential to support businesses in meaningfully engaging with ethical practices in their operations. This involves treating workers as human beings with agency, “where we get better at treating workers as human beings with decisions and agency and exploitation and some different areas” (P12, Business Consultant). This comment highlights the importance of human-centric engagement strategies in enhancing supply chain relations. To achieve this, organisations are encouraged to

invest in capacity building with suppliers, not just expecting suppliers to fall into alignment, but actually enabling both alignment and also partnership to actually drill down the supply chain. One of the greatest barriers [...] which is tied to investment has to do with [...] the identification and the assessment of risk. (P6, Business Consultant)

Scholars have highlighted the challenge contemporary businesses face due to the complexity and length of their supply chains (Nolan & Frishling, 2019). They argue that businesses often lack a comprehensive overview of supply chain networks, frequently struggling to identify even their first-tier suppliers, let alone those further down the line. Furthermore, a significant divergence is observed between the knowledge corporates profess to have regarding their supply chains and the realities that unfold on the ground (New, 2015; Simpson et al., 2021).

Thus, overcoming such barriers requires not only education but also a strong commitment from organisational leadership. As one participant said, “training is only going to matter if those at the top of the organisation actually believe it’s important to shift in that direction” (P7, Civil Society). This comment indicates the critical role of leadership

endorsement in facilitating successful organisational change. Indeed, the answer lies in acknowledging that without the support of those in leadership positions, initiatives for addressing forced labour are unlikely to advance. In line with this, scholars advocate for businesses to critically evaluate the nature of training provided to managers (Simpson et al., 2021).

This highlights the necessity for strategic training that equips managers with crucial tools and insights to effectively identify and address forced labour slavery risks. The challenge of addressing forced labour is exacerbated when leaders lack interest in tackling the issues. As articulated by a participant,

it looks as though industries are not keen to tackle modern slavery. And the consequence will be that there is no collaboration. If you're not making the effort to do it, then you're not going to be collaborating with anyone. (P16, Legal & Academia)

This comment clearly accentuates the critical role of leadership commitment to actively foster collaboration and proactively mitigate forced labour risks. Nevertheless, there is concern among business executives that prioritising engagements with stakeholders might undermine their fundamental goal of generating profit through the provision of goods and services (Eweje et al., 2021). This discussion shows the tension between fulfilling social responsibilities and achieving financial objectives. It bridges the theoretical aspects of strategic guidance with its practical implementation within organisations. Ensuring ethical engagement and economic sustainability in businesses demands a steadfast commitment from top management to redefine traditional strategies, blending social responsibility with financial success and fostering a culture of ethical practices. Additionally, other obstacles to collaboration, such as lack of funding, further complicate efforts to address forced labour. These challenges will be explored in the next section.

6.3 The Impact of Funding on MSCs' Dynamics

The absence of financial support and recognition devalues stakeholders' contributions, further complicating collaborative efforts to address forced labour. For instance, organisations that lack financial resources are unlikely to fully engage in MSCs, and their capacity to contribute valuable insights is reduced, limiting the diversity of perspectives and, therefore, the overall effectiveness of MSCs. To further illustrate this paradox, one participant stated:

When the federal government organises these kinds of things, such as the Roundtable and other advisory bodies, they do not pay a bursary for people to be involved. So they're asking organisations to give their time to also pay their own travel costs, and do all of that with no reimbursement whatsoever? Who are the same organisations who are not getting funding from the federal government either [...] The government require people to do it as a volunteer. And I think the great irony of that is we're working about labour exploitation. And I would call that exploitation. (P8, Civil Society)

These conditions foster an ecosystem of exploitation and marginalisation among stakeholders, which adversely affects collaboration. It also illustrates the burden placed on some organisations already struggling with limited funding. Although the Australian Government's allocation of \$7.8 million to NGOs for community initiatives between 2008 and 2022, as noted in the Statutory Review (McMillan, 2023), participants underlined that overall funding remains insufficient. Failing to address the issue of financial support risks perpetuating inequalities among stakeholders, thereby hindering the effectiveness of MSCs.

Echoing this, scholars have suggested that "the presence or lack of funds are likely to influence the process and outcomes of the collaboration" (Gray & Purdy, 2018, p. 140). In this line, one participant noted that some large companies seek guidance from civil society without providing financial support:

Companies like [...] we want to partner with you on this. But we don't want to pay for any of your services [...] I think there's that slowly changing as well. But it's just, you know, same argument [...] being consulted [...] costs us money. (P9 Civil Society)

This situation is paradoxical, as these organisations addressing forced labour experience similar power imbalances from dominant stakeholders. In the context of MSCs, scholars have noted that organisations often overlook the costs associated with participating in collaborative efforts (Foot, 2015). How can organisations successfully contribute to collaborative frameworks without the necessary financial support and recognition? The result is that some organisations “do end up closing through lack of funding, then that will also mean a lack of voice” (P8 Civil Society). Another respondent further elaborated:

I think money is often an issue, like people do all of this stuff for free [...]. NGOs don't get enough money to do the work that they need to do. So, I think money is always a barrier. (P14, Legal & Academia)

Scholars have mentioned that some NGOs “often lack financial means, but do have other important assets, such as expertise” (Gray & Purdy, 2018, p. 140). The government's insufficient financial support worsens inequalities and marginalises those with limited resources, excluding their voices. In essence, the impact of those stakeholder groups has not been fully recognised (Schrempf-Stirling & Van Buren III, 2024, p. 6). Echoing this, the recent 2024 US TIP Report on Australia underscored the need for improved government-civil society collaboration on forced labour issues (U.S. Department of State, 2024). As one participant succinctly said, “in short, the same people are getting the funding” (P13). Organisations working in the anti-slavery field must use their limited resources in exchange for the “opportunity” to participate in government meetings and collaborate with other key stakeholders. One participant recalled their participation in the Attorney General's conference:

It's a waste of my limited resources to spend money traveling [...] if you wanted to have any kind of voice, or any kind of network or any kind of collaboration, this is where it's being held. (P13, Civil Society)

This issue is intensified by the emotional burden on stakeholders striving to remain engaged in collaborative frameworks, further emphasising the challenges they face.

An organisation who's lacking funding, and trying not to close, and that tends to go on for years and years and years [...] I think there just needs to be an understanding of what that looks like, and the impact that has of itself. So sometimes collaboration of itself can cause harm. (P8, Civil Society)

These comments illustrate how collaboration can shift from effective cooperation to an additional burden, exacerbating existing challenges. It also highlights the need for a deeper understanding of the conditions under which collaboration occurs, ensuring that stakeholders receive support to be involved in MSCs without impacting their sustainability. This also includes critical stakeholders such as workers and survivors.

Survivors are particularly vulnerable to a lack of resources in order to be able to participate. There's a cost of both their time, travel costs. [...] Can they get time off work if they're working? Or all those sorts of things represent barriers for survivors as well. (P7, Civil Society)

Another participant further mentioned that

unlike a lot of other groups, you know, people with lived experience networks don't tend to be very well funded [...] and so often their participation is at their personal expense, which is obviously unsustainable and will create longer-term challenges. (P4, Civil Society)

In line with this, scholars agree that it is essential to include workers' voices in discussions (Benstead et al., 2021). However, "we also need to be careful that a survivor

assumes their experiences are the normative experience” (P7, Civil Society). While their perspective and lived experience are crucial to addressing forced labour, tokenising a single experience overlooks the diversity within the group.

Moreover, ensuring that stakeholders such as survivors are remunerated for their participation is crucial for their sustainable involvement and the overall efforts to address forced labour. As one participant mentioned,

when you’re trying to facilitate [...] meaningful representation from people with lived experience [...] How are they getting access to opportunities and to support and services that will enable them to participate on an even team? (P4, Civil Society)

This situation undermines MSCs’ reliance on diverse perspectives, equal participation, and respect for all stakeholders in addressing forced labour, contradicting the principles of fairness and justice in collaborative efforts. Scholarly research suggests that insufficient funding and resources can negatively affect both the conduct and outcomes of collaborative projects (Gray & Purdy, 2018).

Competitive Funding: Fueling Fear, Hindering Collaboration

Participants also highlighted that the federal government’s implementation of competitive funding grants has amplified divisions among stakeholders in collaboration models. For instance,

the federal government brought in highly competitive funding grants, and that worked against collaboration. So you’d be thinking we’re working together. [...] but there was always a question in my head. How much can I say that that doesn’t expose us to losing the next grant? (P3, Civil Society)

This observation emphasises that the competitive nature of funding fosters an atmosphere of fear among stakeholders, who believe that excessive transparency could jeopardise their chances of securing future funding. Further complicating this issue, scholars

have observed that governments may leverage their budgetary authority to alter programs without consulting NGOs, thereby restricting their meaningful participation in collaborative models (Rajabi et al., 2021).

In contrast, other participants defended this competitive nature, arguing “government’s got limited funds that it can provide to a grant-making process. So it does need to consider where can it best spend that funding” (P7, Civil Society). This comment indicates that a strategic distribution of limited resources is necessary to maximise impact, even if it unintentionally raises competition among stakeholders.

However, studies suggest that limited funding for collaboration stems not only from budget constraints but also from a lack of understanding of what is required to build and sustain impactful collaborations (Foot, 2015). For instance, there is a need for better understanding of equitable resource distribution and idea sharing in collaborative efforts. Echoing this, one participant revealed hesitation around idea sharing within collaborative models:

There is a concern about sharing ideas in collaboration frameworks due to the fear of potential risks. People may hesitate to bring forward controversial viewpoints or opinions if they believe there is a risk of losing funding. (P8, Civil Society)

This observation highlights the inherent tension between collaboration and competition within stakeholder interactions. Researchers stated that unequal resource distribution and cost-benefit misallocation can lead to conflicts (Van Hille et al., 2020). As one respondent said, funding “causes competition. It’s constantly, all the time, everybody’s going for the same little, tiny amount of money” (P13, Civil Society).

Concerns regarding the potential loss of funding opportunities may result in ambiguous communication, limiting the exchange of ideas and information. As one respondent explained, “you don’t even want to be that voice in there. It’s just causing so much division” (P13, Civil

Society). This situation illustrates an extra layer of frustration and division within collaborative frameworks, where stakeholders feel sidelined and discouraged from participating actively, fearing their contributions may be embraced without due recognition or benefit. Similarly, scholars stated that even though stakeholders believe they are working towards a shared objective, “partners often find they espouse diverse aims that provoke difficult-to-reconcile conflicts” (Gray & Purdy, 2018, p. 69).

Another respondent said, “NGOs don’t get enough money to do the work that they need to do. So, I think money is always a barrier” (P14, Legal & Academia). One participant observed that the lack of funding and support is a regular issue in the human rights sector:

I think one thing is to have funding so that we don’t expect people to do things for free because we don’t do that in any other type of work. But it’s a lot and anything human rights-related. (P1, Legal & Academia)

To address these issues, it is critical for the government to take a proactive role in funding research and collaboration initiatives. As one participant noted, “if we want good quality research, we need to get some budget and give some grants out” (P10, Legal & Academia). Another participant suggested that the government could “fund the upscaling of existing multi-stakeholder initiatives, and they could fund the development of new industry-based ones” (P11, Business Consultant). These perceptions highlight the need for “the allocation of resources to actually develop capacity, develop collaboration” (P4, Civil Society).

Clearly, there is room for improvement, and the government plays a critical role in ensuring that initiatives are both inclusive and collaborative. As one respondent stated,

Government has always been the loudest voice, loudest power. And so, I think sometimes it’s difficult for civil society to be heard. And I think that government needs to do better with respect to that. (P14, Legal & Academia)

These comments advocate for a more balanced approach in which the government listens to and collaborates with all stakeholders, integrating the insights and experiences of those directly involved. It is essential to acknowledge, however, that tensions will always exist, particularly in the forced labour space. As one respondent stated, no one's agenda-free [...]. The more people can approach things from a human perspective, the better" (P12, Business Consultant).

This observation suggests that adopting a human-centric approach can help mitigate these tensions, fostering more successful and collaborative solutions. Financial support and government leadership are pivotal in developing meaningful collaboration and creating mechanisms to amplify new voices. Respondents also highlighted the importance of data sharing in facilitating multi-stakeholder collaboration.

6.4 MSCs and Data Sharing to Address Forced Labour

Data sharing is essential in collaboration models as it contributes to a holistic view of issues, facilitates evidence-based decision-making, and promotes collaboration among key stakeholders (Susha et al., 2023). Stakeholders promoting data sharing for public benefit often use terms like "data for good" to highlight the positive objectives of such initiatives (Susha et al., 2019). Researchers confirm that collaborative partners establish trust by exchanging information and expertise (Bryson et al., 2006). However, limited data flow and inadequate information sharing can sabotage collaborative efforts, causing mistrust and collusion among stakeholders (Gray & Purdy, 2018). The absence of effective data collection and distribution in Australia's fight against forced labour severely hampers efforts across various sectors, especially across government agencies. As participants commented, data sharing

remains something that frustrates me a bit in this area. And I do think there's huge scope to improve the sharing of data [...] and certainly, across government agencies as well. I think we could do a lot more to share data to really tackle the issue, not just identify risks. (P1, Legal & Academia)

These perspectives underscore the significant need for developing data collection and sharing practices within organisations and across government agencies to generate a holistic approach to addressing forced labour. However, this approach “requires a broader conversation” (P4, Civil Society). Facilitating easier data sharing entails new organisational forms, as the emergence of “big data” generates an ecosystem of different actors with their own motivations (Susha et al., 2019).

In line with this, the report *Australia’s MSA: Is It Fit for Purpose?* (Marshall et al., 2023) confirmed that many stakeholders strongly desire increased government assistance, particularly in the areas of investigations and data collection. To illustrate this, one participant highlighted significant inadequacies in data sharing:

To really tackle the issue, not just identify risks [...] I suspect that a lot of the information doesn’t get to the relevant people. And so, our ability to really tackle that through, you know, for example, Department of Foreign Affairs or other agencies is probably quite limited. (P1, Legal & Academia)

This comment reveals the apparent inconsistency between identifying risks and the substantial capacity of different organisations to efficiently share data to address human rights risks. In this context, one respondent questioned why the U.S. is responsible for data collection related to Australia, as reflected in the 2024 TIP report, instead of Australia itself:

There’s quite a U.S. statewide initiative. There’s a collection of data. [...] for example, the demographic information. So, the State Department, I think it is, does the trafficking assessment of each country around the world. And we can all look at what’s they saying about Australia. Why on earth is America collecting that information about Australia? Why isn’t Australia doing it itself? (P16, Legal & Academia)

This comment underscores an observed reliance on international assessments rather than fostering domestic capabilities in data gathering and analysis. Experts also emphasised the lack of extensive and reliable data to address the issue. For instance, the absence of a

centralised information database on forced labour in Australia was pointed out by a participant: “There is no sort of central information data point that the government has established, that I’m aware of, on forced labour in Australia” (P2, Legal & Academia). This lack of centralised data significantly hampers the ability to comprehensively understand and address the nuances of forced labour. Further complicating this issue, another participant noted a gap in demographic understanding and border assessment processes:

I don’t think we even do the demographic understanding [...] what processes do we have at the border to assess people? [...] But I suspect the answer usually is to deport them rather than to put them into protection. (P16, Legal & Academia)

This comment indicates a deficiency in both understanding the demographics of individuals at risk and in the procedures at national borders, often leading to deportation rather than protection. In the context of the forced labour statements, the absence of measurable data was highlighted:

There’s no data as far as we can say, there’s no intelligence gathering [...] so the law enforcement side of things is still abysmal, inadequate, dysfunctional [...] you’ve got the Fair Work Ombudsman, they don’t have any training in and a lot of things that happened to workers like threats of denunciation to authorities, you know, all of the, you know, abuse side of things and coercive control, that’s not considered in with the lens of being a potential victim of crime. (P9, Civil Society)

Further complicating this issue is a critical gap in the awareness of reporting requirements among key government agencies. As one participant observed,

I’m surprised to say that the Australian Border Force seems to not be aware of entities who need to report and who haven’t. For example, I’m privy to a number of handful of entities [...] who are over the threshold, that have done nothing in the last four years with no repercussions. So I find it very surprising [...] the information can be derived from the Australian Tax Office and ASIC to actually understand and actually know who should be

reporting and who shouldn't be, and then [...] drive that intervention so that those who are not reporting or not reporting effectively, sort of is, in a sense, motivated, a kind of exposed really to and then with a view to driving them to get on board. (P6, Business Consultant)

This observation reveals a distinct inconsistency between regulatory expectations and reporting practices, with some entities failing to report without facing consequences. To address this, "there should be a positive government initiative to [...] follow up on corporate reporting on slavery in supply chains" (P16, Legal & Academia). These perspectives emphasise a sense of frustration regarding the inadequacies in data collection processes. One participant pointedly addressed the lack of transparency and public engagement, noting that

the policies that are applied by prosecuting authorities or the police are not published in Australia. So, you've got an absence of public policy, you've got an absence of public education. Certainly, and then you've got this absence of legal frameworks as well [...] and an absence of data. (P16, Legal & Academia)

This comment underlines a complex gap between public policy, education, legal frameworks, and data availability, demonstrating a critical obstacle to effectively collaborate to address forced labour. Furthermore, this gap is underscored by the findings in a recent report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2022), which reveals not only a significant decline in the identification of slavery victims but also a global reduction in slavery convictions, with conviction rates dropping to as low as 38% since 2017. This decline emphasises the challenges within the criminal justice system in responding to slavery crimes.

Data Sharing across Sectors

The challenge of data sharing also impacts other sectors, including business and civil society. While data sharing offers significant benefits, some stakeholders remain careful and cautious in their approach. According to Susha et al. (2023), data-sharing partnerships encounter

several new challenges, including managing data risks, adhering to data protection regulations, and ensuring ethical data usage. To illustrate this, one participant commented:

I can understand there are risks and benefits to data sharing. I'm quite agnostic about that for now. And I think none of our members are really comfortable with us sharing compliance data publicly. In some cases, they'll agree to share some very small aspects, but we're not at the stage yet. (P11, Business Consultant)

This hesitation significantly impedes progress, as fragmented data-sharing efforts fail to address forced labour effectively. To illustrate this, while companies conduct risk analyses, one participant noted that the data remains opaque because “they provide a very brief overview in their modern slavery statements” (P1, Legal & Academia). This lack of detailed disclosure hinders stakeholders’ ability to comprehend and address the identified risks fully, undermining efforts to effectively combat forced labour. One participant from a different sector emphasised the importance of distinguishing research data from administrative data to protect stakeholders.

