



Speech by

**Dr DAVID WATSON**

**MEMBER FOR MOGGILL**

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Hansard 1 December 1999

### **PROSTITUTION BILL**

**Dr WATSON** (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (12.49 p.m.): Earlier this year, the Liberal Party went out on a political limb to offer in-principle support for proposed law reform to better contain and regulate the legal and illicit sex industry. We recognised the need to confront this significant social issue, despite our personal abhorrence of the degradation and exploitation of young men and women—sometimes boys and girls—who are invariably down on their luck and very vulnerable. However, it was conditional on the Premier delivering on his public commitment—

"To removing the visible signs of prostitution from the suburbs."

The Premier promised explicitly that the quality of life for local residents and the amenity of local communities would be improved by removing this activity from suburban streets. They were his words, not mine. The Premier has reneged on his public commitments by moving to effectively expand single prostitution mini-brothels in the suburbs, complete with bodyguards and pimps. His planned relaxation of the prostitution laws ignores totally the plight of families who are forced to live next door to prostitutes.

This policy seems heavily biased towards the unique concerns of the Premier in his own electorate of Brisbane Central, at the expense of Brisbane and Queensland as a whole. It may reduce the number of illegal streetwalkers in Fortitude Valley, but that small achievement will be more than offset by the proliferation of sex workers in the suburbs. The Premier has destroyed any chance of bipartisan support for this legislation, which recklessly exposes Queensland families to the many problems caused by prostitutes setting up business in the house next door. His model does not alleviate the problems created by the Goss Government's decision to legalise sole operators in residential areas; it compounds them. The planned 200-metre buffer zone between brothels and homes does not apply to single prostitutes and their entourage, who set up business next door. Under the Beattie model, there is nothing to stop a prostitute from renting a neighbour's house and disrupting the whole street with drunken, rowdy clients at all hours of the day or night. There is nothing to stop their drunken, rowdy clients knocking on the wrong door—your door—at 2 or 3 in the morning. That is what happens when a prostitute sets up business in a suburban street. That is a far cry from Mr Beattie's original rhetoric about restricting brothels to commercial and industrial areas. It is a far cry from his promise to deliver the toughest, most tightly regulated prostitution laws in Australia.

The member for Brisbane Central has become the Premier for prostitutes and pimps. He has given the green light to red lights across the State. Under his model, when business is slow, many bodyguards employed by suburban prostitutes will double as pimps. In addition to legalising regular brothels in commercial and industrial areas, the Premier has created a whole new range of residential mini-brothels.

These changes do not inhibit suburban prostitution; they promote it. That inhibition was the implication of the Premier's original position and that is the one that the Liberal Party said that it was willing to consider and perhaps support. These changes do not encourage prostitutes to leave our neighbourhoods; they encourage them to stay put and expand their operations. They encourage them to bring in bodyguards and pimps. They encourage them to set up mini-brothels right next door to residential homes and families. This is not law reform; it is social vandalism.

There is no doubt in my mind that the Beattie model will undermine family relationships and community values. Every time business gets a bit quiet, these so-called bodyguards will head down to the local pub or club to tout for clients, otherwise they will not get paid. That is the commercial reality. While talking about commercial reality, I say that most of the Premier's few restrictions could actually undermine efforts to ensure a safer, healthier, more accountable culture in the sex industry. For example, the stipulation that cleaning, security and administrative workers be included in the headcount of brothel staff in determining maximum numbers does not offer any obvious advantage. It would inevitably result in support staff being kept to a minimum. That would have entirely adverse implications in relation to public health, personal safety and administrative compliance. In fact, the Government's model seems purpose-built to penalise proper hygiene, security and record keeping.

It will also offer illegal brothels a significant commercial advantage. The Beattie model guarantees that licensed, registered, legal brothels will not be able to compete with unscrupulous operators thumbing their nose at the law. It guarantees that a large slice of the illegal sex industry will be driven further underground. That will pave the way for organised crime and official corruption.

If the Premier is determined to persist with his dangerously flawed model for boutique brothels in industrial areas, mini-brothels in residential areas and illegal brothels anywhere, he should at least give Queensland councils the right of veto in their own cities. People are sick and tired of being pushed around by arrogant politicians who claim to know what is best for their community. Why should prostitutes have the legal right to open brothels in Ipswich and Toowoomba, Logan and the Gold Coast, Caboolture and Caloundra, if local residents do not want them? Why should they have the right to open brothels in Maryborough and Hervey Bay, Bundaberg and Gladstone, Rockhampton and Mackay, or Townsville and Cairns if they are not welcome? What gives the Premier the right to ride roughshod over the community views and values in our major regional cities?

The Government has already promised smaller councils the right of veto over brothel applications. Larger councils, with more than 25,000 citizens, are also entitled to a fair go. Under the Beattie model, smaller councils will be able to act on community concerns. However, larger councils will not be able to. That means that most of our provincial cities will have no choice but to approve every brothel application that comes along, provided it complies with Labor's legislation.

In my view, local authorities have a moral obligation to reflect the wishes of their community. The Beattie model strips them of that right. That is another major flaw in the legislation. The Premier claims that his Bill and his brothels will provide protection for prostitutes. I have my doubts. The sex trade is a high-risk environment for everyone concerned, including clients. Most prostitutes are abused and assaulted by fellow prostitutes, pimps, brothel owners, drug pushers and other assorted criminals with whom they come in contact. Clients are the last in a long line of potential assailants and, generally, the least dangerous. The Premier's brothels may be safer than illegal brothels and streetwalking, but his model will inevitably drive a large slice of the industry even deeper underground. As a result, the risks in the illicit sex trade will be even greater for both prostitutes and their clients. The risk of violence will be greater, the risk of disease will be greater, the risk of drugs will be greater and the risk of exploitation will be greater.

I also have grave reservations about the Premier's intention to allow his brothels within 200 metres of homes, schools and churches. In my view, the minimum distance should have been more like 500 metres. However, in the final analysis, that issue is academic. This Bill is beyond redemption. The member for Bulimba knows it, and he has let the cat out of the bag. The Government's own Deputy Whip has admitted publicly that he does not support the legislation and does not believe that it will work. He has declared publicly his concern that the Beattie model will only succeed in attracting more young people to prostitution. The honourable member is right, and he is not alone.

This legislation will simply pit legal brothels against illegal brothels and boutique brothels against suburban mini-brothels. The coalition cannot and will not support the Beattie model for more prostitutes, more pimps, more brothels, more misery, more crime and more violence.

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