

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

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Inquiry into Criminal Code (Decriminalising Sex Work) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 – Queensland Parliament

Stop Demand Foundation (Stop Demand) is making this submission on the basis of:

1. Its founder/the author of this Submission, barrister Denise Ritchie, has had 32 years working in the field of the global sex trade – prostitution, pornography and sex trafficking;
2. Since its registration as a Charitable Trust in New Zealand in 2003, Stop Demand has built up a body of knowledge of the decriminalisation landscape of prostitution in New Zealand since the introduction of the Prostitution Law Reform Act 2003 (PRA); and
3. Its concern that New Zealand might be held up as the model of prostitution for Queensland to emulate.

Stop Demand would like to draw your Committee members' attention to the attached 2-page media release issued in June last year, arising from the PRA's 20 year anniversary (Appendix 'A').

The media release summarises and provides links to issues worthy of Committee members' consideration, particularly as regards ongoing violence to vulnerable women and the emboldening of increasingly aggressive sex buyers, under the decriminalisation model.

It is our submission that normalising sex buying to your men and boys would not move Queensland towards a more gender equitable and violence free society. Rather, the opposite.

The decriminalisation model is also totally out of step with progressive countries such as Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Northern Ireland, Canada, France, Ireland and Israel who have all moved to the Nordic/Equality model, which makes it illegal to purchase sexual services and assists sex sellers.

While pro-decriminalisation lobbies typically raise objections about 'agency' and 'choice', they often represent a small minority. We submit that the vast majority of vulnerable persons who get caught up in the destructive trade would be 'thrown under the bus', if Queensland were to decriminalise the trade. **We urge it not to.**

We thank you for considering this Submission.

Denise Ritchie MNZM
Barrister/Founder
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New Zealand

26 June 2023

Prostitution's Collateral Damage, 20 years on

This week's 20-year anniversary of New Zealand decriminalising prostitution offers little to celebrate, say advocates who lobbied against the law change in 2003.

Stop Demand, which works to end sexual violence and exploitation, says the collateral damage from normalising the buying and selling of sex far outweighs any self-congratulatory 'backslaps' that are likely during NZ Prostitutes' Collective planned three days of 'celebration' this week.

Stop Demand's founder, Denise Ritchie, says "*Decriminalisation has [lured desperate young women](#) and [migrants](#) into the trade, has fuelled [child prostitution and trafficking](#), facilitated [illegal brothels](#) and led to a host of negative impacts across [residential](#) and [business](#) communities, on [councils](#) and others.*" Impacts that are detailed in a 2021, 88-page [evidenced-based Report](#).

"But what is of greatest concern is the toll taken on vulnerable women including young women, and other sex sellers who've been caught up in the trade," says Ritchie.

Stop Demand says its stance and those of [other advocates](#) are not 'anti-sex'. It distinguishes platforms like Tinder that facilitate hook ups for parties seeking sex. Prostitution, it says, is a very different beast - a trade where typically only one party wants sex, the buyer. Men, many of whom believe they have bought the right to inflict on their 'purchase', acts and abuse that would never be consented to by their wives, partners or Tinder hook ups.

Decriminalisation has not, as touted in 2003, reduced the violence. At best, it offers avenues for reporting violence, but only after harm has occurred. At its extreme end, the law offered nothing to [Bella Te Pania](#), [Renee Duckmanton](#), [Mellory Manning](#), [Suzie Sutherland](#), [a name suppressed 24-year-old](#), murdered women who were viciously and variously raped, bashed, set on fire, strangled, mutilated, and repeatedly run over and dumped, most by sex buyers.

Damaging day-to-day violence and threats of violence also remain widespread across all sectors – street, managed brothels and SOOBs (small owner operated brothels), a fact acknowledged in a [Ministry of Justice Report](#) five years post-decriminalisation (pages 56-58).

In speaking to students at a London conference, Kiwi woman [Chelsea](#), rated No. 1 for many years by one of Auckland's largest brothels, shares the grim reality after twenty years of selling sex. She slams the New Zealand decriminalisation model and the dangers of it being "*aggressively marketed to young girls as 'sex work', as an equal exchange between consenting adults, as harmless fun for men, and even as empowering for women. It is not.*"

[‘Survivor Stories’](#) on *Wahine Toa Rising*, a survivor-led support group, are littered with firsthand accounts of the ravages and damage to body, mind, soul and spirit. Accounts of Kiwi sex buyers, enabled by the law to abuse, degrade, belittle, rape and inflict pain in order to ‘get off’.

“Decriminalising prostitution has simply strengthened and emboldened misogynistic attitudes amongst New Zealand sex buyers”, writes one [survivor](#). *“I believe that for many punters, causing mental discomfort to the girl/woman they buy is necessary for them to truly enjoy the experience ... I thought I had a low self-esteem at 17, but prostitution has absolutely destroyed it.”*

Another, [Sara](#), says of her experiences before and after decriminalisation *“Prostitution is not a life and not work. Definitely not work. Paid rape most definitely.”* Yet even rape is difficult to prove, as one [first-time sex seller](#) found, after her buyer was [acquitted](#). Despite a law that claims to protect them, many women are forced to ‘put up with’ serious abuse and degradation.

Stop Demand notes there are some ‘winners’ from decriminalisation including pimps, brothel owners – and sex buyers. [Countless Auckland men](#) who paid to rape, one thousand times, a pimped 15-year-old girl with impunity. [Four men](#) who received a ‘slap’ for paying to rape a trafficked 15-year-old girl; with a 66-year old gallingly [receiving empathy from a judge](#).

[Gangs](#), unsurprisingly, are among the law’s other ‘winners’. Media organisations like NZ Herald/NZME are also ‘winners’, profiting from advertising women’s bodies for sex, even those of [‘young girls’](#), including profiting from [facilitating rapes of a 15-year-old](#).

Broken women, girls and other sellers are collateral damage of the law. Not fitting the ‘happy hooker’ narrative of NZPC, its supporters and political allies, particularly within Labour and the Green Party, their stories are commonly downplayed. ‘Inconvenient truths’, says Stop Demand.

NZPC is pushing for prostitution to be ‘destigmatised’. Stop Demand argues that stigma is rightly fitting for a trade that, despite being state-sanctioned, irreparably damages lives, far too many.

“New Zealand has a high tolerance and a very low bar as regards violence towards women, with one of the [highest rates in the OECD](#). Prostitution sits within that milieu of violence” says Ritchie.

“New Zealand is a permissive not progressive nation. Progressive countries such as Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Northern Ireland, Canada, France, Ireland and Israel all view prostitution as violence towards women. In tackling male demand and setting a higher bar through the [‘Nordic Model’](#) of prostitution, which criminalises only the buying of sex, boys and men are being educated towards a more gender equitable and violence-free society. New Zealand is totally out of step.”

Stop Demand believes the million dollar [tax-payer funded NZPC](#) lobby has beguiled many with sanitising gloss and cognitive dissonance. It enables and emboldens callous and degrading behaviours and attitudes from men. It has thrown damaged colleagues ‘under the bus’. The marking of twenty years, says Stop Demand, should be a time of lament, not celebration.

ENDS

Media Release published on [Scoop](#) & [Stop Demand’s](#) website