

## **Criminal Code (Decriminalising Sex Work) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024**

**Submission No:** 72  
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Dear Committee Members,

I'm writing in response to your call for submissions regarding the Criminal Code (Decriminalising Sex Work) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024.

I am a sex industry/prostitution survivor and I oppose this bill fully decriminalising “sex work”/prostitution.

Fully decriminalising the sex industry, including decriminalising third party profiteers (who are also known as pimps), is not a humane solution for the women (mostly) in the sex industry/prostitution. Full decriminalisation also needs to justify why it thinks decriminalising pimps is a good idea.

(Just a note that I will be referring particularly to “women” here, because women and girls make up the overwhelming majority of the people in this trade. But of course I believe that men and boys should not be abused in this industry either.)

Instead of full decriminalisation, I support the Nordic Model/Equality Model. This is a system of *partial* decriminalisation, which (like full decrim) decriminalises the sex sellers (mostly women, as mentioned)—and (unlike full decrim) penalises sex buyers (mostly men), as well as third party profiteers (pimps). Additionally the Nordic Model offers support for those who want to leave the industry (commonly called “exit services”).

As you are no doubt aware, the Nordic Model has been introduced to the South Australian parliament by Nicola Centofanti, and will be voted on there later this year.

About me: As I mentioned, I am a survivor of the sex industry. I am also (these days) a writer. I was in this industry for ten years, and my memoir about some of my experiences was published in 2022 by Spinifex Press.

Here is a summary of the points I'll be making below:

- The sex industry/prostitution is a last-resort non-choice—“the choice for women who don't have a choice.” Therefore the interactions that take place in it cannot be called consensual.
- The sex industry/prostitution is violence against women and girls, and therefore it should not be tolerated by our laws.
- It isn't politicians' daughters who end up in this “industry;” instead it's disadvantaged women and girls who need our help.
- The sex industry/prostitution is a trauma industry for women, which cannot be made safe.
- Full decriminalisation does not decrease stigma experienced by the women; instead it just makes the use and abuse of *a certain economic and social class of women and girls* acceptable according to the law (not your daughters; someone else's daughters).
- Are you willing to stop and consider whether this “work” would be acceptable for you to do yourself, or for your daughter to do, or your sister, or any of your beloved family members? If not why not?

- We (prostituted women) are not somehow “different” from you, and therefore able to handle/enjoy this abuse.
- If you are a sex buyer yourself, please read this part.
- If you assume your husband or partner is not a sex buyer, please read this part.
- Who are you listening to? Supposed “sex workers” who argue for full decriminalisation are sometimes not who they seem.
- Please listen to sex industry survivors.
- Full decriminalisation does nothing to help the women—but it does a lot to help sex buyers and pimps.
- Whose side do you want to be on, the side of women and girls and some men and boys who are suffering in this industry—or the side of the sex buyers and pimps?
- I urge you to be willing to consider this issue separate from your party politics.
- We need more courageous people in our halls of power who are willing to stand up and tell the truth about this industry. Can you be that courageous person?

In my experience this industry is overwhelmingly the “choice” for women who have no choice, and the industry is violence against women and girls. The media likes to push the idea of the “empowered sex worker,” but this is a Hollywood fiction, and it’s reprehensible that this silly (but no doubt entertaining and titillating to sex buyers, pimps, and their allies)—fantasy and lie is given so much credence. In my experience it was *not* the reality for the vast majority of women in this industry. Shouldn’t policy should be decided with respect to the majority, not the exceptions? For most women the sex industry is violence, victimisation, and trauma.

Recently I wrote an article for the ABC that detailed my survivor-based opposition to the full decriminalisation of the sex industry (and explained my support for the partial decriminalisation system of the Nordic Model): <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/south-australia-parliament-sex-work-hearing-survivor-voices/103374298>.

As I explain in my article, it generally isn’t the daughters of politicians or other economically and socially advantaged people who end up in this industry.<sup>1</sup> Indigenous women, women of colour, and migrant women are over-represented in the sex trade, as well as women who are unhoused, women experiencing domestic abuse, and women who suffer from addictions. This has been demonstrated in such works as the critical anthology *Prostitution, Trafficking, and Traumatic Stress* <https://www.routledge.com/Prostitution-Trafficking-and-Traumatic-Stress/Farley-PhD/p/book/9780789023797>—and it was also what I observed and experienced.