I hear a lot of times when people are discussing getting access to data, they're conflating research with administrative data. And I think those are slightly separate issues that need to be addressed slightly separately [...] But I think it's a matter of how to do that in ways that protects people whose data it is, protects the systems that the mechanisms that are being used to capture that data. It will undermine the ability to get the data if we make the data too public and therefore how do we manage those dynamics? (P4, Civil Society)

This perspective underscores the complexity of balancing transparency with privacy, highlighting the need for nuanced systems that consider different purposes and sensitivities. As one participant stated, “I think there could be a lot done to invest in research and using, in a sense, using data to increase our understanding” (P6, Business Consultant). These observations reflect that effective data sharing requires protecting individual privacy while leveraging data to enhance collective knowledge. However, a critical challenge in effective

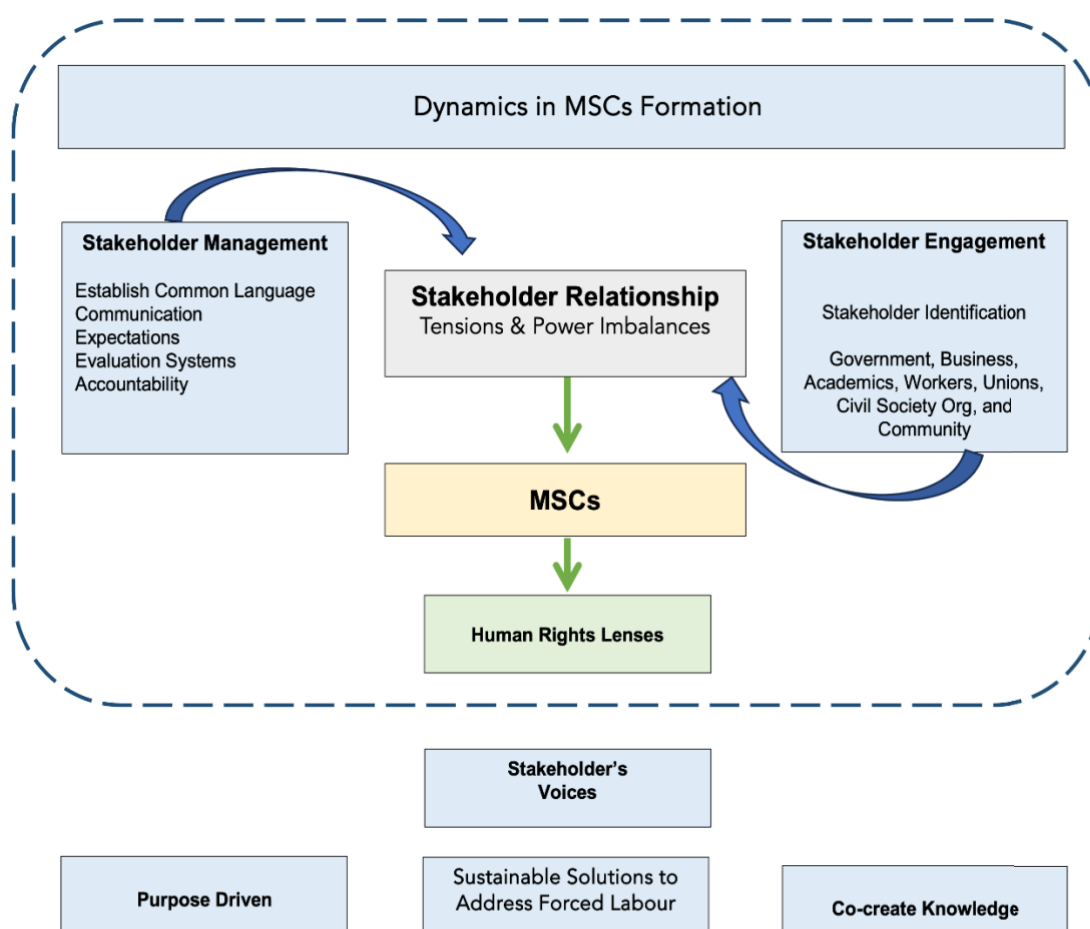
partnering is the need for more data sharing with academics and practitioners in both the public and private sectors (Susha et al., 2019). For instance, some organisations remain hesitant to share data, which hinders the potential for comprehensive insights and collaborative progress. This was illustrated by a participant who observed that

“Civil society organisations tend not to publish any data [...] I think there’s a limitation to that because I think often, they don’t even share de-identified data either” (P7, Civil Society).

These observations highlight the critical need for organisations to embrace a cultural shift towards greater openness and transparency, which is essential for fully understanding and combating forced labour. Scholars state that navigating these complexities and reaching effective data sharing can be difficult for governments, businesses, and other stakeholders (Susha et al., 2023). Given these challenges, how can we better understand and effectively address forced labour when stakeholders operate in isolation and restrict data access? A collaborative and transparent approach to data sharing and stakeholder engagement is crucial for informed and impactful action against forced labour.

Based on the findings from this chapter, I have further refined the preliminary model (see Figure 11), which outlines the dynamics of collaboration and stakeholder engagement within MSCs to combat forced labour. This model will continue to evolve as additional findings are presented in the next chapter. The current findings emphasise the critical role of MSCs in bridging the macro-level organisational strategies for addressing forced labour with the micro-level spaces of trust that address individual concerns. These lenses are essential as they guarantee that the collaboration follows equity and justice principles, especially when navigating the complex dynamics between organisational approaches and unique experiences (e.g., MSCs across sectors and the individual perception of MSCs).

Figure 11 *Development of the Model of the Dynamics in MSCs Formation*



The human rights focus in collaboration models is critical, as it enables a deeper deconstruction of collaboration dynamics between stakeholder management and engagement, exploring the collective knowledge and experience that benefit both immediate stakeholders and the broader community. Integrating multi-layered perspectives, with MSCs as a central player, allows us to identify barriers to collaboration at the individual level. For instance, corporate fear of participating in MSCs due to potential repercussions from disclosing information or the exclusion of less powerful actors from MSCs due to lack of funding. This level of analysis is crucial, as stakeholders come from diverse sectors and organisational structures, including government, business, academia, workers, unions, civil society organisations, and communities. It also fosters sustainable solutions that can adapt to evolving demands and challenges at both the organisational and individual levels. In essence,

exploring and developing MSCs across multiple levels helps overcome difficulties that hinder meaningful collaboration while promoting greater trust, flexibility, and responsiveness to common challenges.

6.5 Chapter Insights

This chapter has explored the complexity and challenges of collaboration in various sectors in Australia to combat forced labour. One of the principal findings is the persistent issue of disconnected actions among stakeholders. The absence of unified efforts, as stressed by participants, highlights the need for more structured and cohesive collaboration models. The mixed perceptions concerning the presence and significance of MSCs within the Australian anti-slavery field further emphasise this challenge. While some respondents acknowledge emergent collaborative efforts, such as the Cleaning Accountability Framework and the Human Rights Resources and Energy Collaborative, their effectiveness and implementation remain unpredictable due to the voluntary nature of participation and the unreliable commitment levels among stakeholders.

A critical insight is the importance of involving a broader spectrum of stakeholders, especially those closely related to the issue, such as unions and workers' groups. These stakeholders provide valuable experience-based responses that internal stakeholders might neglect. Businesses' hesitation to collaborate with external stakeholders due to fears of legal repercussions and competitive disadvantages underscores an essential obstacle to collaboration. The results suggest that building trust and delivering legal protection can promote more open and effective conversations and partnerships with the business sector.

The requirement for organisations that are already struggling to survive to attend meetings and volunteer their time and resources without compensation, especially when addressing labour exploitation, ironically perpetuates exploitation. As one respondent said, "the government requires people to do it as volunteers. And I think the great irony of that is we're working about labour exploitation. And I would call that exploitation" (P8, Civil Society).

This situation creates an ecosystem of marginalisation and psychological distress, similar to the conditions faced by victims of forced labour. Both scenarios involve individuals working under unethical conditions with inadequate compensation, motivated by hope for future benefits that may never materialise. It also challenges MSCs by undermining diverse perspectives, equal participation, and stakeholder respect. Addressing this issue requires more strategic and equitable funding for genuine inclusion and effective collaboration. Ensuring access and support for all stakeholders is crucial to upholding fairness and justice in collaborative efforts against forced labour.

The need for greater information flow practices was also stressed. Adequate data sharing is vital for holistically understanding forced labour and enabling evidence-based decision-making. The lack of a data collection approach and the unwillingness of some organisations to share information hinder progress. Respondents stressed the need for ethical data-sharing instruments that safeguard individual privacy while improving collective understanding. This process is essential for creating effective anti-slavery strategies.

A key finding is the value of a human-centric approach in collaborative efforts. Excluding key stakeholders from collaborative models and processes not only disempowers them but also compromises the legitimacy and efficacy of MSCs. Thus, there is a need for paths that promote stakeholder voices and expertise within the collaborative framework. This approach aligns with the broader literature that advocates for more inclusive and ethical collaborative models to address forced labour. The next section explores the way forward, with a particular focus on the government's role in promoting diverse voices and collaboration models.

7 Moving Forward: Stakeholder Inclusion in MSCs

"I wouldn't want to be involved in a multi stakeholder supply chain initiative that did not include workers. I think that would be a pointless and damaging exercise."

(P11, Business Consultant)

This quote, from an expert in the anti-slavery space, given in response to my question about the importance of stakeholder inclusion in MSCs, effectively illustrates the core premises of this section. Designing MSCs is a complex task, involving a working process across different organisational settings that "is neither easy nor straightforward" (Gray & Purdy, 2018, p. 68). This chapter identifies systemic gaps in the Australian NAP response to forced labour, leading to structural injustices, unclear pathways for all stakeholders, insufficient communication, and limited collaboration. In essence, structural injustices "are harms that come to people as a result of structural processes" (Young, 2003, p. 7) that involve the participation of many.

Scholars argue that NAPs' weaknesses remain evident, particularly in their limited exploration of "regulatory options to ensure adequate human rights protection and access to justice" (Bordignon, 2020, p. 89). To provide meaningful solutions, response mechanisms therefore require stronger collaboration with worker representatives and external stakeholders, such as NGOs and unions. In this chapter, I explore the barriers to effective collaboration in Australia, presenting expert perspectives on designing collaborative models and analysing the roles of government, business, and key stakeholders in promoting diverse voices to combat forced labour. Central to these efforts is the inclusion of worker voices to address inequalities and empower marginalised groups.

One important finding from this chapter is the need for an official definition and public designation of frontline responders in Australia. This structural gap hinders the development of robust support mechanisms, leading to inconsistent interventions and limited collaboration. Establishing clear roles and responsibilities for frontline responders would enhance the

coordination of efforts and strengthen systemic responses to forced labour. Furthermore, challenges persist in translating collaborative initiatives into systemic changes. These issues underscore the importance of critically evaluating multi-stakeholder approaches to ensure they prioritise workers' conditions, safety, and empowerment. Effective strategies must centre worker voices, addressing inequalities and providing avenues for meaningful representation.

At the governance and corporate levels, integrating human rights into business operations remains fraught with challenges. The absence of federal human rights protections exacerbates these difficulties, undermining efforts to combat forced labour. Compelling corporate responses requires not only the implementation of robust grievance mechanisms but also trust-building measures that enable workers to safely report abuses. A restorative justice framework—focusing on restoration, relationships, dialogue, and remedies—offers a promising approach to achieving humane and sustainable outcomes. Addressing forced labour in Australia therefore demands a comprehensive framework that combines legal protections, enhanced stakeholder collaboration, and adherence to restorative justice principles. The government's role is pivotal, both in developing policies and providing resources while ensuring democratic representation and promoting worker-centric solutions.

This chapter leverages the knowledge of seasoned experts (as quoted and classified by expertise in Figure 9 in Chapter 5) to study collaborative models against forced labour and the challenges to their successful implementation in Australia. Participants responded to open-ended questions (see **Appendix 2**) to explore Australia's collaboration models to address forced labour. **Table 14** presents coding examples and relevant quotations that illustrate the themes discussed in this chapter.

Table 14 *Development of Initial and Final Interview Coding for This Chapter*

Illustrative Quotes	1st Order	2nd Order	General Theme
“I don't think the systems exist clearly enough for a lived experience to be easy to find” (P16, Legal & Academia)	Inadequate	Systemic Gaps in Forced Labour	Chapter 7 Moving Forward Stakeholder Inclusion in MSCs
“No one really knows what to do if they do identify someone. [...] I don't think people are equipped to know what to do” (P12, Business Consultant).	Unprepared		
“It's a question that we posed ourselves internally, what happens if we do identify a victim [...] There's not necessarily a clear pathway (P11, Business Consultant)	Confusion		
“There's still very much a siloed approach [...] the market overall is still immature” (P6, Consultant).	Isolation	Government and Business Synergy in Forced Labour Initiatives	
“Unions are not seen as necessarily by corporate Australia as a stakeholder” (P11, Business Consultant)	Recognition		
“There is a real separation between business and NGOs, and it's almost seen as they're in conflict with each other” (P16, Legal & Academia)	Conflict		
“Create meaningful representation that's democratized. So, it doesn't become a small club of people who are protecting an agenda and all saying the same thing” (P4, Civil Society).	Diversify	Designing Collaborative Solutions: Expert Insights on Forced Labour in Australia	
“Involve a [...] tripartite as a minimum conversation [...] to share perspectives and work towards a common goal” (P2, Legal & Academia).	Unite		
“there's no one sector fits all response; you have to consider the particular needs of the worker” (P12, Business Consultant).	Tailor		
“The biggest problem is in Australia [...] is that there is no [...] Federal human rights instrument [...] the human rights state charters are very vulnerable to political change” (P16, Legal & Academia)	Vulnerable	Corporate Remediation through Restorative Justice	
“If you're a criminal and you've killed someone, [...] you can have your lawyer present. Not if you're a victim of modern slavery” (P9, Civil Society)	Unfair		
“We really need victims of crime compensation as a national system” (P3, Civil Society)	Restorative Justice		

This chapter begins with a discussion on systemic gaps in forced labour in Section 7.1. It then transitions to 7.2 Government and Business Synergy in Forced Labour Initiatives. The third theme is covered in 7.3 Designing Collaborative Solutions: Expert Insights on Forced Labour in Australia. The chapter continues with 7.4 Corporate Remediation through Restorative Justice, and it ends with 7.5 Chapter Insights, which comprehensively summarises the significant insights discussed.

7.1 Systemic Gaps in Forced Labour Response

“One of the problems is the systems don’t exist. In child abuse, the systems exist [...] it’s really easy to find people with lived experience. In modern slavery [forced labour], I don’t think the systems exist clearly enough.” (P16, Legal & Academia)

The lack of structured systems in forced labour not only hinders the identification and support of survivors but also undermines the efficacy and outcomes of collaborative efforts within the NAP, leading to structural injustices. Structural injustices “are harms that come to people as a result of structural processes in which many people participate” (Young, 2003, p. 7). Underscoring the consequences of these gaps, one participant mentioned “so you’re more likely to see higher rates of revictimization, or re-traumatization, when there’s gaps in the response mechanisms” (P4, Civil Society). To address this, participants highlighted the role of education and advocated for increased awareness as well as robust response mechanisms. For instance, one participant emphasised Australia’s legal education system.

There’s no training of lawyers in Australia still, even if they’re studying workplace relations on the modern slavery crimes. (P9, Civil Society)

This weakness in legal education highlights a critical gap in developing tailored educational programs for law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, investigators, and the community in general to augment awareness of the prevalence and ramifications of forced labour. As one participant mentioned, it is an issue that “involves children, barely anybody

knows about that” (P4, Civil Society). This exemplifies a broader systemic failure to identify and address the intricacies of forced labour and its subtle occurrence in various sectors. Scholars have emphasised that multidisciplinary training enhances awareness and MSCs’ ability for detection and referral (Nhep et al., 2024). As one participant said,

there needs to be a public program of education. So, there could be a massive education drive on modern slavery. And that would drive the creation of stakeholders once there’s an education [...] engage with health organisations to see whether there’s any data on people coming through who are victims. (P16, Legal & Academia)

Business schools have significantly neglected the incorporation of business and human rights topics. Scholars observed that corporate social responsibility is often seen as a marketing approach, indicating a superficial treatment that undermines the depth and seriousness needed for meaningful change (Nolan & Boersma, 2024). Research reveals a gap between consumers’ professed ethics and purchasing behaviours, reflecting a broader societal issue (Caruana et al., 2021). This inconsistency resonates with one participant’s observation, highlighting the critical role of educating consumers:

Awareness raising and education of all stakeholders and education of customers [...] their expectations go beyond just buying the cheapest product, and that there’s an understanding as to why that product is so cheap. (P2, Legal & Academia)

These consumer trends highlight the need for genuine commitment to business ethics and human rights in both education and practice. One participant, however, identified one of the key issues even if education is offered:

A lot of corporates have their own training for all this stuff. And where they’re trying to train people, [they] had to recognize the signs of someone being a victim of modern slavery. But I think no one really knows what to do if they do identify someone. [...] I don’t think people are equipped to know what to do, basically. (P12, Business Consultant)

This observation raises critical concerns about the need for public education and awareness, as well as robust business response mechanisms. The assertion that “no one really knows what to do” highlights a critical systemic failure, characterised by a pervasive lack of knowledge and preparedness to respond effectively when instances of forced labour are identified or suspected. Therefore, it is unrealistic to expect businesses to identify and address these issues accurately without proper training and guidance. However, business needs to act responsibly and proactively:

Because if you ask, you will find stuff [...]. They're [business] not ready to respond to any problems, so they're actually increasing their risk [...] You kind of knew about that problem two years ago, and you didn't do anything because you didn't know how to deal with that. And now, it's on the front page of the newspapers. (P9, Civil Society)

These comments indicate that businesses are reluctant to investigate or acknowledge forced labour within their supply chains due to a fear of exposing internal problems they are unprepared to address. However, a participant emphasised that businesses are becoming progressively cognisant of their boundaries:

They [business] know that they don't have in-house expertise to handle workers that may be impacted by modern slavery [forced labour]. And so, finding external expertise for, you know, in the not-for-profit in the social services sector is one area where that collaboration is happening. (P9, Civil Society)

The engagement of external expertise can enhance the effectiveness of stakeholder collaborations; however, collaboration between businesses and workers' representatives constitutes an additional area for examination. As one participant highlighted,

business should really engage with worker representatives in a genuine way and that certainly doesn't happen naturally in Australia [...] businesses would much rather consult with a big consulting firm or a charity, neither of whom have any capacity or interest in

actually advocating for the sort of collective interests of workers. (P11, Business Consultant)

These perspectives underline a significant absence of genuine stakeholder involvement and education, with some organisations seeking advice from large firms that often lack the capacity or interest in these issues. In essence, organisations must develop comprehensive training programs that include clear response protocols and resources, emphasising collaboration among different stakeholders. As one participant eloquently said, “if you can connect health, law, and education, you’re a long way to promoting the need to respond to a particular situation” (P16, Legal & Academia).

Addressing these complexities effectively necessitates a holistic approach that integrates educational insights with actionable strategies in business ethics and human rights (Biswas-Tortajada et al., 2023). However, collaboration faces other obstacles, such as the official identification and designation of frontline responders, which will be addressed in the next section.

Who Are Frontline Responders?

Australia’s current referral pathways for addressing forced labour have significant deficiencies, especially regarding first responders’ identification and roles. The country lacks an official definition and public designation of these frontline stakeholders, weakening the overall NAP strategy. In this context, one participant to the public submission to the NAP 2020-25 “encourages the Government to include a clear definition of ‘frontline officials’ in the NAP” (Global Compact Network Australia). This recommendation was made four years ago, yet it has not been implemented. When asked about an official definition for first responders, one participant admitted: “I don’t think there is a [...], maybe there is some. Not to my knowledge” (P12, Business Consultant). Another participant mentioned,

I know there are services provided by Anti-slavery Australia, Red Cross, Salvation Army [...] There are a few organisations that sort of work in relation to each other. But I don't know if it's official, and official or a defined list. (P6, Business Consultant)

Another participant confirmed,

I know that there is some NGOs that provide frontline services to victims. I believe that the Red Cross and the Salvation Army both do those things. And I think there's some other religious charities that provide services. I know that the Australian Federal Police has a program, and that they engage charities to fulfill a lot of the parts of their program. (P11, Business Consultant)

In relation to a specific definition for frontline responders, another expert added:

As far as I'm aware, no, there isn't a definition [...]. It would make sense for government to identify who do they consider is able, is most likely to come across cases of modern slavery and then have an ability to detect them early. So coming up with that kind of list, I think, would probably be helpful [...]. [It] also would help those organisations themselves understand that they may have a role. (P7, Civil Society)

In contrast, the UK approach explicitly defines a "first responder organisation" in England and Wales as an authority that is authorised to refer a potential victim of modern slavery into the National Referral Mechanism (United Kingdom Government, 2015). Some of the organisations publicly designated as first responders include: police forces, certain parts of the Home Office, UK Visas and Immigration, Border Force, immigration enforcement, the National Crime Agency, local authorities, the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA), the Salvation Army, and migrant help, among others. These organisations have well-defined roles and responsibilities in identifying and referring victims/survivors and ensuring timely and successful intervention. As one participant summarised, "I love the UK strategy" (P13, Civil Society).

Australia's absence of a corresponding approach presents significant challenges. Without an authorised identification and description of the first responder's role, there is doubt about who is responsible for the initial identification and referral of forced labour survivors. As one respondent said, "I guess the reporting mechanism is revolved around the Australian Federal Police" (P8, Civil Society). This comment illustrates the ambiguity surrounding the current mechanisms.

