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FASHION IN THE COURTS

Law firm Slater & Gordon will today begin prosecutions against 11 garment manufacturers – many of them prominent fashion labels – in the continuing battle to protect Australia's 300,000 outworkers.

This is the 8th round of prosecutions on behalf of the Textile Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia, and brings to 167 the number of companies prosecuted for around 1100 alleged breaches of the award.

Lawyer Adam Bandt from Slater & Gordon says the prosecutions aim to make the contracting chain transparent.

"The links from the workers who make the garments, the factory that sources them, the fashion labels that contract the factories, to the eventual consumer need to be clear and open if outworkers are to be protected."

The prosecutions follow factory visits by the TCFUA which uncovered piles of big name and well-known fashion labels – but gaps in the records that are supposed to show who the companies and factories sub-contract to and what they are paid.

"While the federal government has amended its WorkChoices legislation to allow the TCFUA to protect outworkers, the Victorian branch of the Liberal Party wants to remove the union's right to inspect workplaces and records," Mr Bandt says.

"It is essential that protections be maintained for hundreds of thousands of Australia's lowest-paid workers, outworkers earning as little as \$3 an hour."