

AUSTRALIAN CONSULTATIONS ON BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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Legal Briefings - By **Donald Robertson**

The Australian Government will undertake national consultations on the implementation of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights during 2016.

This announcement was made as part of the Australian Government's [official response](#) to the second ever wide-ranging review of Australia's human rights record, the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review in Geneva on 9 November 2015.

The UN Global Compact Network Australia, a business-led initiative to advance corporate sustainability, is organising business roundtables in late May, in collaboration with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The roundtables will build business' understanding of National Action Plans (**NAPs**) and feed into the national consultation process.

The national consultations are expected to place the issue of a NAP on business and human rights at centre stage.

A NAP would provide greater guidance to all sectors on the implementation of the Guiding Principles. For companies, in particular, a NAP would be useful for clarifying government expectations and policy priorities, and make it easier to know who to engage with in government for support and guidance. In addition, a NAP would support companies to prevent and manage human rights risks throughout their operations.

To date, ten countries have launched NAPs on business and human rights, including the UK, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain. 26 others are in the process of developing one, including the US. There has been growing pressure on the Australian Government to do the same or risk falling behind other nations.

The UN Working Group on business and human rights has produced [guidance](#) on the development of a national action plan. Likewise, the Global Business Initiative on Human Rights – representing 18 leading multi-national enterprises from diverse industries and geographies – has provided its [recommendations](#) for the key components of a NAP.

We will be following the national consultations closely as they unfold and will provide updates as they become available.

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