In my experience the industry was full of traumatised women. A line I heard a lot, and that I used myself, was, “It’s just my body.” I never questioned the lack of self-care this statement represents. So many of us get into the sex industry at least in part because our prior traumatic experiences have given us the “ability” to dissociate our way through abuse. We’re traumatised when we start in the industry, then we get traumatised further by the industry—which then drags us down more, making it extremely hard to get out. Of course this isn’t

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<sup>1</sup> This paragraph and the next few are largely taken from my ABC article: <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/south-australia-parliament-sex-work-hearing-survivor-voices/103374298>.

what we tell the sex buyers, because most of them don't want to hear it (it's not sexy for them).

When I say that the sex industry is a “trauma industry” for women, I'm not talking primarily about the trauma caused by the worst buyers. I'm talking about the trauma women experience on a daily basis in the sex industry. I was raped in a brothel, [REDACTED]

This is another way of saying “my consent was repeatedly bought, and it is what some feminists and many survivors mean when they say the sex industry is “paid rape.” I'm sometimes cautious with that statement because I recognise there are other situations in which people (especially women) have sex they don't want to have—for example, to placate a partner. However, imagine doing that multiple times most days, and with different men each time, who you wouldn't dream of having unpaid sex with, and who are in many cases physically or emotionally repulsive to you? [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (I do apologise for the frank language—but how on earth can we talk about this issue without naming what we're talking about?)

Then add to that the necessity to pretend you're enjoying it—which most buyers of sex demand either explicitly or implicitly, and some will get violent or complain to pimps/“management” if you don't comply. This was my experience, and it is also supported by academic research, for example in (and I'll quote the full title of the article by Meagan Tyler and Natalie Jovanovski because it really sums up the attitudes of many sex buyers in my experience) “[REDACTED], You Got What You Deserved!": Violation and Violence in Sex Buyer Reviews of Legal Brothels', <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1077801218757375>).

Consider for a moment if you can, the physical, mental, and emotional toll all this would take on you. Those who promote full decriminalisation want to make the sex trade safer, but they can't prevent this trauma, because this trauma is the *nature* of the work.

And then there was the constant stress—including anxieties over disease. Condoms are not one hundred percent effective, and some buyers will try to “stealth” them off. Many also try to convince women to go without condoms, and if a woman is broke enough (which she often is), she will often do it.

What acceptable form of work involves having your body penetrated and exposed to other people's bodily fluids and the risk of disease? Over and over? I've worked in brothels where you were supposed to examine the buyer's penis under a lamp beforehand. This is not a full solution because the worst things you can catch don't show up in plain sight. Nor is compulsory testing for the women and not the sex buyers.

Nor does decriminalising the industry reduce stigma for the women. Instead, full decriminalisation just makes the use and abuse of a certain economic and social class of women and girls acceptable (but not acceptable for your nearest and dearest most likely—meaning the “stigma” isn't actually removed).

And if you want to know how sex buyers actually talk about us under full decriminalisation, there is research on that. For example, Tyler and Jovanovski looked at men's "reviews" of women in brothels in Victoria:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S027753951730239X>. This accords with my experience in the industry, and it will turn your stomach. No "de-stigmatisation" of the women has happened here—quite the opposite. Sex buyers are supported and emboldened by full decriminalisation to view women as consumer products for their sexual use, completely devoid of humanity.

Are you willing to stop and consider whether this "work" would be acceptable for you to do yourself, or your daughter to do, or your sister, or any of your beloved family members?

If your answer is no, it wouldn't be acceptable, are you willing to honestly ask yourself why you think it's acceptable for some other, less advantaged, women and girls (and some men and boys)?

If you think it's okay for us because we're somehow "different" from you, let me tell you that we feel pain and anguish the same as you do, and we feel grief the same. We too have hopes and dreams beyond this industry (just like you would). We too feel trauma and develop PTSD (rife among sex industry women: <https://theconversation.com/a-soldier-and-a-sex-worker-walk-into-a-therapists-office-whos-more-likely-to-have-ptsd-71464>)—

I'm so very sorry if it has. None of us deserve it.

If you have ever experienced that, I ask you to imagine it happening to you every day—and on top of that imagine society (and full decriminalisation laws) telling you this abuse/assault of you is okay, because you somehow "chose" it? Never mind that you "chose" it over being homeless, or you "chose" it to pay your rent or feed your children, or you "chose" it because you had mental health or alcoholism and addiction issues that prevented you from getting other forms of employment—this is why exit programs offered by the Nordic Model are so important. No one should have to make this "choice."