Frontline responders within and across sectors play a pivotal role in identifying and responding to forced labour issues (David & Salter, 2021). These responders can serve as service providers and advocates, which positions them as key stakeholders in fighting human rights issues (Phillips & Heward-Belle, 2023).

Frontline responders in the context of forced labour can include healthcare professionals, settlement sector and social workers, NGOs, trade unions, community outreach workers, and law enforcement, among others (Baumann-Pauly, Nolan, Labowitz, et al., 2016; David & Salter, 2021; Helton, 2016; Lockyer, 2020; Testa, 2020). The inadequacies in current referral mechanisms are particularly problematic. One respondent emphasised essential questions in relation to the formal referral mechanisms, stressing the need for a robust and well-formulated referral system.

How are those pathways formulated? How well are they formulated? How comprehensive are they? Are they missing referrals to particular stakeholder groups? And that might be for services or for information flows. (P4, Civil Society)

Without clear and ingrained referral pathways, frontline workers and other vital stakeholders face substantial challenges in providing timely and practical assistance to victims of forced labour. Although the role of first responders in the context of forced labour is under-researched, studies in forced marriage define the social response role as the "wide-ranging supports, services and educational activities that work to prevent, respond and support those affected" by human rights abuses (Nelson & Burn, 2024, p. 2). Research on the role of

domestic violence workers in policymaking processes shows that responders feel excluded from national policymaking, with their perspectives often overlooked (Phillips & Heward-Belle, 2023). This exclusion results in the absence of key insights and evidence-based approaches, leading to narrow policies and limited collaboration.

This ambiguity can result in unreliable responses, missed intervention opportunities, and ongoing victim distress. One respondent shared this sentiment, referring to the AFP as the main path:

I think it's a web page on the AFP website, that's pretty much it, you're supposed to refer yourself through the Police website, never going to happen. It's madness. (P16, Legal & Academia)

Overall, respondents confirmed doubt about the pathways available for victims and survivors and the clarity of the current mechanisms. As one participant eloquently stated,

I think there's quite a bit of complexity there and like if I'm confused about it, I can bet people that are in situations of exploitation or like just working on what's going on here and [...]. I think it's probably a quite a leap to step out and say, "Oh, wait a minute, this doesn't seem fair, who can I tell?" But yeah, quite a bit more work to do there around sort of like building those networks and those channels. (P12, Business Consultant)

Another respondent from a different sector confirmed this concern, questioning what happens if they identify a victim:

It's a question that we posed ourselves internally, what happens if we do identify a victim of modern slavery? How do we how do we refer that person for support? [...] There's not necessarily a clear pathway. Yeah, it is concerning. (P11, Business Consultant)

These observations are particularly concerning. If experts in the Australian anti-slavery field are confused, what can we expect from victims and survivors navigating such uncertainty in seeking assistance? The complexity and the lack of well-defined and accessible referral

channels create substantial barriers for frontline responders and victims in identifying and reporting forced labour issues.

The absence of a precise first responder role further exacerbates this problem. Without adequate training and clear accountability, no single stakeholder feels fully equipped or responsible for addressing the situation, leading to a fragmented approach, duplicated efforts, and ignored critical aspects of victim support. Echoing this, one participant from a different sector said,

sometimes I think it's not just how frontline responders are identified and defined, but also how that information feeds from other channels that may end up identifying indicators of trafficking and referring those indicators on to frontline responders for, you know, next steps for investigation or whatever those protocols might be. (P4, Civil Society)

This observation stresses the need for a uniform and cohesive system where different information channels significantly coordinate to identify and address forced labour. The lack of structured systems and clear roles in Australia's approach to forced labour creates significant challenges. This situation demands a thorough re-evaluation of potential solutions to enhance accountability and facilitate support mechanisms for victims/survivors.

7.2 Stakeholder Inclusion in MSCs to Address Forced Labour

"There is a need for multistakeholder initiatives in particular industries, which are high risk for modern slavery and labour rights violations." (P11, Business Consultant)

This observation underscores the importance of developing tailored collaboration models to address the issue of forced labour across multiple sectors. It also highlights the role of government, shifting its focus from passive advocacy to leading by example and demonstrating tangible action and accountability. As one participant said,

the thing I'm interested in is government walking, you know, walking the talk, not just talking the talk. (P9, Civil Society)

As Eweje and colleagues (2021, p. 203) articulate, "governments around the world should show more leadership and sincerity in dealing with sustainability issues and partner with various stakeholders to achieve the SDGs". Research shows that governments can be complicit in human rights abuses (Nguyen, 2021); therefore, to ensure businesses uphold human rights, governments are encouraged to utilise broader aspects of their regulatory powers (International Labour Organization et al., 2022). This statement highlights the importance of genuine and active involvement by governments in sustainability efforts, emphasising the need for cooperation with a wide range of stakeholders. Echoing this, strategic scholars emphasise that no single actor can independently resolve our most challenging social problems (Freeman et al., 2019). As one participant mentioned: "We just need as humans to collaborate, a little bit more tighter and better" (P15, Business Consultant).

This perception accentuates the value of human-centric collaboration, where the unique experiences of workers play a critical role in shaping effective strategies against forced labour. Within such a paradigm, organisational scholars advocate for stakeholder voice inclusion as a key strategy to address inequalities in the interactions between organisations and their stakeholders, especially focusing on groups that are marginalised or exercise minor power, such as workers (Van Buren & Greenwood, 2009). This process requires not merely granting them a voice but also affirming their status through acknowledgment and recognition. However, this approach has drawn scholarly attention, with some supporting and others critiquing it in relation to stakeholder classification and legitimacy (Derry, 2012; Mitchell et al., 1997). In the context of MSCs, stakeholders are considered legitimate when potential collaborators acknowledge their right and ability to affect the issue or problem under discussion (Gray & Purdy, 2018).

By enhancing collaboration and emphasising the voices of workers, governments and businesses can develop more inclusive and empathetic approaches to combating forced labour while protecting human rights within business operations. This strategy not only addresses the issue effectively but also ensures that the methods employed respect and uphold the dignity of all individuals involved. Building on this foundation, the importance of critically evaluating the effectiveness of various approaches to addressing forced labour cannot be overstated.

We often sort of make proclamations about what should be done [...]. But we often don't really carefully consider what's been effective or what hasn't been effective. (P1, Legal & Academia)

This observation underlines the importance of adopting a more reflective, outcomes-driven framework that prioritises evidence-based approaches to inform and guide anti-slavery strategies effectively. Similarly, scholars affirm that “evaluation is a key tool for identifying ‘what works’ in terms of delivering public policy goals” (Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002, p. 185). Therefore, the efficacy of multi-stakeholder approaches, particularly within the NAP, remains a subject of debate:

Out of the National Action Plan, that things that are multi-stakeholder agencies don't really shift the political settings. (P10, Legal & Academia)

This comment underscores the challenge of translating collaborative efforts into significant systemic changes, demonstrating that while certain models show promise, they still need to be evaluated and their effectiveness enhanced. Researchers support this idea as MSCs, while becoming more common in both public and private sectors, are often unsuccessful (Eweje et al., 2021; B. Gray & J. P. Stites, 2013). In this context, one participant questions the effectiveness of these collaborative efforts from the business sector in addressing forced labour.

Do they [business] collaborate with local services? Do they collaborate, for example, with women's services? Do they collaborate with anti-slavery Australia or other NGOs? (P16, Legal & Academia)

This comment underlines the importance of organisations identifying appropriate and effective stakeholders for collaboration. It accentuates the need for businesses to engage with a diverse range of organisations, including local service providers, women's services, and NGOs, to ensure a holistic approach. Moreover, for collaboration to be successful, businesses need to recognise their strengths and remain open to collaboration with other key stakeholders. As one respondent mentioned, "the only meaningful collaboration, I think, is where you know, business know their limitations" (P9, Civil Society).

Business and Other Key Stakeholders

In exploring the collaborative dynamics between businesses and key stakeholders such as unions, a significant decline in the influence of unions within Australia has become evident:

There's been an erosion in the power of trade unions in Australia over several decades. There are very few union members left in the private sector. Unions are not seen as necessarily by corporate Australia as a stakeholder that they need to or should consult with. (P11, Business Consultant)

Studies have confirmed this decline in Australia, further limiting workers' ability to express their concerns while exacerbating power imbalances (Bondy & Charles, 2020; Van Buren & Greenwood, 2008). Reinforcing this, scholars advocate for the inclusion of workers, their chosen trade unions, and representative organisations in HRDD processes to improve their effectiveness (Nolan, 2022). This suggests that including trade unions and groups selected by workers is crucial for improving collaborative efforts to fight forced labour. However, while unions play a crucial role in addressing and preventing forced labour, their engagement with the MSA appears limited. This concern was expressed by one participant:

The unions [...] have disregarded the modern slavery act because it's seen as something that business and conservatives came up with. It wasn't their initiative. It wasn't their idea. It wasn't implemented by a Labour government. (P9, Civil Society)

This comment suggests that unions themselves now exhibit a lack of interest, viewing the MSA as emblematic of conservative ideology rather than a genuine effort to address labour issues. This complexity raises the question of how businesses and essential stakeholders, like unions, can bridge socio-ideological boundaries to collaboratively tackle forced labour. In this context, Nolan and Bott (2018) argue that improving conditions for workers within global supply chains necessitates the concerted efforts of a wide array of participants—governments, businesses, consumers, NGOs, and unions alike. They argue that meaningful progress can only be made with a broad and cooperative approach, emphasising the importance of collaboration across different sectors and ideologies for significant improvement.

Moreover, the union movement seems to lack a clear understanding of the “continuum of exploitation, workers’ rights”, and its connection to forced labour:

In the union movement, there's not an understanding of that continuum at all. In actual fact, there's a complete conflation and overuse of the word exploitation, as though that's still just a civil matter. (P9, Civil Society)

Could this knowledge gap contribute to unions’ reduced engagement with MSA and collaboration efforts against forced labour? In this context, Boersma and Nolan (2022) suggest exploring how worker education and awareness of the continuum of exploitation can improve the support and solutions offered by businesses and governments.

To boost collaboration, one participant suggested businesses should actively embrace union involvement: “I think businesses should really, you know, take union seriously and help them come into workplaces” (P11, Business Consultant). This collaboration could help close

gaps in understanding forced labour and its legal implications while fostering stronger partnerships.

However, unions are not the only stakeholders facing challenges in collaboration; respondents also highlighted a significant disconnect between businesses and NGOs:

I think there is a real separation between business and NGOs, and it's almost seen as they're in conflict with each other. So, I suspect that reduces the opportunities for collaboration. (P16, Legal & Academia)

This gap between key stakeholders hinders the development of effective strategies and limits opportunities for MSC efforts to combat forced labour. Building on this perspective, scholars suggest that efforts should be intensified to motivate businesses to adopt anti-slavery practices, governance, leadership, and ethical conduct at the local level (Bales & Gardner, 2020).

Collaboration is Key

“There’s still very much a siloed approach [...] the market overall is still immature.”

(P6, Business Consultant)

This observation suggests the persistence of a siloed mindset within the market, which lacks the structural maturity, collective commitment, and integrated strategies necessary for effectively addressing forced labour. It also raises a critical question: Why do businesses often operate in isolation rather than pursue holistic MSCs? LeBaron (2021b) argues that addressing forced labour in supply chains requires a comprehensive analysis that considers broader employment and labour dynamics, challenging the practice of addressing these issues in isolation. In this context, a participant mentioned,

I think there's a lot more that needs to be done [...] to bridge [...] the gap, also in that between civil society groups and the private sector, so that there's a greater collaboration and greater sense of partnership. (P6, Business Consultant)

Moreover, the level of this engagement varies among businesses. As noted by a different participant,

there are some businesses doing quite meaningful consultation; there are other businesses that do superficial consultation or simply superficial engagement and limit the level of willingness to engage. (P7, Civil Society)

Similarly, Nolan (2022) argues that superficial strategies fail to drive meaningful changes in business models. Additionally, other studies advocate for greater accountability and transparency in addressing forced labour, emphasising the need for substantive action (Nolan & Frishling, 2019; Wettstein, 2021). Despite these challenges, a prudently optimistic attitude toward future improvements prevails, particularly in light of the anticipated appointment of an Anti-Slavery Commissioner. As one participant expressed, "we've got an Anti-Slavery Commissioner coming on board soon. So that could be an area for them to work through" (P12, Business Consultant). This perspective highlights a potential avenue for developing and improving MSC models between government, business entities, and other key stakeholders.

These findings highlight the challenges stakeholders face in collaborating to combat forced labour, accentuating the need for clearer cooperation models and more comprehensive cross-sector engagement strategies. The complex nature of forced labour makes it critical for all relevant sectors and stakeholders to be involved in efforts to prevent and address these issues. Therefore, meaningful collaboration is essential. As one participant noted, these complex crimes are characterised by their nuanced and covert nature. They observed:

They're incredibly nuanced; they can often be very, very covert. And at the point at which you exclude a sector, or you exclude a stakeholder, from being part of the infrastructure

that supports it, that prevents it, then you're just leaving gaps, you're leaving holes that victims are likely to fall through. (P4, Civil Society)

In essence, by failing to include all stakeholders across sectors—whether from government, business, civil society, unions, or the community and workers—the system designed to address the issue, much like the supply chains, becomes fragmented. As a result, critical perspectives and resources that could support Australia's national strategy in detecting, preventing, and addressing forced labour are lost. Therefore, designing tailored collaboration models is critical, a topic that will be addressed in the next section.

7.3 Designing Collaborative Solutions to Address Forced Labour

"I think it really depends on the sector, and who is relevant to that sector. But I think what we can't do is do it in isolation as a group of professionals." (P1, Legal & Academia)

This quote from an expert, provided in response to my question about the design of MSCs to address forced labour, underlines the need to develop collaboration models that actively engage key stakeholders, ensuring sector-specific perspectives are included and avoiding siloed thinking. In essence, tailoring strategies to the unique context while acknowledging that

there's no one-size-fits-all; there's no one-sector-fits-all response; you have to consider the particular needs of the worker and their safety first. (P12, Business Consultant)

This statement highlights the shortcomings of the "fits all" or the "exclusive group" approach, setting the stage for this section. As scholars suggest, "if the problem cannot be seen, it cannot be fixed", so building collaboration with trusted stakeholders is crucial for effective remediation (Pryde et al., 2024, p. 90). Echoing this, one participant emphasised the importance of involving various stakeholders rather than employing multiple strategies:

Sometimes, having lots of different strategies would actually weaken the remediation, but that having lots of stakeholders would strengthen remediation. (P1, Legal & Academia)

Contrary to this view, one respondent considered that “sometimes I find that actually you’re more productive with just a few people because you just can get the work done” (P14, Legal & Academia). Both perspectives provide compelling arguments. While broader collaboration strengthens inclusivity and remediation, others consider that fewer participants may allow concrete outcomes. The lack of communication was identified as a significant challenge:

Communication has to be there [...]. You know, we all made submissions, but nobody emailed us back to say this is where we’re up to now [...]. We had no communication back, and I think it’s a very good example of which government needs to do better. (P14, Legal & Academia)

This observation aligns with scholars’ views that collaboration is a “two-way communication” (Ansell & Gash, 2008, p. 546). It enhances MSCs by influencing public perceptions and demonstrating social transformation (Bryson et al., 2015). Therefore, improving communication between government agencies and various community organisations is essential to enhancing the effectiveness of collaborative efforts (Preble et al., 2021).

MSCs extend beyond the mere creation of physical spaces; they require a tailored response that addresses affected workers’ specific needs and safety, fostering an ecosystem that values continuity and inclusive dialogue. Therefore, the MSCs has

to be very targeted about the issue that it’s dealing with. [...] So we’re dealing with forced labour? We’re dealing with forced labour all around the world? Are we dealing with forced labour in Australia? [...] Because there’s so many different aspects of forced labour. (P14, Legal & Academia)

This observation underscores the complexity of forced labour, which has yet to be fully addressed in Australia. A targeted approach ensures that strategies are relevant and effective for the particular context. Another respondent elaborated on this as follows:

We've been tending to look offshore and not look so much at what's happening here [Australia] [...]. Martijn's research on cleaning is a good example of how this can work. But I don't see those kinds of voices being sought out so much. (P10, Legal & Academia)

Echoing this, researchers stress the necessity for further studies on the trends of forced labour within domestic supply chains (Crane et al., 2019). This disconnect between the offshore focus and domestic realities increases risks for vulnerable workers and hinders the development of effective, evidence-based strategies. In this context, I asked participants: "If you were to design a MSC model in Australia to address forced labour, which stakeholders do you believe should be included?" Respondents provided various examples, such as the need for a

tripartite as a minimum conversation between policymakers, so the government, on one hand, business perspective stakeholders on another hand, and then civil society and NGO organisations. [...] I would trade unions as well to bring those three groupings together to share perspectives and work towards a common goal. (P2, Legal & Academia)

Another participant added:

Procurement, employers, workers, and worker representatives and any kind of middleman. [...] Government is a nice-to-have but not crucial [...]. Academics [...], frontline sort of support services [...], faith-based charities. (P11, Business Consultant)

The observation that the government is not always viewed as an "essential" stakeholder in collaboration deserves additional examination. Scholars have found that stakeholders may perceive government participation as complex bureaucracy, potentially slowing interactions and hindering effective responses (Rajabi et al., 2021). In contrast, another participant emphasised the indispensable role of government and its agencies. They noted, "government itself needs to be in there. And then also want any government agencies that provide services to people who are survivors of forced labour" (P7, Civil Society). Another participant added that the government's role and guidance are essential to ensure

that you have adequate trust between those different groups. [...] thinking about how you can really get a genuine mix of perspectives, how you can begin to have a kind of balanced prioritisation of those different perspectives. (P2, Legal & Academia)

In this context, leadership is vital for establishing clear guidelines, fostering trust, promoting dialogue, and identifying mutual benefits (Ansell & Gash, 2008). As stakeholder theorists state, emphasising trust as an essential requirement for all stakeholders promotes practical and effective relationships (Barney & Harrison, 2020). In line with this, NGOs fulfil an essential role in fostering trust by supporting and protecting workers in global supply chains and acting as “social intermediaries” between corporations and workers (Wilhelm et al., 2024). However, research on collaboration with NGOs and other social actors from a social sustainability perspective remains relatively unexplored (Benstead et al., 2021).

Expanding Beyond Traditional Stakeholder Groups

Healthcare professionals were also mentioned. Participants noted that “Allied Health [...] healthcare services [...]” (P4, Civil Society) and the “frontline workers like nursing home, dental” (P13, Civil Society) are critical in the anti-slavery conversations. Research supports this, affirming that healthcare and allied workers, such as pharmacists, are uniquely positioned to identify victims, provide trauma-informed care, and contribute to early intervention efforts (Fraley et al., 2020; Gibbons & Stoklosa, 2016; Lederer et al., 2017; Lederer & Wetzel, 2014).

Another respondent emphasised the inclusion of domestic violence organisations: “I would definitely include the domestic violence across organisation” (P13, Civil Society). The inclusion of these stakeholders is critical for two reasons. **First**, despite interactions with healthcare professionals and the justice system, many victims often go unnoticed due to psychological manipulation and their inability to self-identify as victims. Moreover, many victims of forced labour experience conditions that closely “resemble” those of domestic violence. Improper identification often leads to forced labour cases being conflated with other crimes (Lederer & Wetzel, 2014). Scholars indicate that many forced labour survivors go

unnoticed due to perceptions of it as less severe than sexual exploitation, despite similar impacts (Van Meeteren & Hiah, 2020, p. 1607). Key stakeholder groups can leverage their knowledge to recognise forced labour victims and help them access legal protections. An empirical U.S. study revealed a case where a Dominican Republic victim was brought into the United States under the guise of marriage and coerced into forced labour in a parking garage (Bessell, 2018). However, evidence of the links between these crimes is still limited (Vijayarasa, 2016).

