



Speech by

**Mr JIM PEARCE**

**MEMBER FOR FITZROY**

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Hansard 1 December 1999

### **PROSTITUTION BILL**

**Mr PEARCE** (Fitzroy—ALP) (5.06 p.m.): Firstly, before I commence my contribution to this debate, I congratulate the member for Mulgrave on his well-researched and presented contribution to this debate. I thought that he covered the legislation in great detail and spoke with passion and commonsense. He showed that he is the decent man we all know him to be.

I was not going to speak to this legislation, because the act of prostitution is not one with which I am personally comfortable. However, after taking several matters into consideration, I felt that I had an obligation to stand in this place and put on record the reasons why I will be voting in the way that I will at the end of the debate and during the various stages of the passage of this Bill. I do not walk away from the difficult issues that confront the people in my electorate. It is not my style to do that and when I believe that I should stand in this place and speak to legislation or issues, I intend to do so.

The strongest influence on my decision to speak to this legislation was out of courtesy for those people in central Queensland who sent letters to me requesting that I vote against the legislation to legalise prostitution in Queensland. The same courtesy is extended to those few people who phoned my office. As an elected member, those people deserve from me a response that cannot always be put best in correspondence. Parliament is where I have to justify my actions in voting for legislation. It gives me the opportunity explain in some detail my position on an issue and why I vote in the way I do. I have received some 67 letters from central Queenslanders, seven of those letters from within the Fitzroy electorate. Those letters were from, as I see it, decent people with strong beliefs and a commitment to moral standards that instils family values that they believe to be fundamental to a healthy lifestyle. I respect them for that. I admire their commitment to the family unit and the fact that they felt strongly enough to write to me or to make contact with my office.

I turn to the legislation before the House. Firstly, I would like to say that what the Government is seeking to do with these proposals does not constitute support for prostitution or for the sex industry. In common with many members of this Parliament, I find prostitution abhorrent, demeaning to our society and degrading to women. If we could bring legislation into this Parliament that would remove prostitution from our streets, from homes, from motels or from any other place, I would be one of the first people to support it. However, the reality of life is that prostitution is here and it is here to stay. I would prefer to toughen up the laws than do nothing about it at all.

Prostitution is truly an international industry. It comes down to market forces the world over. As some members from this side of the Chamber have said, it is about demand and supply. Unfortunately, while Queenslanders continue to demonstrate a demand for prostitution, there will be people who are willing to supply such services. The days of Russ Hinze and the former corrupt National Party Government are gone, and they are gone forever. No longer is it acceptable for the Government of the day to stick its head in the sand and deny that prostitution is alive and well in Queensland.

In the 1980s Russ Hinze asked the Queensland police force whether there were any brothels in Queensland and he was told that there were not. I am advised that the current Minister has been told the truth. There are brothels operating in Queensland—many of them—and there are sex workers working in them. Sadly, many of those workers are under-aged, disabled or from non-English speaking backgrounds. Exploitation, organised crime and drugs are rife in Queensland brothels. I do not know if single sex workers should be accused of being involved in organised crime and drugs, but there is no doubt that organised crime and drugs are prevalent in the sex industry in Queensland. I am proud to be

part of a Government that is working to wipe out exploitation to ensure that Queensland children are not selling themselves. We are working to wipe out organised crime to ensure that brothels are drug and alcohol free.

The regulation of the sex industry is a necessary evil. Ignoring the sex industry and all of its problems, as I am sure that the Opposition would have us do, will not solve the problems that exist now. Some church leaders and members of a number of religious groups have damned the Government for these reforms. I understand their fears. A lot of the letters that I have received explain those fears. I understand and sympathise with the views of those who say that prostitution is morally repugnant. I agree wholeheartedly with them. Unlike many thousands of men who are the clients of Queensland prostitutes, I am personally offended by the idea that women are prepared to sell their bodies for an income.

Much of the criticism of the Government's proposals relates to the breakdown of family values that it is said will be brought about by proceeding down this path. It is very sad that anecdotal evidence suggests that the majority of clients of sex workers are, in fact, married men. No doubt, many of those men are family men. The men of Queensland are complicit in the degradation of sex workers. They are supporting the exploitation of under-aged girls, the disabled and those who cannot speak English. Those men are supporting an illegal and unregulated regime that involves drugs, violence and the degradation of women. It would be an irresponsible Government that stood back and did nothing about that.

Like the member for Crows Nest, who tried to do something about this problem when he was the Minister for Police and Corrective Services, this Government has refused to stand ostrich-like with its head in the sand. However unlike the member for Crows Nest, the member for Waterford, the current Minister for Police and Corrective Services, has the support of Government members. When it comes to moral concerns, the Government and the Minister have listened clearly to the concerns of Queenslanders.

This process has not been rushed; public consultation was extensive. Public meetings have been held in venues across Queensland and those meetings were attended by the Minister. The Minister listened to local communities as diverse as those on the Gold Coast and at Gladstone. At some of those meetings, people expressed their moral repugnance at the thought of any active Queensland sex industry. They are concerned that by regulating the industry we will actually be sanctioning it. They are concerned at the possibility of brothels being located in their neighbourhoods. The Government has listened to those concerns.

The Bill includes a provision that brothels be located no closer than 200 metres from any residence. The distance initially proposed by the Government was 100 metres. The people of Queensland and, indeed, many of my constituents said that 100 metres, which is the distance proclaimed in other States of Australia, is simply not enough. The Government listened and the distance is now set at 200 metres. The distance from any place frequented by children is to be 200 metres, as it is from churches, scout halls, hospitals, train stations, playgrounds and other places where children gather. In other States, the distance is as little as 50 or 100 metres. The Beattie Government heard Queenslanders when they said that that was too close.

A point that I think a lot of people are missing is that councils are responsible for a local government area with a population of less than 25,000 people. They will have a choice about whether or not to approve a planning application for a brothel. The local government can refuse an applicant outright if the community decides that brothels should not be allowed. The Opposition's scaremongering about the spread of brothels across Queensland is not only untruthful but also immoral.

I am pleased that, under this legislation, the Criminal Justice Commission will monitor and report on the effectiveness of the framework and whether it is achieving its objectives, which include safeguarding against corruption and organised crime. The CJC will be required to conduct a full review of the legislation within three years of its commencement. The public will be able to bring matters of concern to the CJC for investigation and consideration at the time of review. The Prostitution Licensing Authority will be established to implement and administer a stringent licensing and monitoring regime for prostitution in Queensland. The PLA will play a key role in ensuring that the corruption of the past is never again allowed to raise its ugly head in this State.

I feel quite comfortable with this legislation. If in time there is proof that the new laws are not working, we will have an opportunity to review them. As members of Parliament, we will have an opportunity to bring the legislation back to this place for debate. That is the proper way to go about it. We have to appreciate and understand that we are living in a real world. Prostitution does exist and it is a problem for the community. As a Government we have to act responsibly and make sure that the industry is regulated and made as safe as possible, not only for the clients but for the sex workers themselves. I support the legislation and wish it every success in the future.