And if you are a sex buyer yourself, as I well know some of you reading this will be, and you say, well the women I hire for sexual use seem to be fine with it—I ask you to consider what power we (sex sellers) really have in this interaction with you. Whether we can *really* tell you what we think and feel about what we're doing. Would you continue to pay to use us (so we can pay our rents)—if we were that honest with you? Of course we tell you it's okay with us.

I used to joke that I got extra tips for saying I was "an empowered sex worker." Only it wasn't a joke, it was the truth. Most sex buyers see what they want to see and hear what they want to hear. And what they want to hear are lies that makes them feel better about what they're doing. Full decriminalisation enables these lies. Full decriminalisation benefits sex buyers and pimps, not women/sex sellers.

I urge you to be more honest than this. I urge you to be willing to see what's this industry is actually like for us, rather than seeing what's easiest for you to see, or following the "sex work is a job like any other" lockstep mantra that is currently fashionable, but will not be on the right side of history.

I submit to you that if you truly imagined yourself having to do it, and not a few times, but over and over as your supposed “job”—there is no way you could continue to believe those lies.

Some of you reading will also have husbands or partners who are sex buyers. In my experience, many of the women who support this industry (without ever having had to do it themselves), assume sex buyers must be other people’s husbands. But the main demographic of sex buyers that I saw were white, middle class and higher, professional, married or partnered men. These men badger us (women and girls of lower socioeconomic status) to have sex with them without a condom or try to pay us more to do so—then they go back to your beds. I saw it time and time again. Lovely “industry” right? Full decriminalisation only emboldens sex buyers to demand more and more, as they can now do so with impunity.

Please listen to sex industry survivors and not just “sex worker” advocates, who may not be who they say they are. In my experience many who support this industry and say they were “sex workers,” were actually “tourists” who only worked for a short while and/or not as their main source of income. This is a very different experience compared to the majority of women in this industry.

Other “sex worker” advocates currently in the industry may only be working sparingly—also not the reality for most women in this industry. Some of them may also be involved in selling us (aka they are also third party profiteers/pimps, who of course have a vested interest in saying it’s all just fine). I don’t know the extent to which this goes on here or not, but it has been demonstrated in other countries, for example by the academic researcher Melissa Farley: <https://prostitutionresearch.com/very-inconvenient-truths-sex-buyers-sexual-coercion-and-prostitution-harm-denial/>.

What I do know is that back when I was in the brothels and massage parlours, having time or energy or inclination for sex industry/prostitution activism work would have been completely beyond me. Nor can I remember knowing anyone who was an activist pushing for full decriminalisation—or any activists or advocates among us at all. This was in my entire ten years in the industry. In my experience most of us checked ourselves out mentally in order to do this “job,” tried to comfort ourselves with the money, and, far from attending rallies or marches or talking to the media, most of us preferred to escape from thoughts of the brothel until the next time we had to be there. Almost everyone that I knew wanted to get out of the sex trade.

I urge you to read survivor stories so you know what this “industry” is really like for those of us who have been in it for real (not as tourists). Some of our stories can be found here: <https://nordicmodelnow.org/testimonial/>

Please see this so-called industry for what it *is*—violence against women and girls (and some men and boys), which should not be supported by our laws.

You can make a difference to the people currently suffering in this industry. Full decriminalisation does nothing to help the majority of sex sellers. It does a lot to help sex buyers and pimps though.

Whose side do you truly want to be on, the side of women and girls and some men and boys suffering in this industry, or the side of the sex buyers and pimps?

You can say that the endorsement of this industry enacted by full decriminalisation is *not* okay.

I also urge you to consider the Nordic Model as the humane alternative to the opposite extremes of full decriminalisation on the one hand, and prohibition on the other. If you're interested in knowing more about this you can watch Nicola Centofanti's brilliant speech outlining this model and the reasons for it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xoo4eb0VR9E>, and you can read more about the Nordic Model here: <https://nordicmodelnow.org/what-is-the-nordic-model/>.

I am not a Liberal Party supporter myself, but Nicola Centofanti's speech is spot on—it gets the facts about this industry right.

I urge you to be willing to consider this issue separate from your party politics.

The sex industry/prostitution is violence against women and girls that should not be tolerated by our laws.

We need more courageous people in our halls of power who are willing to stand up and tell the truth about this industry.

Can you be that courageous person?

Thank you for reading.

Warm wishes,

Rose.

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Brisbane.