Second, studies in Australia show that some stakeholders, such as domestic violence workers, perceived themselves as excluded from the national policy-making process, with their perspectives often overlooked (Phillips & Heward-Belle, 2023). This exclusion hinders victim identification and limits overall outcomes, resulting in policies that are often unrealistic and misaligned with frontline realities. Including these stakeholder groups in MSCs ensures that all aspects of a victim's experience are considered and addressed, leading to more effective strategies and interventions. As one participant eloquently said,

Everybody in society, whether it be business, civil society, survivors, government, non-government, they're all going to have something to contribute to working out the issue. So it can't be through one lens, the solution is never going to be through one lens because it's complex. (P14, Legal & Academia)

Other minority groups were also mentioned, including "Indigenous communities" (P13, Civil Society) and "women, children, persons with disabilities, and drug workers" (P16, Legal & Academia). One participant added: "Industry representatives. You need low-level industry where you might traditionally find, so agriculture, catering, cleaning, gambling" (P16, Legal & Academia). Ensuring the inclusion of key stakeholders is critical, as neglecting certain actors can cause MSCs to fail (Gray & Purdy, 2018).

The whole hostelry sector, where we know that migrant workers, you know, spend their time on seasonal countries [...] there's never been representative from the [...]

agricultural sector. You know, who's representing the interests of the Pacific Island workers in Australia? (P2, Legal & Academia)

Additionally, the Fair Work Ombudsman was highlighted as a necessary participant (P3, Civil Society). Other respondents advocated for the inclusion of artificial intelligence in "tracing supply chains" (P13, Civil Society) and involving "internet providers [...], business councils and chambers that influence business practices [...] the immigration" (P4, Civil Society). Adding to this, one respondent said, "we still haven't got the migration worker voice [...] so, there's quite a bit to do in that space" (P12, Business Consultant).

The educational sector plays a central role, as mentioned by one respondent: "The role of teachers. Teachers are trusted persons [...] in particular around supporting the identification of victims [...] and that requires just a lot more awareness raising" (P4, Civil Society). Another participant added: "I think the educational sector is very important because there's a lot of misinformation" (P5, Civil Society). These observations highlight the crucial role educational organisations play in circulating accurate information and raising awareness about forced labour.

Other critical actors that emerged in the conversations are faith communities due to their closeness with individuals at risk of exploitation:

The various faith communities are important because they could have direct contact with people who are subject to these conditions on an incidental basis by visiting a church. (P5, Civil Society)

The meaningful involvement of financial services and civil society groups in MSCs is also vital. One respondent indicated:

I think there's a lot of avenues for leadership. So particularly those who are at the top end of the market, and I'm thinking of financial services. I think there could be, there needs to

be a lot that could be done in partnership with civil society groups, as well as academia, to actually invest in research. (P6, Business Consultant)

This comment emphasises the necessity for joint efforts between academia, industry, and civil society to address and explore the complexity of forced labour. It highlights the importance of leveraging each sector's unique strengths and perspectives to develop comprehensive solutions. Thus, the government needs to "talk beyond the people we're already talking" (P10, Legal & Academia). One participant suggested:

Perhaps having different working groups. So, for example, if you were talking about support services for survivors, I'm not sure the financial sector has much of a role. If you were talking now about the sale of online sexual force for sexual services, then, yes, the financial sector and the IT industry have far more of a stake in that and a relevance to that issue. (P7, Civil Society)

This observation underscores that a structured and targeted approach ensures the right stakeholders are engaged in the most relevant discussions, leading to more informed and effective interventions. Scholars suggest that when relevant stakeholders are excluded, collaborative outcomes may favour certain groups and reinforce unequal power distribution among stakeholders (Gray & Purdy, 2018). Similarly, another respondent stressed the importance of inclusivity and openness in MSC:

You would probably also want to include an expression of interest so that other people could apply. I think that you don't want to always have the same groups of people all the time because maybe that doesn't allow for some new ideas and new perspectives. (P8, Civil Society)

One participant from a different sector underlined: "Personally, I don't necessarily think everyone has to be around the same table at the same time" (P1, Legal). This can be both beneficial and counterproductive. On the one hand, it allows for flexibility and quick decisions,

reducing logistical and bureaucratic complexity and leading to more effective solutions. As one participant said:

Having lots and lots of people can mean that you never have a decision. That's a danger; it's always a risk that you've got competing interests, especially when you've got industry and NGOs together, you have competing interests. (P16, Legal & Academia)

However, if we think counterfactually, "in some collaborative settings it is desirable to involve large numbers of participants in the process to ensure diversity of viewpoints and widespread support for agreements that are reached" (Gray & Purdy, 2018, p. 85). In large MSCs, participants suggested to

build trust between the different groups [...] also making sure that those who are participating in it have a clear idea about exactly what the goals are, and what [...] is going to come out of it. (P2, Legal & Academia)

This comment calls for building trust and clear communication channels, highlighting the need for transparency and purpose in collaboration. Scholars emphasise that "unless parties spend time within positive interactions with each other", stereotypes and mistrust will persist, hindering effective collaboration and mutual understanding (Gray & Purdy, 2018, p. 89). In essence, scholars and policymakers must rethink their strategies to design governance frameworks that accommodate local variations (Crane et al., 2019). As one participant suggested, "create meaningful representation that's democratised. So, it doesn't become a small club of people who are protecting an agenda and all saying the same thing" (P4, Civil Society).

This comment highlights the importance of developing frameworks within the Australian NAP that prioritise diversity and inclusivity to strengthen responses to forced labour issues. As one participant observed, "you don't need to demonstrate how effective you are, you just need to demonstrate how you're measuring effectiveness" (P6, Business Consultant).

Ensuring that collaborative efforts are voluntary and that stakeholders are similarly engaged and recognised as significant contributors can enhance the effectiveness of MSC models (Jones & Lutze, 2016). Thus, promoting collaborative efforts within Australia requires the government to proactively develop and maintain spaces that facilitate easy access and encourage the emergence of diverse, critical voices in a space where dialogue and remediation can thrive. These topics will be discussed in the following section.

7.4 Corporate Remediation: Purpose-Driven and Restorative Justice

“Businesses are not used [...] to thinking in a human rights framework. They’re not used to thinking in a way of putting people first, okay, like, traditionally, money has always come first—making profit.” (P14, Legal & Academia)

This comment underscores the fundamental challenge in integrating human rights considerations into business operations. Scholars agree that the provision of remediation should take into account both the direct and indirect effects of corporate activities on rights holders (Pryde et al., 2024). Despite the UNGP’s actions to guide governments and corporations in remedying human rights abuses (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2011), its guidelines lack specificity, making enforcement and evaluation difficult (Salcito et al., 2015, p. 5). Furthermore, the UNGPs focus insufficiently on tangible results (Harrison & Wielga, 2023), and businesses remain hesitant to accept general legal liability for human rights violations (Muchlinski, 2021).

The literature suggests that the voluntary adoption of the UNGPs allows corporations to select their responsibilities, inhibiting a comprehensive and meaningful strategy to manage these crimes (Salcito et al., 2015). This approach also allows businesses to selectively disclose “voluntary reporting” efforts without effectively addressing the root causes of forced labour (LeBaron & Rühmkorf, 2017; Nolan & Boersma, 2019). One participant highlighted a deeper systemic issue, emphasising the inadequacy of human rights protections in Australia:

The biggest problem in Australia on the human rights aspect [...] is that there is no [...] Federal human rights instrument [...]. The human rights state charters are very vulnerable to political change. So in the absence of a federal constitutional human rights instrument, I think there's always going to be reduced protection for victims of modern slavery and minimum effort to tackle modern slavery. (P16, Legal & Academia)

This quote underscores a significant challenge in Australia's business and human rights landscape: the absence of a robust national human rights framework, coupled with state charters' vulnerability to political shifts, leaves businesses without clear national guidance on how to uphold human rights. How, then, can we expect meaningful commitment from the business sector to workers' rights? This tension underscores how business practices have historically neglected human rights (Nolan, 2016). In this context, scholars argue that "to make further progress on human rights issues the current business paradigm needs to shift to a more inclusive model that integrates human rights" (Baumann-Pauly, Nolan, & Posner, 2016, p. 317). In this context, the restorative justice approach has the potential to tackle injustices by rectifying the distortion of relationships among stakeholders and admitting the need for apology (Aertsen, 2022; Walker, 2006).

This situation underscores the importance of embracing a restorative justice approach, which prioritises dialogue, relationships, and healing among all stakeholders, fostering accountability and sustainable solutions (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2011; Van Ness et al., 2022; Zehr, 2002b; Zehr et al., 2022) while acknowledging the need for apology (Aertsen, 2022; Walker, 2006). As one participant emphasised, integrating worker voices in remediation processes while building an environment of trust where workers feel safe and empowered is critical.

I think there's always a question of agendas, and how much weight you give to different voices. There are going to be some people who aren't supportive of workers' rights. And so, if they're part of your multi-stakeholder collaboration, I think it's just being cautious about what agendas people have. (P1, Legal & Academia)

Scholars affirm that “a top-down approach in the context of human rights remediation impedes necessary victim engagement at each step of a remediation process” (Schormair & Gerlach, 2020, p. 478). Other scholars emphasise the critical role that organisations play in both local and global economies—a role that has become increasingly prominent in recent decades (Baumann-Pauly & Nolan, 2016). For instance, in the Australian context,

Corporates and companies all over Australia—3000 plus—that now have had to become experts in modern slavery. So, [...] we’ve got teams of people now that have learned and studied slavery, and running the Modern Slavery Act within each of these companies. So got a whole lot of new players. (P13, Civil Society)

With the arrival of new players, grievance mechanisms enable companies to promptly detect and tackle forced labour, nurturing a culture of responsibility and continuous improvement. However, there is a significant lack of literature on corporate responses to human rights abuses in supply chains (Benstead et al., 2021). In particular, researchers note that despite the Australian MSA, significant uncertainty persists regarding effective remediation processes and access to remedies (Pryde et al., 2024). Further complicating this scenario, the understanding of the concept of a remedy can be challenging, especially for newcomers (Moore, 2024). One participant’s comment illustrates this well: “I think there needs to be a lot more work as well as research into remediation. Good practice, grievance mechanisms” (P6, Business Consultant).

In a recent article published by *The Mandarin*, Professor Nolan (2024) stated that “current laws have succeeded in raising awareness of the problem, but corporate responses remain largely symbolic” (p.1). Similarly, studies have found that while most businesses submit their modern slavery statements, the information related to remedies and their implementation is often superficial, revealing a lack of transparency (Davis & Haapasaari, 2024) and making it impossible to study the effectiveness of most corporate grievance mechanisms (Harrison &

Wielga, 2023). As a result, the conditions of those most impacted by corporate activities have seen no progress (Wettstein, 2021).

Designing Purpose-Driven Collective Responses

Scholars state that grievance mechanisms offer secure channels for rights holders and key stakeholders to voice their concerns (Davis & Haapasaari, 2024). These mechanisms need to be “genuinely sort of accessible in languages that are relevant” (P2, Legal & Academia). To illustrate this, one participant suggested

designing grievance mechanisms with worker voice in them and making sure like areas are trusted, and you know, building that trust and environment so that workers can feel safe to raise things. (P12, Business Consultant)

This comment underlines the pivotal role of integrating worker voices in purpose-driven remediation processes while building an environment of trust where workers feel safe and empowered. The integration of key stakeholders not only enriches the legitimacy of remediation strategies but also contributes to the co-creation of knowledge grounded in stakeholders’ lived experiences. However, a need for safety mechanisms remains and, as one participant emphasised, anonymity in these processes is important:

When we speak to companies about establishing grievance mechanisms of some sort to be able to hear from workers, you know, key aspects are [...] that those processes need to guarantee anonymity for the worker. (P2, Legal & Academia)

Anonymity is paramount in the grievance mechanism as it protects workers from voicing their concerns without fear of retaliation. This involves offering a safe space with an accessible language where they can voice their concerns because workers,

don’t go, “Oh, I’ve got a grievance today”. It’s very much in the case of, like, “I’ve got a question [...] this is my job that I’m doing and I’m not sure if that’s right, is that right? Can they do that?” [...] these [safe spaces] are so much more valuable because you can

actually have a conversation and connect with people at that, you know, not necessarily Town Hall-type level, but it's like, it's person to person and it's relational. I think doing that well and then feeding up those responses to businesses is the best way to do it. (P12, Business Consultant)

This comment shows that workers see these mechanisms as safe, relational spaces rather than formal grievance platforms. Instead, they express concerns by asking questions about their working conditions. Echoing this, another participant advocated for businesses taking the first step because “survivors can bring a high level of education purposes into the forefront of things and can inform the humanity to action that needs to be done” (P15, Business Consultant). Survivors humanise the issue, offering firsthand insights that inspire action and inform empathetic strategies.

Creating a safe space for workers to freely voice concerns underscores the importance of shared language and strong relationships between businesses and workers. In essence, building trust among stakeholders is key, as one participant observed, “the more trust you build, the more engagement you get, and you build design and safeguards for workers [who] do raise things” (P12, Business Consultant).

Recognising the importance of grievance mechanisms, scholars advocate for more research on their distinct functions, particularly within MSCs (Harrison & Wielga, 2023). Specifically, how might implementing restorative justice, rather than conventional mechanisms that treat workers as subjects, enhance the overall anti-slavery strategy and improve remediation?

Restorative Justice Towards Remediation

Restorative justice theory enables a detailed and inclusive exploration of forced labour, fostering balanced dialogues to address injustices and determine appropriate measures for rectification (Zehr, 2002a, 2015). In cases of forced labour, embracing a restorative justice

approach is crucial as it promotes genuine accountability and healing (Zehr, 2008). However, as one participant cautioned, it “really requires both sides to be open to the conversation and be willing to potentially shift position” (P7, Civil Society). This also involves exploring what effective remediation looks like, as one participant observed:

But we can also look at how do we provide remedy, whether it's going to be a financial remedy, or whether it's compensation remedy to victims. And I think that really needs to be guarded well that when the situation [...] for one person that has been identified in the forced labour situation, that they know, the guidelines that they need to go through. (P15, Business Consultant)

This comment underlines the essential need for comprehensive remedies in cases of forced labour. Financial compensation or other forms of redress are imperative but only part of the solution. For example, addressing trauma, recovery, healing, and protecting workers is also a crucial aspect of this process so that affected stakeholders remain in the middle of the conflict solution (Schormair & Gerlach, 2020). However, the restorative justice literature highlights that victims' advocates often criticise their exclusion from early-stage strategies despite their crucial role in decision-making and planning (Zehr et al., 2022). Accordingly, scholars argue that communication and collaboration among practitioners of restorative justice across various contexts and roles should be improved and better organised (Marder, 2016). In essence, the stakeholders involved need to support preliminary efforts and continuing activities (Zehr et al., 2022). As one participant observed, “I think there's some big impacts of leaving certain stakeholders out” (P8, Civil Society).

Although most scholars and practitioners agree that survivors need to have a voice in collaboration models, we must exercise caution in claiming that meaningful outcomes can only be achieved when victims and survivors have a direct voice. Scholars emphasise that assuming stakeholder voice inclusion as largely beneficial can be risky as more voices do not necessarily yield more power (Dempsey, 2017) or decision-making influence (Van Buren &

Greenwood, 2009). Therefore, simply attempting to provide a “voice” without a structured mechanism can sometimes exacerbate issues. For instance, some actors may try to dominate the conversation, while environments that superficially grant a voice can significantly weaken collective action.

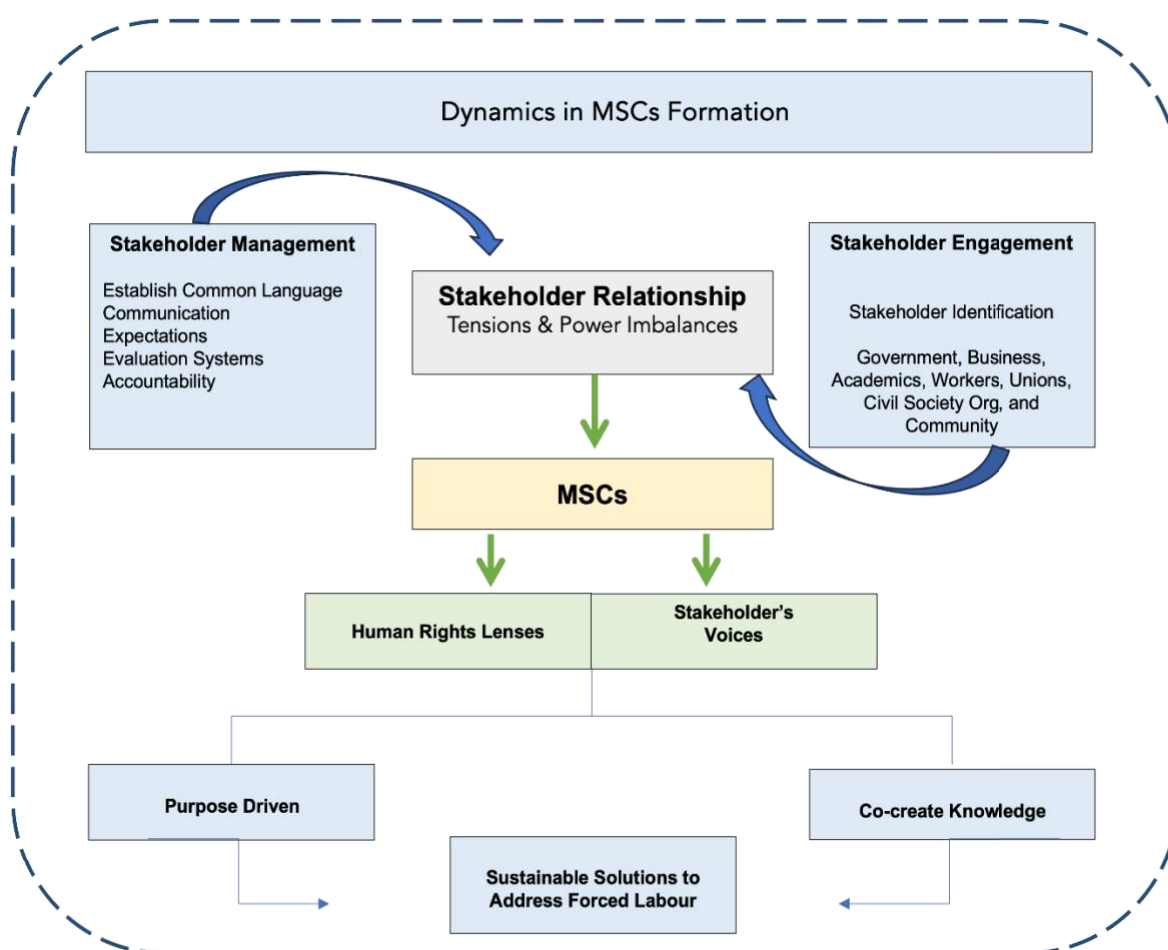
A recent study underlined that many firms, especially in high-impact sectors like fashion and mining, employ stakeholder dialogue as a symbolic approach to bypass meaningful action (Acuti et al., 2024, p. 1). To address this, scholars have developed a toolkit to guide businesses, government, and organisations on the MSA and human rights due diligence, emphasising stakeholder engagement and collaboration (Nolan et al., 2023). While public and private governance initiatives have agreed to address forced labour (Crane et al., 2019), their effectiveness is hindered by the limited research on collaboration among diverse stakeholders, particularly from a social sustainability perspective (Benstead et al., 2021). This gap highlights the critical importance of applying effective remediation processes and robust grievance mechanisms to protect worker rights and hold companies accountable for their practices. Scholars assert that the success of these initiatives depends on the meaningful involvement of rights holders in their creation, design, reform, and operation (Moore, 2024; Pryde et al., 2024).

Additionally, integrating remediation practices with restorative justice principles is crucial for addressing human rights abuses (Schormair & Gerlach, 2020). Incorporating restorative justice principles into MSCs and remediation strategies helps overcome the limitations of top-down approaches by fostering trust and dialogue among all stakeholders. This collaboration leads to purpose-driven outcomes, enabling policies to be shaped by those with firsthand experience as well as a diverse range of stakeholders across sectors. This multi-level approach can result in more sustainable, long-term solutions for addressing forced labour.

Based on the findings from this chapter, I have developed a model (see **Figure 12**) which outlines the crucial role of stakeholder inclusion in MSCs for creating purpose-driven solutions and co-creating knowledge to address forced labour. Forced labour is a complex issue affecting people worldwide. As such, addressing it requires MSCs that explore multiple angles while engaging key stakeholders across sectors. This necessitates proactive government involvement to establish and maintain environments that encourage the inclusion of diverse, critical voices. An ecosystem that supports dialogue and innovation is essential for fostering collaborative responses to forced labour.

The absence of structured systems that support stakeholders and clearly defined roles (e.g., frontline responders) in Australia's approach to forced labour presents significant challenges, necessitating a reassessment of potential solutions and the inclusion of critical stakeholder perspectives. This reassessment is vital for developing support mechanisms for stakeholder inclusion and enhancing accountability. Moreover, the current findings emphasise the critical role of MSCs in connecting macro-level organisational approaches and stakeholder theory with micro-level perspectives focused on stakeholders and restorative justice to address forced labour. This theoretical blending is significant as it ensures that MSCs integrate two key components: stakeholder voices and a human rights lens. In turn, this ensures fair treatment and values stakeholder input. This combination will foster purpose-driven, co-created knowledge that strengthens the overall collaboration strategy to achieve sustainable solutions.

Figure 12 *Model of the Dynamics in MSC Formation*



My proposed multi-stakeholder collaboration model, based on stakeholder theory at the macro level and restorative justice at the individual level of analysis, is significant. It facilitates the unique exploration at three levels of analysis: macro-level at the organisational level, meso-level interactions within stakeholder groups, and micro-level one-on-one interactions. This all-inclusive approach enables a unique exploration of what is effective, who is effective, and which models are impacted in the Australian approach, encouraging stakeholders across sectors to reflect on their distinct roles.

Implementing the proposed MSC model requires systemic structures and processes that strengthen stakeholder voice and engagement. Four key components can help translate this model into practice:

1. Inclusivity and Representation. Transparent and inclusive selection criteria should guide stakeholder involvement, ensuring that participation includes lived experience and cross-sector expertise that reflect the complexity of the issue.

2. Balancing Power Dynamics. Restorative justice principles offer practical guidance and safe mechanisms that emphasise equality, dialogue, consensus-based standards, skilled facilitators, and respectful communication. These practices allow all stakeholders, especially those with less perceived power to express fears and concerns, which is essential for mutual understanding, healing and remediation.

3. Collective Responsibility Through Recognition. The proposed MSC model fosters the co-creation of knowledge and purpose-driven collaboration by encouraging a shared understanding of the issue and building mutual accountability. For such collaboration to be inclusive and effective, fair compensation for survivors, workers, and civil society actors is not only an ethical principle but an essential condition for equitable participation. It recognises the time, expertise, and emotional labour they contribute and addresses systemic gaps that can foster accountability.

4. Sustainable Solutions Through Meaningful Collaboration. The theoretical framework applied in this research encourages effective dialogue and collaborative problem-solving among all stakeholders, reflecting both the evolving needs of stakeholders and the fluctuating nature of forced labour. By infusing MSCs with shared goals and inclusive processes, these frameworks can unify stakeholders' interests and capabilities, transforming fragmented efforts into sustained, collective progress. In essence, MSCs can become powerful mechanisms for driving collective compliance and inspiring systemic change in the fight against forced labour.

7.5 Chapter Insights

This chapter has revealed significant barriers to collaboration within the Australian anti-slavery approach. Government selection criteria favour individuals aligned with existing policies, excluding critical expertise needed for complex issues such as supply chain management in the context of forced labour. This bias prioritises visible groups, overshadowing less established stakeholders. The findings illustrate that power imbalances favouring government agencies exacerbate distrust and lack of transparency. These findings underscore the need for a more open, inclusive, and strategic approach to stakeholder engagement.

As a participant noted, the government must “walk the talk” and understand that effective strategies against forced labour necessitate collaboration with diverse stakeholders within and across sectors. Stressing workers’ unique experiences is essential for developing effective strategies. Governments and businesses can adopt more inclusive and empathetic approaches to combating forced labour and protecting human rights by enhancing collaboration and prioritising workers’ voices. Therefore, participants stressed the importance of diverse stakeholder involvement, including government agencies, businesses, civil society, unions, researchers, workers, and affected communities. This inclusion fosters holistic, purpose-driven strategies that support co-creating knowledge to address a common issue.

The government plays an essential role in developing policy and collaboration frameworks. Australia’s lack of federal human rights instruments exacerbates business responses and creates an environment of inconsistent protections with minimal accountability. Without federal mandates, organisations fail to uphold human rights standards and create transparent and secure pathways for workers. Moreover, relying on voluntary reporting under modern slavery regulations allows organisations to selectively disclose their actions while avoiding comprehensive scrutiny.

This chapter also illustrated the lack of proper systems, particularly the inadequacies in current referral mechanisms, which are especially problematic. Without clear and

established referral pathways, frontline workers and other crucial stakeholders face significant challenges in providing timely and practical assistance to victims of forced labour. A surprising finding is that experts have expressed confusion about their precise actions when identifying victims. This confusion highlights a systemic failure; if experts in the Australian anti-slavery field are uncertain about available pathways and mechanisms, it is unrealistic to expect businesses to report accurately on issues they neither understand nor can identify. Without adequate training and transparent accountability, stakeholders feel unequipped to address the situation. This results in a fragmented approach and duplicated efforts while neglecting critical aspects of survivor support.

In this context, restorative justice could contribute to addressing these shortcomings. Effective remediation requires integrating worker voices into grievance mechanisms, ensuring trust, and promoting a safe environment for raising concerns. Restorative justice prioritises healing and dialogue over punishment, focusing on the needs and voices of every stakeholder involved. This framework supports dialogue between all stakeholders, ensuring the harm caused is acknowledged and appropriate reparations are made. In essence, applying the proposed MSC model in practice requires inclusive stakeholder engagement, balanced power dynamics, collective responsibility, and sustained collaboration—essential elements for fostering meaningful engagement and developing sustainable solutions to address forced labour. In the next section, I will discuss the findings from this dissertation, including a summary of key findings, as well as theoretical and managerial implications.

8 Discussion

I began the introduction chapter with a quote from one of my interviewees, capturing the core principles of this dissertation. This quote, repeated below, underscores the potential benefits, tensions, and pitfalls associated with MSCs in addressing forced labour, emphasising the critical role of including stakeholder voices in collaboration models.

Stakeholder groups need to be represented. Representative mechanisms need to be structured, and they need to be democratic; they need to be organised because there's a lot of diversity amongst stakeholders. And so that diversity needs to be accounted for; it needs to be managed. (P4, Civil Society)

In this final chapter, I provide an additional interpretation of the quote: it also underscores the critical role of collaboration and demonstrates how cooperation among diverse stakeholders across various sectors can strengthen response efforts, even in the face of challenges and conflicting agendas. The involvement of different stakeholders in the collaboration dynamics allows us to explore the phenomena from multiple levels, revealing the tensions and complexities inherent in such efforts.

As scholars state, “if the problem cannot be seen, it cannot be fixed” (Pryde et al., 2024, p. 90). This is particularly relevant for forced labour, as survivors of forced labour often remain unseen due to public perceptions that it is less severe than sexual exploitation despite similar impacts (Van Meeteren & Hiah, 2020, p. 1607). When key stakeholders are absent from NAP initiatives, the issue of forced labour remains unclear, resulting in fragmented and ineffective policies that fail to address the systemic problems of exploitation and the needs of those affected. Some studies argue that governments may use NAPs as a pretext to avoid stricter regulations and meaningful standards (O'Brien et al., 2022, p. 93).

My research bridges the micro–macro divide in management studies by directly linking individual actions to broader organisational structures, deepening our understanding of these

interconnected levels (Eckardt et al., 2019), fostering stakeholder dialogue that creates a common understanding and concern regarding social issues between the organisation and its stakeholders (Acuti et al., 2024, p. 2). Similarly, I respond to the call for micro-level analysis of structural injustices (Van Buren III & Schrempf-Stirling, 2022) within the Australian NAP by applying restorative justice as a theoretical framework at the individual level.

From a broader perspective, collaboration involving multiple stakeholders has emerged over the last decades as an intentional approach to address and foster long-term solutions to social issues, such as forced labour (Baumann-Pauly & Trabelsi, 2021; Bryson et al., 2006; George et al., 2016a; Simpson et al., 2021). Scholars agree that MSCs are not universal solutions (Bryson et al., 2006; Gray & Purdy, 2018; Seitanidi, 2010) and can sometimes be challenging, frustrating, and unsuccessful (Bryson et al., 2006; Le Pennec & Raufflet, 2018; Tencati & Zsolnai, 2013). Despite this, they have been described as the dynamic “constellation of entities across different sectors that can attempt to provide society with ‘public goods’” (Seitanidi, 2010, p. 4).

After four years of research, I remain a strong advocate for MSCs and continue to believe they are essential for addressing the pervasive issue of forced labour. Due to my research on collaboration dynamics to address forced labour, and after immersing myself in theoretical discussions, MSCs, forced labour, and exploring the contributions from participants in this study, I have developed a deeper understanding of the complexities and tensions inherent in MSCs. Government, policymakers, businesses, and academics recognise the critical role of MSCs in addressing forced labour. Although collaboration is not a panacea, opting to collaborate, despite its challenges, may be the most effective way to tackle social issues such as forced labour and promote greater respect for human rights (Gray & Purdy, 2018).

Collaboration involving diverse stakeholders across different sectors and levels of power is challenging, as evidenced by the empirical findings in this dissertation and supported

by prior research. Participants recognised that tensions in collaboration models are part of the process. Considering the complex nature of globalisation, which serves as a double-edged sword by offering opportunities while increasing forced labour (Baumann-Pauly, Nolan, & Posner, 2016; Clarke & Boersma, 2019), it is reasonable to think that there is no easy solution to this complex social issue (Gray & Purdy, 2018). This complexity is further highlighted by the increased poverty drawing individuals towards forced labour and the demand for cheap labour sustaining the practice (Kerr, 2014; Nolan & Boersma, 2019). The fact that global human rights standards are not consistently implemented also exacerbates this, while the global human cost of exploitative practices continues to rise (Boersma & Nolan, 2022; International Labour Organization et al., 2022).

Research has moved from questioning the relevance of collaboration models to concentrating on how to establish, organise, govern, intensify, and prolong them (Van Tulder et al., 2016). Specifically, this includes exploring how to design, establish, and manage sustainable and robust collaborative models—referred to in this dissertation as multi-stakeholder collaborations (MSCs)—to effectively address forced labour. These collaborations have been widely adopted in countries like the UK as a different governance approach to address social issues (Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002) and are encouraged in the narrative around the UN SDG, specifically Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) (United Nations, 2015b). A great example is the Global Commission on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, led by former UK Prime Minister Theresa May. This initiative represents a significant collaborative effort to address forced labour through global strategies and coordinated action (Global Commission on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, 2023).

From the start of this research, my primary motivation was to better understand collaboration models and the inclusion and exclusion of stakeholder voices within these models to address forced labour. Concentrating particularly on the context of this dissertation—forced labour in supply chains—I see the essential role of MSCs. Implementing

meaningful change and addressing the root causes of forced labour in supply chains requires constant collaboration and negotiation among all stakeholders involved (e.g., organisations, workers, civil society, unions, academics, and government entities). Considering the tensions and interactions among these actors, it is crucial to develop MSCs that can effectively facilitate this dynamic with the sensitivity required by the restorative justice approach and the structure framework of stakeholder theory.

As I finalise this thesis for submission, the Attorney-General, the Hon. Mark Dreyfus KC MP, announced the appointment of Chris Evans as Australia's inaugural Anti-Slavery Commissioner (Australian Attorney-General's Department, Nov 11 2024). Evans will begin a five-year term on 2 December 2024, following a merit-based selection process. The Commissioner will play a critical role in fostering stakeholder engagement and dialogue while navigating tensions and power dynamics among diverse stakeholders within MSCs under the Australian NAP. By promoting policy reforms and systemic change, the Commissioner will act as a catalyst for addressing the root causes of forced labour and achieving long-term, transformative outcomes.

When obstacles appear in collaboration models—as illustrated in Chapter 5 (e.g., advisory groups)—stakeholders must be able to discuss their concerns in a safe, trust-based environment without fear of reprisal. A trust-based ecosystem will allow stakeholders to express their perspectives openly, leading to more honest, inclusive, and practical discussions. Recognising their significance, I aimed to use this dissertation to advance our understanding of why stakeholders matter and how they can make a difference in addressing forced labour in the supply chain.

In this discussion chapter, I present the conclusions and implications of my research. I begin by outlining the key findings in Section 8.1. Subsequently, in Section 8.2, I focus on the social impact of my research, discussing its managerial implications. Section 8.3

summarises the theoretical contributions of my dissertation, highlighting its academic relevance. In Section 8.4, I provide limitations and directions for future research.

8.1 Summary of Key Findings

In this dissertation, I explored and illustrated how stakeholders are integrated into current collaboration models in Australia to address forced labour, guided by the research question:

Why do stakeholder voices matter, and how can they make a difference in multi-stakeholder collaborations to address forced labour?

I based my research on a qualitative, grounded theory approach to explore Australian collaboration models addressing forced labour. Given the significance of the NAP 2020–25, which reflects Australia’s priority to end forced labour in business operations, I based my study on 45 public submissions made to the NAP in 2020, along with semi-structured and informal interviews with 16 key stakeholders and experts in the field. As a researcher, I found that the NAP’s framework for involving diverse stakeholder voices and experts supports the exploration of my research question. In this section, I first summarise the key findings of each chapter before connecting them to provide an answer to the research question.

The first key finding of this dissertation, based on public submissions to the NAP 2020–25, is that achieving a transformative response to forced labour necessitates a holistic MSCs approach, which integrates diverse stakeholders across sectors and emphasises the human rights aspect to combat forced labour effectively. This approach is critical to the Australian NAP as it ensures that stakeholder voices—including marginalised groups—are heard and valued in collaborative efforts.

Previous research on MSCs has paid less attention to the human rights component, particularly the significant roles played by actors closely connected to the issue (e.g., workers and frontline responders) in addressing forced labour. This is surprising given the critical role stakeholders play in addressing the social problem of forced labour. Accordingly, **Chapter 4**

elaborates on key stakeholders' significant role in MSCs aimed at combating forced labour. The chapter demonstrates that the exclusion of stakeholders in MSCs constitutes a severe moral and strategic issue, exposing powerless stakeholders, such as survivors and workers, to exploitation by organisations.

Furthermore, the chapter exemplifies the need for a national strategy integrating human rights into business operations, directing businesses to conduct human rights due diligence in line with the UN Guiding Principles. By detailing the complexities surrounding stakeholder inclusion in the national strategy, **Chapter 4** provides analytical insights that inform the interview questions addressed in the subsequent chapters. Before explaining the findings, it is important to note the three-and-a-half-year gap between the public submissions to the NAP (January 2020) and the expert interviews (May–October 2023). This gap is crucial for assessing the long-term impact of the NAP's strategies and identifying new trends and issues in the fight against forced labour. Moreover, stakeholder perspectives may have shifted over the four years, reflecting changes in priorities, strategies, and political variations.

Chapter 5 illustrates how current MSC models function within the Australian NAP framework, focusing on their efficacy, transparency, and criteria for stakeholder inclusion in addressing forced labour. Based on the findings from this chapter, I developed the preliminary model (see **Figure 9**), detailing collaboration dynamics and stakeholder engagement within MSCs to address forced labour. This chapter provides two important findings that contribute to answering the research question of this dissertation. **First**, to contextualise the research, Chapter 5 positioned the collaboration approach vis-à-vis government-led collaboration initiatives—i.e., roundtables and advisory boards in addressing forced labour. These MSC initiatives face criticism for their structural inadequacies, unclear membership processes, stakeholder representation and expertise, and lack of transparency and effective outcomes. These issues erode trust and accountability, casting doubt on the overall effectiveness of these initiatives.

Second, the chapter elaborated on the nature and influence of “MSC models” within the context of the NAP’s approach to addressing forced labour, a central concept in this dissertation. The literature on MSCs shows that stakeholder cooperation offers insightful perspectives on organisational interactions and their relation with society at large. In Chapter 5, however, adopting the stakeholder perspective within the collaboration—viewing stakeholders as human beings with a voice rather than focusing on MSCs as a whole—allowed for a more detailed analysis of how government-led collaborations function and operate. By focusing on the stakeholder perspective, it was possible to identify stakeholders’ roles, contributions, and challenges.

Therefore, I was able to shed new light on our understanding of MSC models within the Australian NAP framework to address forced labour. By exploring insights from experts in the anti-slavery field, Chapter 5 demonstrated how the government needs to (1) reassess these MSCs within the Australian NAP framework to improve transparency, (2) capitalise on broad stakeholder participation across sectors, and (3) foster inclusion and democratic dialogue within MSCs, ensuring that stakeholder voices are acknowledged and esteemed. The government should adopt a targeted approach within its NAP framework, navigating complexities and uncertainties to develop more effective and sustainable MSC models capable of addressing forced labour. Together, these elements highlight the complexities and challenges of MSCs, which single theoretical models cannot fully capture.

In **Chapter 6**, I adopted a stakeholder perspective and identified two significant tensions experienced by stakeholders in MSCs: stakeholder recognition and stakeholder support from both the government and within stakeholder groups. The NAP has identified collaboration as significant to addressing and preventing forced labour; however, findings reveal “pockets of collaboration” where certain stakeholders are [un]intentionally excluded from MSC discussions, which threatens the MSC’s effectiveness. This exclusion diminishes stakeholders, limiting the NAP’s strategic impact and comprehensive response. Without meaningful engagement, the NAP risks fragmenting its efforts, weakening its capacity to

address forced labour in a cohesive and strategic manner. Based on this chapter's findings, I have further refined the preliminary model (see **Figure 10**), which outlines the dynamics of collaboration and stakeholder engagement within MSCs to combat forced labour.

Management studies often emphasise the role of managers, but it is equally important to highlight the roles of workers, communities, and other key stakeholders (Freeman, 1984). The findings revealed frustration among some stakeholders, particularly workers, regarding their ability to voice concerns, leading to increased power inequalities. The NAP's success depends on acknowledging and integrating the perspectives of key stakeholder groups whose voices are often neglected. These groups often struggle to self-organise and articulate their views and needs effectively. By applying stakeholder theory, I illustrated a systemic failure where diverse stakeholder groups usually have their voices stifled—first by their captors and then by organisations that aggregate their voices but [un]intentionally diminish their agency.

This perspective challenges the role of NGOs and other organisations that see themselves as “legitimate” representatives of survivors and workers. Furthermore, while aggregating voices may address some issues from a stakeholder theory perspective, it conflicts with the restorative justice approach, which focuses on restoration at the individual level. This shift in perspective redefines the role of key stakeholders, who have the expertise to contribute to MSCs but must navigate tensions related to their positions within these collaborations. The critical questions are: What is a more legitimate approach to aggregating voices? What is lost, and what is gained in the process? Addressing this within the NAP framework is vital for building equitable and effective collaborations that genuinely empower all stakeholders and promote sustainable solutions to forced labour.

The chapter shows how the lack of financial support devalues stakeholders' contributions, burdening organisations already struggling with limited funds. This issue is exacerbated by the government and other organisations seeking guidance from civil society without offering financial support. This paradoxical situation mirrors the exploitation these

organisations are trying to address, creating an ecosystem of exploitation and marginalisation among stakeholders with significant psychological consequences. The comparison to labour exploitation is pertinent, reflecting a structural injustice. These structural injustices are “the unintended but inevitable result of individuals and institutions (including businesses) pursuing their goals and interests” (Van Buren III & Schrempf-Stirling, 2022, p. 973). Both scenarios involve actors experiencing psychological distress, working under unethical conditions with no compensation, motivated by hope for future benefits that may never materialise. This situation undermines MSCs' reliance on diverse perspectives, equal participation, and respect for all stakeholders, contradicting the principles of fairness and justice in collaborative efforts as well as the overall strategy of the NAP.

Additionally, the government often requires organisations to measure and report on arbitrary and unrealistic metrics to demonstrate social impact, inadvertently encouraging dishonesty and eroding trust and effectiveness in collaborative efforts. To further complicate this, the government's preference for funding only “new” projects and unproven initiatives increases failure and inefficiency, forcing organisations to constantly create new projects to secure funding rather than focusing on long-term, sustainable solutions. This approach is concerning as it undermines the foundational principles and long-term effectiveness of the NAP by promoting an ecosystem focused on subjective indicators of success rather than deep-rooted changes that address the systemic issues surrounding forced labour. Scholars have further observed that the impact of civil society's business and human rights movement has not been fully recognised or appreciated (Schrempf-Stirling & Van Buren III, 2024, p. 6). Ensuring access and support for all stakeholders within the NAP is crucial to upholding equality and impartiality in collaborative efforts against forced labour.

In **Chapter 7**, I adopted a restorative justice approach to interpret my findings, focusing on the collaboration process with stakeholders as the primary unit of analysis. This chapter revisits the role of governments in establishing structures and mechanisms, underscoring the necessity for inclusive and effective collaboration channels so that all voices, especially those

of the right stakeholders, are heard and valued. Three and a half years have passed since the public submissions to the NAP 2020–25. Based on the findings from this chapter, I developed a model (see **Figure 11**) that outlines the crucial role of stakeholder inclusion in MSCs for creating purpose-driven solutions and co-creating knowledge to address sustainable solutions.

Although the findings indicate some improvements, such as increased research efforts and the appointment of an Anti-Slavery Commissioner to oversee the NAP, systemic issues persist: **(1)** government agencies often operate behind closed doors, limiting the inclusion of stakeholders with critical expertise, while businesses frequently neglect their responsibilities; **(2)** the absence of structured systems with clearly defined frontline responders and roles hinders the identification and support of survivors, resulting in unclear pathways, confusion among stakeholders, and the increased risk of re-victimisation; and **(3)** effective collaboration, emphasising workers' voices, is necessary for governments and businesses to develop more inclusive and empathetic approaches to addressing forced labour. The findings indicate the importance of developing tailored collaboration models sensitive to various stakeholders' specific contexts and needs and the overarching goals of the NAP. In turn, this approach will contribute to address structural injustices among stakeholders, which require systemic change at the macro level (Browne & McKeown, 2024, p. 95). Context-specific collaboration models actively foster a fairer NAP framework, promoting sustainable solutions for structural injustices.

This chapter highlights significant inadequacies in current referral mechanisms, which pose challenges for frontline workers and stakeholders in assisting forced labour victims. Experts have expressed confusion about their roles, revealing a systemic failure. If experts in the Australian anti-slavery field are uncertain about available pathways, it is unrealistic to expect businesses to report accurately on issues they neither understand nor can identify. This broken system complicates navigation for survivors and stakeholders, undermining the NAP's effectiveness. Without adequate training and transparent accountability, no single

stakeholder feels fully equipped to address the situation, resulting in a fragmented approach, duplicated efforts, neglected victim support, and systemic confusion, all of which hinder the NAP's efforts.

A multilevel analysis of my findings reveals benefits and obstacles in creating a collaborative environment. As scholars suggest, "if the problem cannot be seen, it cannot be fixed" (Pryde et al., 2024, p. 90). This chapter emphasises the need to develop a common language and build trust among stakeholders, allowing them to express fears and concerns safely. Previous reports show that MSCs are essential, as engaging diverse stakeholders strengthens remediation efforts. We can build a more humane response to wrongdoing by focusing on harm and reparations. **Chapter 7** advocates a multi-faceted approach to stakeholder inclusion, arguing that improving the NAP's effectiveness against forced labour requires embracing stakeholder diversity, facilitating government support, applying restorative justice principles, and committing to ongoing evaluation. Proactive government funding for research and initiatives in MSC is essential to address systemic issues and foster a unified commitment to combating forced labour.

My analysis in **Chapter 7** demonstrates that the MSC model addresses this challenge by facilitating a comprehensive approach to human rights issues, encouraging stakeholder dialogue and reflection across macro, meso, and micro levels. This layered analysis ensures that stakeholder engagement and collaboration are rigorously evaluated and effective at all levels, from broad organisational partnerships to individual interactions, focusing on stakeholders as human beings with a voice. Consequently, this approach can enhance the overall efficacy of the NAP's remediation efforts and foster a more just and humane response to forced labour.

In this research, I explored several stakeholder groups identified in the literature as central to anti-slavery efforts: the healthcare sector (Fraley et al., 2020; Greenbaum et al., 2017; Testa, 2020; Williamson et al., 2020), the settlement sector (David & Salter, 2021),

survivors (Lockyer, 2020), businesses (Boersma, 2018), government agencies (e.g., law enforcement) (Dovydaitis, 2010; Helton, 2016), and affected communities (Baumann-Pauly, Nolan, Labowitz, et al., 2016), among others. While not an exhaustive list of stakeholders, these stakeholders underscore the unique expertise each stakeholder brings, providing essential voices and resources for a holistic response that addresses both systemic factors and direct needs within the NAP framework.

However, if we think counterfactually, many of these stakeholders studied in this research are not only crucial in addressing forced labour but also have supply chains within their business operations, underscoring their critical position in the Australian NAP. Therefore, an MSC approach is not only beneficial but crucial for building a robust and humane response to forced labour within the NAP. It guarantees that policies and practices are grounded in real-world contexts and responsive to the challenges encountered by those connected to the fight against forced labour.

In what ways could my findings guide improvements to the Australian NAP?

The dissertation's key findings contribute to answering the research question: Why do stakeholder voices matter, and how can they make a difference in MSCs to address forced labour? By emphasising the importance of stakeholder engagement, these findings offer insights into targeted improvements that could strengthen Australia's NAP and its effectiveness in combating forced labour. These findings support a holistic approach to MSCs, engaging diverse stakeholders across sectors to foster inclusive collaboration. In this context, stakeholders include "all individuals, groups, or organisations that can directly influence the focal problem or issue by their actions or are directly influenced by actions others take to address it" (Gray & Purdy, 2018, p. 2). By creating an environment where all stakeholder voices—including those closely connected to the issue—are genuinely heard and valued, the NAP can move beyond token participation to achieve meaningful engagement and more effective outcomes.

This research supports an inclusive approach by recommending structured mechanisms that create clear paths for communication and collaboration, allowing actors to work cohesively. Therefore, developing well-defined structures that enable key stakeholders to shape alternative justice practices is crucial for significant outcomes (Yu et al., 2018). Similarly, reinforcing monitoring and evaluation processes is critical for promoting adaptive governance that can respond to the dynamic challenges of forced labour. This adaptability requires consistent community educational programs and awareness initiatives, with clearly defined roles for frontline responders and other key actors to guarantee adequate responses.

In this research, I developed a model that explored the dynamics of MSC formation, detailed in Chapters 5, 6, and 7. This model is essential to the NAP as it addresses critical gaps in collaborative approaches, strengthening the NAP's capacity. This study underscores the importance of a survivor-centred approach within the Australian NAP, placing survivor rights and needs at the heart of its strategies. The NAP should foster stronger collaborations between government, businesses, and critical actors to reinforce these efforts, promoting best practices and regulatory frameworks that encourage responsible supply chain practices. Finally, the research prompts the NAP to continuously evaluate and address gaps in its approach, guided by stakeholder engagement, feedback, and ongoing research to drive continual and practical improvement.

The integration of these elements within the model of MSC dynamics developed in this study, along with a multilevel exploration at the macro (organisational), meso (collaboration), and micro (individual) levels, uniquely facilitates the evaluation of effectiveness, identifies vital contributors, and assesses impactful models within the Australian NAP approach. It also offers insights into optimising collaboration processes and leveraging stakeholders' unique voices and expertise to create purpose-driven solutions and co-create knowledge to encourage a more inclusive, communicative, and effective collaboration framework.

As Curti (2024, p. 8) stated, stakeholder dialogue “involves a search for win-wins, an exploration of shared and different interests, values, needs and fears”, emphasising open communication and collaboration to balance competing interests and achieve inclusive outcomes. Thus, this model addresses key gaps in existing collaborative approaches, enhancing the NAP’s ability to create sustainable, long-term interventions in supply chains. It aligns national strategies with the Australian Modern Slavery Act, the collaborative approach of the SDGs, and human rights standards, promoting a holistic and enduring response to forced labour.

In the next section, I will explore the managerial implications, limitations, and future directions. This study offers valuable insights for various stakeholders involved in MSCs, providing useful perspectives for addressing forced labour within complex, multi-organisational collaborations.

8.2 Managerial Implications

How might my findings inform specific changes to the Australian NAP? My research identifies systemic issues and structural injustices within the NAP, recognising the complexities and tensions in stakeholder collaboration. Such injustices enable “winners” to benefit because they dominate others, whether this domination is intended or not (Van Buren III & Schrempf-Stirling, 2022, p. 973). Addressing such injustices demands coordinated change at both the macro level (Browne & McKeown, 2024, p. 95) and the micro level to promote repair and reconciliation and facilitate social recovery (Braithwaite, 1999; Sered, 2019; Zehr, 2002a). I propose a shift from superficial measures to a deeper transformation of the structural conditions that shape stakeholder engagement and overall strategies within NAP collaboration models. In essence, the managerial implications centre on developing MSCs that incorporate diverse stakeholder voices, breaking down operational silos, and fostering spaces for open dialogue and communication.

Management scholars indicate that individuals often distance themselves from structural injustices because they struggle to connect their “own actions and structural outcomes”, fostering psychological distance (Young, 2003, p. 7). Further, a recent study maintains that organisations often prioritise their interests in corporate social responsibility dialogues, causing stakeholders to view these interactions sceptically (Acuti et al., 2024). Addressing this “distance” within the NAP framework requires organisations to broaden their view of stakeholders and critically assess their relationships. Thus, multidisciplinary programs enhance awareness and boost MSCs’ capacity for detection and referral (Nhep et al., 2024).

By moving beyond traditional actors, organisations can better understand their broader impact and responsibly engage with all stakeholders. Moreover, educating organisations within the NAP to identify these “invisible” stakeholders involves incorporating empathy, an ethical approach, and developing structural systems into MSC conversations. When stakeholders observe that their “incidental” needs are contemplated with empathy, they are more likely to participate in dialogue with organisations (Acuti et al., 2024, p. 7).

By actively involving structured MSCs within the NAP, we can foster unique, practical insights into the relationships among key stakeholders and sectors (e.g., healthcare, law enforcement, social services, education, business, workers and other critical actors) to develop actionable policy. Leveraging stakeholders’ distinct roles and expertise empowers actors, builds trust, and fosters a common language among stakeholders, facilitating meaningful engagement and transformative change in combating forced labour. It will enhance the monitoring and evaluation of initiatives against forced labour, improve research impact, and support the dissemination of findings, advancing adaptive governance. As Young (2004, p. 387) argued, addressing structural injustices requires us to “change structural processes by reforming institutions or creating new ones that will better regulate the process to prevent harmful outcomes”.

In this context, my MSC multilevel perspective, grounded in stakeholder theory at the macro level and restorative justice principles at the micro (individual) level, provides a holistic approach for exploring stakeholder engagement in collaboration dynamics within the Australian NAP against forced labour. Collaboration models operating on macro, meso, and micro levels offer a promising path forward by allowing the exploration of synergies and trade-offs in collaborative dynamics from multiple perspectives, resulting in more coherent and integrated policy responses. This three-layered framework enables an all-inclusive examination of collaboration dynamics.

My study provides valuable insights for governments, businesses, practitioners, NGOs, academics, and other critical stakeholders engaged in MSCs. The dynamics explored in this study offer critical insights for scholars, practitioners, and key stakeholders, shedding light on the challenges of stakeholder engagement. While marginalised groups may seek recognition as stakeholders, organisations often lack the expertise to integrate them meaningfully (Chowdhury, 2021a). Additionally, large organisations struggle with informal dialogue with all stakeholders due to the diversity of stakeholders and challenges in reaching each group effectively (Acuti et al., 2024, p. 10).

Many organisations feel “overwhelmed” by the demand for information about their business operations, hindering authentic engagement (Acuti et al., 2024, p. 2). These conditions fail a genuine dialogue, limiting organisations’ ability to address forced labour’s root causes (LeBaron & Rühmkorf, 2017; Nolan & Boersma, 2019). The findings in this research, reinforced by the literature, suggest that the Australian NAP should prioritise developing robust stakeholder collaboration frameworks that address each stakeholder’s expertise, limitations, and concerns beyond superficial interactions. I present three managerial implications for involved actors to address forced labour within complex, multi-organisational collaborations.

First, continuous evaluation and accountability are crucial. A key issue with some models explored in this research (e.g., roundtable, advisory groups) is their failure to develop

a common language, clear goals, and a focus on tangible outcomes. The literature supports this, noting that MSCs thrive when they are built on shared, achievable goals and a unified vision (Bryson et al., 2015; Eweje et al., 2021; Gray & Purdy, 2018; Whittington, 2003). Without these foundations, MSC within the NAP risks becoming superficial rather than effective.

Addressing forced labour requires the government to adopt a more inclusive and flexible approach to designing MSC models. This approach should allow for broader voices across different sectors, traditionally excluded from these conversations, to contribute to the issue and be heard and valued. In particular, it is crucial to establish mechanisms to integrate stakeholders across a spectrum of sectors, for instance, state and territory governments, academics, business, NGOs, technology, the maritime sector, labour unions, the health sector, survivors, and workers, into these conversations.

However, if we think counterfactually, many of these stakeholder groups are not only crucial in addressing forced labour but also follow procurement practices across various industries. Recognising their expertise helps organisations scrutinise supply chains and reflect on their key roles in combating forced labour. Therefore, by leveraging their voices, the government can explore the issue from various unconventional angles and understand its intersections with related areas (e.g., domestic violence conflated with forced labour). This understanding and the complexities of experience will help tailor responses to the specific needs of different sectors. Thus, embracing collaboration in practice necessitates the government developing a common language among participants. Clear objectives, accountability, and outcomes are vital, especially when taxpayer money is involved.

Effective collaboration also requires addressing power imbalances and tensions among actors, guiding the dynamics towards a common ground. Moreover, the interviews revealed a concerning trend where government collaborative mechanisms function in a siloed manner. These mechanisms often prioritise certain stakeholders and set rules without proper consultation, even within a voluntary collaborative framework. To counter this, the government

should develop the flexibility to adapt to the accessibility needs of various stakeholder groups, ensuring their skills and expertise are valued in the conversation. By implementing these strategies, the government can enhance the effectiveness of MSCs in addressing forced labour, providing a more inclusive, responsive, and impactful approach.

Another concerning finding is the burden placed on organisations struggling with limited funding. The government's insufficient financial support exacerbates inequalities and marginalises those with limited resources, effectively excluding their voices from critical discussions. Moreover, scholars state that the impact of key stakeholders such as civil society in anti-slavery conversations has not been fully acknowledged (Schrempf-Stirling & Van Buren III, 2024, p. 6). This behaviour is mirrored in the business sector, where large companies often seek guidance from civil society organisations without offering financial support. To address this, organisations must prioritise costs associated with participating in collaborative efforts to address forced labour.

The absence of financial support and recognition devalues stakeholders' contributions, further complicating efforts to combat forced labour. This situation becomes paradoxical as these organisations, while addressing forced labour, face a similar form of psychological manipulation and exploitation by influential stakeholders. This situation raises a vital question: How can civil society organisations successfully contribute to collaborative frameworks without the much-needed support and recognition? Scholars argue that structural injustices are the "unintended but inevitable result of individuals and institutions" pursuing their objectives and priorities within established norms (Van Buren III & Schrempf-Stirling, 2022, p. 973).

These circumstances underscore a discriminatory ecosystem that favours well-resourced entities. Organisations working in the anti-slavery field must use their limited resources in exchange for the "opportunity" to participate in government meetings and collaborate with other key stakeholders. To address this shortcoming, it is essential to provide adequate financial support and recognise all stakeholders' contributions to a genuinely

effective and inclusive collaborative framework. Thus, without these measures, the efforts to address forced labour will remain restrained by systemic inequalities that inadvertently exploit vulnerable stakeholders. Addressing these injustices, therefore, necessitates dialogue and action among multiple stakeholders within the NAP collaborative framework. Given that stakeholder dialogue often has a strategic, outcome-driven orientation (Acuti et al., 2024, p. 10), this approach ensures that NAP efforts are purposeful and aimed at achieving tangible progress in combating structural injustices.

Second, communication and transparency are paramount. Interviews with experts in the anti-slavery field revealed that the aspects of collaboration are frequently complex for the stakeholders and organisations involved, including tensions and conflicting agendas. These interviews highlighted that many stakeholders, excluded from government conversations, had to find alternative ways to collaborate. While these small pockets of collaboration are positive, they illustrate a siloed approach in the anti-slavery space, exacerbating the overall strategy and hindering data collection. As a result, organisations operate independently, leading to a lack of awareness and coordination. One participant aptly described this situation: “All of these companies doing their risk analysis. But no one knows, no one knows what that data says” (P1, Legal & Academia).

Although challenging, navigating these complexities and achieving effective data sharing is vital. A collaborative and transparent approach to data sharing and stakeholder engagement is crucial for informed and impactful action against forced labour. Thus, data sharing is essential in collaborative models as it contributes to a holistic understanding of the issue, facilitates evidence-based decision-making, and promotes cooperation among key stakeholders.

This dissertation raises concerns about the need for guidance to the business sector and other stakeholders in identifying, addressing, and supporting victims of forced labour. Asking businesses to report on issues they do not fully understand, including who to contact

or how to address these problems, is idealistic. Moreover, this research highlights the lack of available information on firms' responses and remediation mechanisms to forced labour, indicating a significant knowledge gap. Therefore, exploring the dynamics around corporate responses helps us increase our understanding and develop a more holistic approach that integrates all stakeholders. This can foster an environment of inclusion, inspiring organisations to identify critical stakeholders and develop best practices for integrating business and human rights that will be reflected in corporate responses and remediation efforts.

By promoting a transparent and communicative environment, stakeholders can align their efforts, disseminate valuable insights, and work together more efficiently to combat forced labour. This dissertation is particularly relevant for policymakers and vital stakeholders in the fight against forced labour. It invites them to reflect on the current collaboration models, such as roundtables and advisory groups, and improve them to include stakeholders outside their traditional classification and sphere of influence. By doing so, they can enhance the value of their efforts, guaranteeing a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to addressing forced labour.

Third, implementing adaptive strategies is crucial for identifying and including stakeholder voices. Historical trends in local governance, as discussed by Taylor Marlin (2006), indicate that without structured mechanisms for meaningful engagement and follow-through, stakeholder voices risk being sidelined. This issue is illustrated by the experience in Colombia under President Álvaro Uribe Vélez's "Consejos Comunes de Gobierno", which, despite creating open forums for community engagement, often led to unclear outcomes with insufficient accountability and follow-up (Muñoz Eraso, 2010).

The findings suggest that organisations need to reassess the roles of critical stakeholders beyond their conventional classifications and identify their marginalised stakeholders. Additionally, organisations need to embrace collaboration with actors across various sectors, including workers to share information and expertise, avoiding silos of

knowledge. This collaborative approach aligns with the UNGPs and the SDGs and, locally, with the NAP to contribute to the MSA 2018. In this context, educational institutions play an essential role in this strategy by increasing awareness among their stakeholders, including business, health, and law schools, among others. This expansion in knowledge will facilitate a more practical approach to addressing forced labour.

The findings in this study echo the literature questioning the impact of NAP collaboration models in addressing forced labour. While NAPs are acknowledged as tools to advance the UNGPs (Cantú Rivera, 2019, p. 222), they face clear challenges. Some studies argue that governments have used NAPs as a “pretext for avoiding hard regulations” (O’Brien et al., 2022, p. 93), resulting in “difficulty to generate vertical policy coherence”, or alignment of legislation (Cantú Rivera, 2019, p. 226). Thus, their weaknesses remain evident, particularly in their limited exploration of “regulatory options to ensure adequate human rights protection and access to justice” (Bordignon, 2020, p. 89). This is critical because without legal reforms and MSCs, the NAPs may lack the necessary impact to drive substantial changes to protect human rights in business contexts.

Throughout this dissertation, I have illustrated that forced labour cannot be addressed in silos. There is a need to improve collaboration processes within NAP frameworks. The findings highlight the critical role of government in leading by example while addressing stakeholder fears to collaborate and provide support to all stakeholders—ensuring that no one stands alone. Finally, the Australian NAP strategy must promote managerial empathy within organisations, inspiring managers to recognise and interact with a more diverse group of stakeholders. A major challenge for stakeholder dialogue collaboration is the need to set aside strategic and private interests to prioritise collaboration (Acuti et al., 2024, p. 11; Van Tulder et al., 2016).

Building empathy is crucial, enabling leaders to comprehend and address the needs of workers often overlooked in business decisions. However, it is crucial to remember that

while stakeholder theory and restorative justice offer valuable insights, they alone cannot resolve all social injustices. A robust collaborative approach will support businesses and organisations in fully integrating human rights due diligence into their operations. To encourage more responsible behaviour from businesses and stakeholders, the NAP must actively apply social influence over corporate practices, lead by example, and set high ethical engagement and accountability standards. In this context, the Attorney-General, the Hon. Mark Dreyfus KC MP, recently announced the appointment of Chris Evans as Australia's inaugural Anti-Slavery Commissioner, assigning him the critical role of fostering stakeholder collaboration and driving systemic reforms to combat forced labour (Australian Attorney-General's Department, Nov 11 2024).

A critical managerial implication is that governments and organisations should promote structured MSC frameworks beyond superficial "collaboration". Moreover, MSC enhances transparency, dialogue, and accountability, as each stakeholder group brings distinctive skills to the process. This responsible approach represents "a relational call for solidarity" that extends to all who contribute to or combat structural injustices, uniting them through these shared conditions (Browne, 2023, p. 98). By integrating traditional and non-traditional stakeholders across various sectors, the NAP can monitor overall strategy and collaboration outcomes more effectively, holding organisations accountable for their human rights practices. By fostering MSCs, the NAP can work towards systemic change and build a shared commitment to combating forced labour.

In the next section, I will explore the theoretical implications of this research. Specifically, I will problematise the conversation around stakeholder voice inclusion in MSCs, applying a stakeholder engagement lens and a restorative justice perspective to understand the MSC framework for addressing forced labour.

8.3 Theoretical Contributions: Multiple Levels of Analysis

“An idea whose time has come is that of considering more directly the governance of relations between a firm and its multiple stakeholders and not just with its shareholders.”

(Amis et al., 2020, p. 499)

From a theoretical perspective, this research problematises the conversation around stakeholder voice inclusion in MSCs (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011; Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997). In essence, I have adopted a stakeholder engagement lens and a restorative justice perspective to understand the MSC framework for addressing forced labour. By applying stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), this study aims to inform MSCs (Bryson et al., 2006; Selsky & Parker, 2005) and explore collective solutions to forced labour. This does not imply that stakeholder theory is well suited to determine stakeholder inclusion and exclusion (Chowdhury et al., 2022) in MSCs. Instead, I argue that stakeholder theory, a theory that connects management and ethics (Phillips et al., 2003), has significant limitations when it comes to understanding key stakeholder claims to address the organisational footprint and social responsibility (Chowdhury et al., 2022; Derry, 2012; Van de Ven, 2005).

Although this theoretical blending of stakeholder theory and restorative justice theory is significant, it alone cannot fully explain the findings of my research. Given that stakeholder theory and MSCs operate at the macro and meso levels of society, it is crucial to explore stakeholder voice inclusion from a micro-level perspective—at the individual level. To address this, I incorporated restorative justice theory at the micro level (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2011; Van Ness et al., 2022; Zehr, 2002b; Zehr et al., 2022), considering stakeholders as human beings with a voice to explore the nuanced dynamics of stakeholder inclusion and promote dialogue and rebuilding trust.

However, scholars argue that collaboration and dialogue among practitioners of restorative justice should be further enhanced and better structured (Marder, 2016). Stakeholder “dialogue” should create a shared understanding of and concerns about social

issues between the organisation and its key stakeholders (Acuti et al., 2024, p. 2). Thus, MSC plays a fundamental role in bridging theoretical frameworks, creating a platform where stakeholder theory, MSCs, and restorative justice interconnect, enabling a more nuanced understanding of stakeholder inclusion and collaborative models within the Australian NAP.

This emphasis on the macro, meso, and micro levels underscores not only the significant contributions of each stakeholder to our understanding of forced labour but also the underlying premises, constraints, and inconsistencies present in each approach. Therefore, the theoretical contribution of this dissertation is an alternative perspective on stakeholder theory, MSCs, and restorative justice, along with its implications for understanding forced labour within supply chains. Within this framework, my objective is not to establish factual assertions but rather to foster fresh understandings (Cornelissen, 2017; Suddaby, 2006) and explore alternative approaches to addressing forced labour.

Stakeholder Theory: Macro Level

“It is due to many companies failing to properly execute stakeholder engagement that so few cases of modern slavery are identified, and correspondingly, remedy is not properly conducted.” (Pryde et al., 2024)

Stakeholder theory has changed how we view businesses, shifting from a transactional to a relational viewpoint on corporate behaviours (Freeman, 1984; Wettstein, 2023), connecting management and ethics (Phillips et al., 2003). However, stakeholder theory as a managerial theory does not cover all ethical issues (Parmar et al., 2010; Phillips et al., 2003). Although this theory focuses on stakeholder interests, emphasising the importance of individuals in the value-creation process (Freeman, 1984; Parmar et al., 2010, p. 38), an understanding of how these interests are harmonised for all stakeholders is lacking (Gibson, 2017). Moreover, organisations’ interests are often prioritised over those of stakeholders (Acuti et al., 2024, p. 1) highlighting the need for greater attention to the interests of key stakeholders (Laplume et al., 2008), such as workers who play a critical role in value creation.

Stakeholder classification based on power, legitimacy, and urgency (Mitchell et al., 1997) negatively impacts meaningful, responsible, and novel interactions between the organisation and any stakeholder (Chowdhury, 2021d, 2022; Chowdhury et al., 2022). Mitchell et al.'s (1997) classification misinterprets Freeman's (1984) more inclusive and humanistic view of business (Freeman et al., 2020), leading to bias (Derry, 2012) and corporate irresponsibility that harms marginalised stakeholders (Mena et al., 2016). Other scholars categorise stakeholder groups as having normative and derivative legitimacy (Phillips, 2003). As a result, stakeholder voices in organisations are sometimes sidelined, undervalued, or even rejected (Dempsey, 2017), with managers favouring dominant stakeholders over less powerful actors (Chowdhury et al., 2022; Roloff, 2008). Here, I argue that if an organisation violates human rights, the rights violation should take priority over stakeholder status. Nevertheless, some scholars argue that power relationships are often inevitable, and attempting to provide balanced stakeholder treatment can harm the weaker party (Gibson, 2017).

The persistence of forced labour can be attributed to corporations' psychological distance; they either believe these problems occur elsewhere or assume they cannot happen among their suppliers (Simpson et al., 2021). Additionally, inadequate engagement with critical stakeholders in decision-making processes leads to missed opportunities for genuine interaction and the development of sustainable solutions (Chowdhury et al., 2022; Harris & Freeman, 2008). Conversely, management scholars state that individuals often distance themselves from structural injustices due to the difficulty of connecting their "own actions and structural outcomes", creating psychological distance (Young, 2003, p. 7). Moreover, many corporations focus primarily on narrowly defined competitive advantages, often overlooking human rights risks in their operations (Parmar et al., 2022). This research highlights this issue, arguing that organisations failing to prioritise human rights abuses risk damaging their reputation and hindering their strategic objectives, ultimately jeopardising their long-term well-being (Carroll & Buchholtz, 1993).

In essence, neglecting stakeholders is ethically wrong, especially when being a stakeholder is about having the capacity to impact or be impacted by an organisation's decisions (Gibson, 2017). Unheard stakeholder voices perpetuate existing conditions, potentially bolstering systemic oppression (Dempsey, 2017, p. 2479) and placing workers in supply chains at risk of exploitation by organisations (Van Buren & Greenwood, 2009). However, having a voice is not sufficient, it must be conceived as a value which is associated with free speech (Benoit-Barné & Martine, 2021). With this in mind, classifying and categorising stakeholders presents problems and limitations, as many potential stakeholder groups do not adequately fit into predefined categories (Crane, 2020).

This research has reviewed the literature, revealing a significant gap between organisations' understanding and acknowledgment of their stakeholders and the actual conditions observed on the ground (New, 2015; Simpson et al., 2021). Although scholars agree that firms' role in capitalism is to orchestrate stakeholder collaboration (Bridoux & Stoelhorst, 2022), it is essential for workers to have a voice, which necessitates influential stakeholders such as unions and forums for their expression (Nolan, 2016). However, the observed decline in union presence in Australia and the US has reduced employees' ability to voice concerns and has led to increased power inequalities among stakeholders (Bondy & Charles, 2020; Van Buren & Greenwood, 2008).

Recent studies state have recognised these stakeholder groups' skills, enabling firms to engage ethically and innovatively with them and reducing negative externalities without relying on NGOs or government agencies (Chowdhury et al., 2022). Although this approach is suitable for including other stakeholder groups such as unions and NGOs, it is not fully applicable to victims of forced labour. For instance, research underscores that the dynamics between businesses and suppliers are frequently characterised by a culture of fear, driven by demands for price reductions and coercive practices (New, 2015). Moreover, victims of forced labour often experience violence, deception, coercion, and abuse of power (International

Labour Organization, 2017c, p. 9), which hinders their ability to self-identify as victims and interact directly with organisations.

To further complicate this scenario, I have shown that businesses usually lack the guidance and expertise needed to identify victims and engage with them in a meaningful, trauma-informed approach. Additionally, the diversity, lack of organisation, and difficulty in articulating needs and ideas in a structured manner among marginalised communities create substantial challenges. Although organisations may acknowledge the significance of engaging with various stakeholders, including marginalised groups (Chowdhury, 2021b; Chowdhury et al., 2022), they often lack the time, resources, and capacity to effectively engage with individual stakeholders, such as workers in global supply chains, who are not part of formally recognised groups. This limitation highlights a disconnect between the structured classifications outlined in stakeholder theory and the practical challenges of engaging with disorganised and unrecognised stakeholder groups.

Even when marginalised actors seek to be perceived and integrated as stakeholders, organisations frequently lack the knowledge on how to integrate them meaningfully (Chowdhury, 2021a). Moreover, larger organisations may struggle to conduct informal dialogues with all their stakeholders due to the diversity of stakeholder groups and the challenges in effectively reaching each one (Acuti et al., 2024, p. 10). Similarly, many firms feel overwhelmed by the constant demand for information and struggle to engage in authentic dialogue (Acuti et al., 2024, p. 2). This situation results in a failure to foster genuine engagement and address the underlying causes of forced labour (LeBaron & Rühmkorf, 2017; Nolan & Boersma, 2019). These significant barriers hinder meaningful interaction between businesses and these stakeholder groups. Since identifying marginalised stakeholders is challenging, organisations must facilitate stakeholder self-identification (Bondy & Charles, 2020). Given these complexities, it is crucial to develop collaborative models that serve as intermediaries between organisations and stakeholder groups, ensuring these stakeholders are recognised and included effectively.

From a stakeholder theory perspective, there is an assumption of aggregation of stakeholder views at the group level. However, marginalised stakeholder groups are not self-organised and struggle to express their views coherently. Stakeholders such as workers in supply chains rarely exhibit all three attributes of power, legitimacy, and urgency to be considered a stakeholder group unless they form coalitions with more powerful actors (Chowdhury et al., 2022). My findings suggest that “powerful actors”, such as MSCs involving stakeholders from various sectors (e.g., governments, businesses, academics, civil society, NGOs, unions, workers, the impacted community, and other relevant actors) with specific skills and a trauma-informed approach, can be crucial in addressing common issues.

My contribution to the ongoing conversation on stakeholder marginalisation is to advocate for a more refined and collaborative attitude to corporate responses in addressing forced labour and its impact. By facilitating the translation and decoding of dialogues outside the organisation, MSCs ensure that stakeholder voices are identified, included, and valued (Benoit-Barné & Martine, 2021), positioning workers as active participants in the solution rather than being solely passive recipients (Chowdhury et al., 2022). This approach not only helps overcome the challenges organisations face in acknowledging and interacting with key stakeholders but also serves as an intermediary between organisations and marginalised groups, fostering more meaningful and inclusive engagement and providing a sustainable solution to forced labour.

This research complements emerging studies on stakeholder theory and marginalised stakeholders by shifting the focus of stakeholder classification to the level of stakeholder as a human being with voice (Chowdhury et al., 2022; Derry, 2012; Van de Ven, 2005). It introduces a pathway for exploring how marginalised stakeholders can come together to contribute as a collaborative system of stakeholder groups to address a common issue.

Restorative Justice: Micro Level

“People should be at the center of every way we think about business.”

(Freeman et al., 2019, p. 152)

This quote reflecting stakeholder theory reasoning eloquently sets the stage for this section by emphasising the need to prioritise human concerns in business practices. Although “restorative justice is a compass, not a map” (Zehr, 2002b, p. 10), it underscores the involvement and acknowledgment of those most impacted by misconduct and employs a problem-solving framework (Zehr, 2008, p. 3). However, collaborative frameworks often focus on macro-level perspectives, overlooking the structural injustices that occur at the micro level. My study addresses this gap by exploring structural injustices at the micro level (Van Buren III & Schrempf-Stirling, 2022) focusing on collaboration models through the perspective of restorative justice. By implementing dialogue-based resolutions and transparency to repair injustice, the focus shifts from solely identifying broken laws and culprits to fostering healing and accountability (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2011; Van Ness et al., 2022; Zehr, 2002b; Zehr et al., 2022).

However, offenders must honestly admit their fault for the offence to accomplish restorative justice (Sarkin & Pereira Lopes, 2023). Some restorative justice perspectives emphasise the importance of processes involving victims, offenders, and communities to achieve restorative sanctions without necessarily requiring face-to-face dialogue (Castro, 2023). In essence, restorative justice is a social movement that actively promotes holistic approaches to harm caused by unethical behaviour and violations of human rights (Gohar, 2018).

The issue of how to adequately remedy the abuse of the victim’s rights is often neglected (Simmons et al., 2022), representing a current failure and a potential opportunity for improvement. The lack of transparency has made it impossible to study the effectiveness of

most company grievance mechanisms (Harrison & Wielga, 2023). Addressing this requires considering both the direct and indirect effects of corporate activities on rights holders (Pryde et al., 2024). Through meaningful engagement, the rights holders can search for solutions that promote repair and reconciliation and facilitate social recovery (Braithwaite, 1999; Sered, 2019; Zehr, 2002a). It implies right holders receiving compensation and apologies, offenders accepting responsibility and making restitution, and the general community building trust and promoting collective learning (Goodstein & Butterfield, 2010). While most studies demonstrate greater victim agreement with restorative justice than with traditional methods, research questions this and advises to explore victims' mediation experiences (Green, 2007).

Although restorative justice represents a “collaborative problem-solving approach” (Sered, 2019, p. 113) and a process of “earned redemption” (Braithwaite, 2013, p. 462), scholars argue that interaction and partnership among restorative justice practitioners across diverse settings and roles should be further improved and better regulated (Marder, 2016). For instance, recent studies indicate that victims' advocates express concern over their exclusion from the initial stages of planning and decision-making, stressing the crucial role that survivors' groups should play in these processes (Zehr et al., 2022). From a survivor's perspective, Sarah S. (Sarah S, 2024) illustrates how this remediation should look.

In order to heal, interactions need to counteract previous relationships with perpetrators [...] Remedy then, looks like learning to believe that humans can be kind, empathetic, responsive, and respectful. These kinds of relationships give you hope that there is a place where you can be heard, accepted, and your dignity is restored.

Corporate remediation practices that involve the restorative justice frameworks are essential for addressing human rights abuses (Schormair & Gerlach, 2020).

A study found that most forced labour survivors preferred alternative justice over retributive justice, seeking to confront exploiters, show resilience, and ensure accountability (Yu et al., 2018). In this context, restorative justice theory is particularly relevant for exploring

groups of individuals who are not self-organised and struggle to articulate their views and needs in a structured manner. Moreover, this research has shown that these stakeholder voices are not fully integrated in current collaboration models; instead, NGOs and other actors often speak on their behalf.

It is essential to consider the different degrees of legitimacy, intermediation, and aggregation of these voices and to evaluate two potential counterfactual scenarios. **First**, organisations representing victims/survivors understand, organise, integrate, and present the views of these stakeholder groups in a way that facilitates understanding, advocacy, and support. Moreover, when marginalised stakeholder views are aggregated in an organised manner, these unique experiences naturally become diluted in the collective representation. From a stakeholder theory perspective, this representation helps with the aggregation issue, facilitates the translation process across stakeholders, and contributes to a richer classification and structure of stakeholders.

Second, an additional layer of analysis must be considered when NGOs or other actors serve as intermediaries for marginalised stakeholders but fail to let them raise their voices openly. This condition creates substantial power inequalities, where the voices of less powerful actors are sidelined or overshadowed, opposing the restorative justice principles of healing, dialogue, and reconciliation among all parties. These two scenarios help illuminate the tension between potential losses and gains associated with each approach.

To guarantee the practice of restorative justice and avoid [un]intentionally perpetuating the injustices they aim to address, the role of mediators must be carefully balanced. This counterfactual exploration highlights the fine line between including stakeholder voices and ensuring balanced representation within collaborative models. Restorative justice, while valuable, has trade-offs, including the need to recognise the importance of empowerment within the process (Tiarks, 2019).

Moreover, scholars argue that equal justice for offenders is inconsistent with equal justice for victims, indicating that a greater degree of equality is attained by refusing equality as an objective, ensuring victims a minimum level of care, and protecting offenders against excessive punishment (Braithwaite, 1999). An example of restorative justice in practice is the Colombian Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), a transitional justice mechanism that seeks to balance justice and peace (Castro, 2023; Matias-Camargo, 2019). Scholars agree that realising the process of truth, understanding, and reparation is vital for survivors and victims, as well as for the institutional health of the structures designed to ensure it (Botero, 2020). However, this restorative justice approach has been assessed as a less ideal method of bringing harmony and justice (Sarkin & Pereira Lopes, 2023).

A restorative justice approach to addressing forced labour entails creating an environment that fosters genuine engagement and equitable participation in discussions of common interest. The approach must be at the micro level, as it involves individuals with unique experiences. Given the significant diversity within these communities, they require a collaborative mechanism for aggregation to ensure their collective voices are effectively heard and valued.

However, when considering counterfactual scenarios, it is essential to avoid overemphasising the inclusion of marginalised stakeholders or suggesting that advancement is unattainable without their input. While their views are beneficial, proposing that progress solely depends on their involvement can be misleading. Echoing this, scholars state that assuming stakeholder voice inclusion as largely beneficial can be risky as more voices do not necessarily yield more power (Dempsey, 2017) or decision-making influence (Van Buren & Greenwood, 2009). Therefore, simply attempting to provide a “voice” without a structured mechanism can sometimes exacerbate issues. For instance, some actors may try to dominate the conversation, while environments that superficially grant a voice can significantly weaken collective action.

Similarly, scholars stress the lack of limited knowledge on how marginalised stakeholders self-represent and use mechanisms to address forced labour (Chowdhury, 2021a). Therefore, implementing a micro-level approach using the restorative justice framework allows us to explore issues related to marginalised stakeholders and remediation, as well as the fears and concerns of broader stakeholder groups, connecting business and ethics.

Scholars suggest that merging business and ethics is most effective when integrated into the company's core values from the start (Freeman et al., 2019). This raises a critical question: How can businesses bridge this gap between theory and practice to fulfil their ethical duties towards these stakeholder groups? Freeman's stakeholder legacy, which is "rooted in a more humanistic conception of business as a vehicle for human cooperation to realize outcomes not otherwise attainable" (Freeman et al., 2020, p. 219), provides a foundational perspective for addressing this issue. Therefore, scholars argue that

a robust deliberative democracy balances the rule of law with public concerns, as top-down legalism without restorative justice risks a "tyranny of lawyers", while bottom-up justice without oversight risks a "tyranny of the majority", necessitating balanced oversight and community input. (Braithwaite, 1999, p. 105)

Thus, a balanced approach incorporating top-down legal principles and bottom-up restorative practices is vital, ensuring that justice is administered fairly and reflects the diverse needs and concerns of all stakeholders involved. Scholars suggest that restorative justice frameworks and punitive measures often create issues for certain trust (Botero, 2020). In this context, scholars agree that developing collaborative mechanisms for aggregation is essential to ensure stakeholders' perspectives are gathered and delivered in a meaningful way (Foot, 2015; George et al., 2016b; Gray & Purdy, 2018; Lockyer, 2020; Nolan & Boersma, 2019).

To achieve this, MSCs involving multiple stakeholders are crucial in the design and implementation of remedies based on restorative justice principles—dialogue and healing. Such MSCs can enhance transparency and legitimacy, ensuring that the remedies are trusted

and effectively implemented (Pryde et al., 2024). Thus, by adopting an MSC approach aligned with Freeman's vision of "human collaboration", firms can more effectively engage with and genuinely listen to critical stakeholders. This approach enables them to address the complexities of forced labour through multiple levels of analysis.

MSCs: Meso Level Bridging the Gap

"Collaboration is not always easy to achieve when it involves people with different skills, assumptions, values, and priorities—but it is precisely these different perspectives that can add value to research." (ATMG 2021, p 14)

The findings from this dissertation also have implications for research on MSCs. In this research, I highlighted various aspects of different stakeholder capabilities and skills and illustrated their critical role in developing new collaborative pathways towards more ethical and sustainable business practices. However, scholars argue that without structured mechanisms for meaningful engagement, stakeholder voices risk being sidelined (Taylor, 2006). Colombia's experience under President Álvaro Uribe Vélez's "Consejos Comunes de Gobierno" illustrates this, as these open forums often led to unclear outcomes and lacked accountability (Muñoz Eraso, 2010).

In my study, one of the most significant similarities among current Australian collaborative models (e.g., roundtable, advisory groups, and CAF) is the "complex" and "siloed" approach to developing, implementing, and integrating stakeholder voices in MSCs. However, it is important to emphasise that MSCs are not panaceas (Gray, 2018); rather, they are provisional and rarely easy solutions (Crosby & Bryson, 2010), requiring ongoing negotiation to reconcile competing stakeholder agendas (Bingham, 2006) within a wide-ranging process framework that is flexible, inclusive, and multidisciplinary (Head, 2022). Although this dissertation confirms the literature on stakeholder exclusion from collaboration models (Baumann-Pauly, Nolan, Labowitz, et al., 2016; David & Salter, 2021; Helton, 2016; Lockyer, 2020; Testa, 2020) and reveals tensions in MSCs (Boersma, 2018; Quayle et al.,

2019), I extend current insights by adding an individual-level analysis that could help address these issues. This aligns with the literature on restorative justice, reinforcing the idea of restoring relationships through inclusive dialogue and mutual respect (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2011; Van Ness et al., 2022; Zehr, 2002b; Zehr et al., 2022).

Scholars argue that the legitimacy of global governance relies on the democratic participation of everyone affected (Hilbrich, 2024). Integrating key stakeholder views is vital. One recent example of MSCs at the global level illustrates this point. The Global Commission on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, led by former UK Prime Minister Theresa May, aims to achieve UN Sustainable Development Goal 8.7 by 2030 (Global Commission on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, 2023; United Nations, 2015b). This Commission leverages political leadership and research, integrating leaders, business and CEOs, academics, activists, and survivors to combat forced labour effectively.

In synthesising these collaborative efforts, it becomes evident that the integration of key stakeholder perspectives is not just beneficial but essential. However, my research highlights that both the government's role in leading by example and fostering collaboration, as well as the business sector's attention to corporate responsibility, have been insufficient, hindering accountability and transparency. Moreover, with firm managers centralising governance (e.g., state or businesses), other stakeholders have limited interaction on governance issues (Bridoux & Stoelhorst, 2022). As a result, this research illustrates confusion among some participants about pathways for victim support and businesses' lack of knowledge in identifying human rights issues within their operations, indicating a systemic failure. Expecting businesses to accurately report on issues they do not fully understand or recognise is idealistic.

Moreover, understanding the concept of a remedy can be particularly challenging for newcomers (Moore, 2024). Therefore, governments need to demonstrate greater leadership in and genuine commitment to addressing social issues like forced labour (Eweje et al., 2021).

This research has also revealed that businesses frequently demonstrate reluctance to cooperate due to fears of legal repercussions. This formula of ignorance and fear among different stakeholders obstructs effective collaboration and the overall efforts to address the underlying causes of forced labour. On a counterfactual note, scholars observe that management research often explores firms' responses to social issues while overlooking how these solutions apply to business practices (Dorado et al., 2022).

Scholars suggest that corporate governance structures and mechanisms at various levels within a firm—institutional, firm, executive, and individual—collectively drive ethical behaviours (Jain & Jamali, 2016; Jain et al., 2023). These studies significantly contribute to our understanding at the organisational level. However, I aim to broaden this perspective to encompass multi-stakeholder groups across organisations and multiple levels of analysis (macro, meso, and micro). Single responses are rarely sufficient when addressing complex issues. Therefore, by integrating collaborative mechanisms across organisations, “we can design a framework that encourages people to ask relevant questions for making ethical decisions” (Freeman et al., 2019, p. 154).

Overall, exploring collaboration models to address forced labour through stakeholder theory, a macro-level approach, it becomes evident that for this framework to function effectively, categorised stakeholder groups with distinct issues and perspectives are needed. However, this framework often overlooks the complexities of critical stakeholders, making it essential to integrate their voices in addressing issues like forced labour. Conversely, restorative justice, a micro-level approach that focuses on individual experiences and dialogues for reconciliation and healing, is valuable but inadvertently overlooks broader systemic issues and collective aspects, neglecting the dynamics of stakeholders in collaboration to address common problems. This “space in the middle” encompasses diverse and intersecting concerns that do not fit neatly into a single framework—stakeholder theory or restorative justice—highlighting the limitations of any single approach in addressing the full spectrum of stakeholder voices in collaboration models to address complex problems. This

gap calls for including the MSC mechanism at the meso level of analysis to bridge and blend these theoretical frameworks, offering a more comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon.

In the next section, I will discuss the limitations of this research and future research directions. The study's focus on individuals affiliated with the Australian National Action Plan Against Modern Slavery 2020–25 limits its scope, but multiple expert interviews and public document reviews offer a comprehensive perspective.

8.4 Limitations and Future Research

This dissertation has some limitations. A significant limitation of the study lies in its exclusive emphasis on individuals affiliated with the submissions to the Australian National Action Plan Against Modern Slavery 2020–25. This focus narrows the scope to specific sectors and organisations, consequently limiting the inclusion of other pivotal experts who lack a direct association with the submissions to the NAP. My research, interviewing 16 out of 44 public submissions to the Australian NAP on forced labour, avoids generalising views by including multiple experts from each relevant field. Although the absence of government representatives among the study participants might have limited the range of perspectives, including public documents, such as recent statutory reports, provides a comprehensive view of the government's stance on the Australian anti-slavery approach.

Moreover, despite efforts to gain access to survivors' voices directly, they were limited—only one expert in this research has lived experience. In Section 2.2, I share my experience searching for these voices. Although a few studies include survivors' voices in research (e.g., the UK anti-trafficking monitoring group), additional research is needed to explore their views concerning collaboration models and their perception of how their voices could be integrated more meaningfully. Additionally, a more nuanced approach for organisations to deal with marginalised stakeholder engagement collaboration models is needed, particularly in collectively addressing the SDGs. From an academic perspective, this involves exploring stakeholder engagement in MSCs through theoretical blending across disciplines to shed new

light. Future research should seek to include a broader range of perspectives, including stakeholders with lived experience, to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of forced labour.

Additionally, the research is focused on Australia, where the anti-slavery collaborative approach is predominately overseen and coordinated by the government, and only a few pockets of sector-specific collaboration exist. The applicability of the findings to other contexts remains uncertain, as collaboration dynamics, stakeholder roles, and overseen actors may vary. Hence, future research should explore multiple settings and organisational structures to learn the broader relevance of the recognised principles. Moreover, exploring MSCs in different international and cross-cultural settings can offer meaningful comparative insights. Specifically, stronger engagement with transnational and regional research groups could help shed light on how different legal and cultural contexts influence MSCs. Further research is needed to explore the collaborative systems in place to address forced labour and how stakeholder voices are valued.

My study shows that some organisations aggregate stakeholder voices, particularly those of workers and survivors, thereby [un]intentionally reducing their agency. These stakeholder groups must navigate tensions related to their roles within collaborative models. Therefore, exploring more legitimate approaches to aggregating voices—ones that support genuine participation—is essential. However, in doing so, we must ask: what is lost, and what is gained?

Future research could explore how current MSC trends reflect those of early abolitionist movements, especially the role of volunteerism and advocacy. Examining these historical patterns may reveal systemic structures that continue to shape collaborative responses to forced labour. The role of faith-based civil society organisations also needs more exploration, particularly in how their motivations and approaches may differ from those of secular CSOs.

Understanding these distinctions could offer valuable insights into the organisational dynamics and values shaping collaboration.

Further research is needed to explore firms' incentives for including critical stakeholders in their corporate strategies and responses to address forced labour. However, to do that, organisations need to educate themselves about the issue of forced labour and the subtle connections that need to be identified. Additionally, exploring how individuals perceive existing organisations as prioritising ethical responses to forced labour over profit is essential. This approach highlights the significance of comprehending stakeholder roles and collaboration in addressing forced labour. Although I believe that stakeholder voice inclusion in collaboration models has the potential to address forced labour, it needs government oversight to support and develop mechanisms that facilitate and value their inclusion.

In turn, it will encourage businesses and organisations to take action to identify critical stakeholders, value their skills and expertise, and include them in a meaningful way and in their strategies to improve corporate responses to address forced labour. Therefore, I argue that unless different actors collectively influence broader voice inclusion in collaboration models, critical stakeholders will continue to be neglected, resulting in a siloed approach and fragmented solutions.

Regarding research methodology, the phenomenon I studied—forced labour—is too complex to be explored through a single method. Although my qualitative grounded theory approach provides insight into collaboration models, it restricts my ability to apply findings directly to other MSCs. Therefore, implementing quantitative and qualitative approaches could highlight new insights to explore specific conditions and strategies to develop innovative and sustainable methods.

Finally, while the proposed MSC model supports stakeholder engagement as a pathway to sustainable solutions for addressing forced labour, its implementation faces two significant barriers. **First**, political shifts, dominant institutional logics that reinforce

inequalities, and power dynamics can hinder meaningful and sustainable collaboration. Addressing these barriers necessitates prioritising transparent oversight frameworks, fostering trust among stakeholders, and embedding mechanisms resilient to political changes. **Second**, implementing such systemic change can be difficult, as it requires fundamental structural shifts grounded in inclusivity, attentive to power imbalances, committed to fair compensation and recognition, and guided by shared goals that reflect a collective understanding of responsibility. Thus, facilitating systemic change requires building capacity, collaborative leadership, and policy measures that promote fairness and accountability. Future research should explore how these conditions can be effectively embedded across diverse organisational levels and policy environments to support successful implementation.

Despite its limitations, this study offers important insights for academic debate and real-world implementation within the Australian context. It underscores the need for more research into the empowering roles of different stakeholders within Australia's global supply chains, including government agencies, businesses, academics, trade unions, suppliers, workers, NGOs, refugee organisations, health practitioners, and other critical stakeholders. Additionally, there is a call for more in-depth exploration of collaborative models involving diverse stakeholders.

Appendix

Appendix 1 Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS TO THE PUBLIC SUBMISSIONS (NAP)

HREC APPROVAL NUMBER: ETH21-6550

Project Title: Creating legal and Social Change for Survivors

How can cross-sector partnerships embrace survivor's perspectives and promote survivor's engagement to guide anti-modern slavery policy and program?

WHO IS CONDUCTING THIS RESEARCH?

My name is Zulay Buchs and I am a PhD Student at UTS. My supervisors are:

- ☐ Martijn Boersma is an Honorary Professor in the faculty of business at the University of Technology of Sydney.
- ☐ Professor Justine Nolan from the faculty of Law and Justice at UNSW Sydney.

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

The purpose of this research is to explore how the knowledge and perceptions of participants to the public submissions to the National Action Plan (2020-25) contribute to the identification, referral, protocols and provision of care to victims/survivors of Modern slavery in Australia.

In particular, it will explore how cross-sector collaborations are initiated, established, and maintained to address modern slavery. It challenges traditional methods and understandings of modern slavery within the country by studying how can cross-sector partnerships could genuinely embrace broader groups of participants such as health care providers, law enforcement, government, businesses, civil society, and survivors to promote survivor's engagement to guide anti-modern slavery policy and program. This approach moves beyond the victim's position to consider their critical participation in cross-sector partnership in the research associated to ways to fight modern slavery. Our goal is to develop an evidence-based study to inform the National Action Plan response to modern slavery crimes in Australia.

WHY HAVE I BEEN INVITED?

You have been invited to participate in this study because we feel that your knowledge and experience as a participant to the public submissions to the NAP (2020-25) will contribute to our understanding and knowledge in the fight against modern slavery in Australia. All the data collected from the semi-structure interview will be stored in a secure server at the University of Technology Sydney and de-identified. This means that your name and any personal information will be removed and replaced with a non-identifiable code.

WHAT DOES MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

If you decide to participate, I will invite you to take part in a semi-structured personal interview (60 min long), arranged at a time that is convenient for you. The online interview can take place via Zoom, Teams, FaceTime or Skype. If the Australian government Covid-19 guidelines allows it, we will offer a face-to-face interview. For the face-to-face interview, you can select the interview location you are most familiar with, as for example your organisation's workplace or in a neutral space for both the researcher and you. The interviews will be recorded (audio) and transcribed. Your participation is completely voluntary. You will receive a research information sheet and consent form before participating in the interview.

You will be provided with the contact details of Lifeline should the interview process remind you of negative experiences. You have the right to withdraw at any time for any reason and inform the researcher if there is any data you are uncomfortable with.

I will provide you with a report of the research finding at the completion of the study.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS/INCONVENIENCE?

This study has been carefully designed but possible risks may remain. You may feel discomfort or being cautious in expressing your views, but the probability is slight as the researcher will create a receptive atmosphere and effective ways of private communication (email, Zoom, Teams, Skype meetings) to assist you with such concerns. You will be assured before and during the interview that there are no right or wrong answers. All information is kept confidential and deidentified, allowing you to freely express your opinion. You do not have to answer any question or take part in the interview if you don't wish to do so. You do not have to justify any reason for not responding to any question, or for refusing to take part in the interview. You can request to exclude certain conversations from the interview and final work.

In addition, you may feel inconvenience or discomfort with the added challenge of handling questions or concerns about the research on top of your existing responsibilities, but the probability is slight due to the flexibility throughout the research process and the receptive communication channels organised by the research team.

If you have any concerns, discomfort or distress of any kind, you are more than welcome to discuss this with the researcher (Zulay Buchs) or with your manager, because the safety of all participants is our top priority, and we will do our best to accommodate the research around these concerns. You will be provided with the contact details of Lifeline should the interview process remind you of negative experiences. You can also withdraw from the research at any time, for any reason and be assured that ALL your personal information and conversations will be kept strictly confidential and not used without your consent.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT?

Participation in this study is voluntary. It is completely up to you whether or not you decide to take part.

WHAT IF I WITHDRAW FROM THIS RESEARCH PROJECT?

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason and inform the researcher (Zulay Buchs) if there is any data you are uncomfortable with. You may also choose to have your previously recorded details remain in the study or securely removed and destroyed. If you decide to keep your record details in the study, you will be assured that ALL your personal information and conversations will be kept strictly confidential and not used without your consent. This will not affect your relationship with the researchers, with the University of Technology Sydney or with your organisation community in any way. Finally, you are welcome to discuss concerns with the researcher at any time. The research team will remain finely attuned to your level of comfort about taking part in the study.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO INFORMATION ABOUT ME?

By signing the consent form, you consent to the research team collecting and using personal information about you for the purposes of the research project. All fieldwork data and your personal information will be treated confidentially and de-identified. Your data will be stored using secure online and offline storage services, password protected and according to UTS guidelines and procedures. Raw data and codes will be securely stored separately. The de-identified data will not be disclosed to anyone else apart from the UTS research team and only used with your consent.

The researcher plans to discuss and publish the results of the research project as a doctoral thesis to the University of Technology Sydney. The researcher also plans to discuss and publish the research in academic and industry journals, and at academic and industry conferences. All information presented in published form will be formatted in a manner that protects your privacy and confidentiality.

In accordance with relevant Australian and/or NSW Privacy laws, you have the right to request access to the information that is collected and stored by the research team about you. You also have the right to request that any information with which you disagree will be corrected. Please inform the researcher Zulay Buchs if you would like to access your information.

DISCLOSURE PROTOCOL

Your personal information will be treated confidentially by the research team and will not be shared with third parties other than required by law. There may be a requirement to disclose information in certain circumstances. Information will be reported if the project researchers receive disclosures about the risk of harm to children that give rise to mandatory reporting obligations.

WHAT IF I HAVE CONCERNS OR A COMPLAINT?

If you have concerns about this research, which I as the researcher or my supervisors can help you with, please feel free to contact me directly at zulaypatricia.buchs@student.uts.edu.au. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

COVID – 19 GUIDELINES

Please note: The researcher will carefully respect and follow [Australian Government COVID-19 guidelines](#). Therefore, the researcher will invite all participants to take part in an **ONLINE** semi-structured personal interview via Zoom, Teams, FaceTime, Skype or via Phone. If the Australian government Covid-19 guidelines allows it, we will offer a face-to-face interview. We encourage everyone participating in research involving physical face-to-face contact to maintain good hand hygiene and to practice physical distancing (maintaining 1.5 metres or more between yourself and others) at all times. Please take your own measures to respond to COVID-19 in line with [Australian Government COVID-19 guidelines](#) and consider downloading the [COVIDSafe app](#). For your safety and for others, if you are feeling unwell, please notify Zulay Buchs and do not attend any physical face-to-face activities.

NOTE: This study has been approved in line with the University of Technology Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee [UTS HREC] guidelines. If you have any concerns or complaints about any aspect of the conduct of this research, please contact the Ethics Secretariat on ph.: +61 2 9514 2478 or email: Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au, and quote the UTS HREC reference number. Any matter raised will be treated confidentially, investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.

CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Creating legal and Social Change for Survivors.

How can cross-sector partnerships embrace survivor's perspectives and promote survivor's engagement to guide anti-modern slavery policy and program?

HREC APPROVAL NUMBER: ETH21-6550

I _____ *[participant's name]* agree to participate in the research project being conducted by Zulay Buchs under the supervision of Honorary Professor Martijn Boersma, from the University of Technology Sydney, 15 Broadway Ultimo NSW 2007 and Professor Justine Nolan from the University of New South Wales, Kensington NSW 2052.

☐ I am 18 years of age or older. I have read the Participant Information Sheet in a language that I understand. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and I am satisfied with the answers I have received. I have been provided with the contact details of Lifeline.

I freely agree to participate in this research project as described and understand that I am free to withdraw at any time and for any reason, and inform Zulay Buchs if there is any data, I am uncomfortable with without affecting my relationship with the researchers, the University of Technology Sydney or my organisation. I understand that I will be given a signed copy of this document to keep.

I agree:

- ☐ to participate in an interview that will last approximately 60 minutes, arranged at a time convenient for me. I understand that I can select the interview mode (Online via Zoom, Teams, FaceTime, Skype or if the government allows it, a face-to-face interview)
- ☐ to allow the researcher to record(audio) and transcribe the interview.
- ☐ with the purposes, procedures and risks of the research as described in the Participant Information Sheet.
- ☐ to inform the researcher if there is any data, I am uncomfortable with.
- ☐ that the research data gathered from this project may be published in a form that does not identify me in any way

I am aware that:

- ☐ I can contact Zulay Buchs if I have any concerns about the research.

Name and Signature [participant]

____/____/____
Date

Name and Signature [researcher or delegate]

____/____/____
Date

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