



Speech by

KAREN STRUTHERS

MEMBER FOR ARCHERFIELD

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PROSTITUTION BILL

Ms STRUTHERS (Archerfield—ALP) (2.49 p.m.): I rise to support this Bill not because I am an unquestioning supporter of prostitution, but because I support the strict regulation of prostitution. A significant proportion of men throughout time have sought female or male sex workers, as has a much smaller proportion of women. Unless the demand drops off dramatically, or unless something else drops off first, prostitution will be around well into the future. I support the intent of this legislation: that it is far better to tightly regulate prostitution than to prohibit it. It is far more responsible to make the sex industry as safe and as free of violence and organised crime as possible than to deploy police on fruitless raids on sex workers and to have the activity rearing its head continually.

I put it to those who are opposed to prostitution that the best way to limit the extent of prostitution, particularly female prostitution, is to substantially boost the economic status of all women throughout the world. Some men and women do freely choose prostitution as a job. They remain in control of themselves and their work choices. They do not feel abused in the workplace. I am most concerned, though, about the vast majority of female prostitutes throughout the world, particularly in Third World countries, who endure sex work through economic necessity or, in many cases, through physical brutality.

I deplore the behaviour of Aussie tourists and other men abusing vulnerable sex workers in the bars of Thailand or Indonesia. I am sure that most of these women sex workers would choose other ways to feed their families if real choices existed. Fortunately, prostitution in Queensland is not on the same oppressive scale as our Third World neighbours, but I still consider it to be, in general, perpetuating the sexual objectification and economic oppression of women. It is also clear that a small percentage of women and men have a drug problem or are homeless and are in need of support, not condemnation.

A particular concern amongst opponents of this Bill is that licensed brothels will encourage organised crime, particularly from interstate. The member for Toowoomba South stated that, through these laws, Queensland will open the floodgates to every sleaze, every vice king; they will be lining up for this bonanza. In fact, the opposite effect is most likely. Those of us with good memories would well remember the Joh era—the pre-Fitzgerald era—when organised crime and prostitution were bedfellows in Queensland. Prostitution was prohibited, yet it flourished. It was under these conditions of prohibition that vice kings and sleaze bags reigned supreme in Queensland.

A Government member: They said it did not exist.

Ms STRUTHERS: That is right; they said it did not exist.

Conservative political leaders of the era foolishly attempted to cover up this seedy underbelly with public pronouncements that prostitution and organised crime did not exist in Queensland. The moral hypocrisy of this era has been exposed to the nation.

Now the coalition Opposition is hypocritically claiming the high moral ground on the issue. Successive State Labor Governments have been vigilant in their efforts to legislate and to set policies to keep corruption and organised crime at bay in Queensland. This effort is evidenced in the relatively "clean bill of health" on organised crime in Queensland reported by the Queensland Crime Commission

this year. The Minister has reaffirmed this vigilance with very strict provisions in this Bill to prevent undesirable characters from gaining a licence to run a brothel.

To reassure community members, I want to make it very clear that anyone who has committed a serious criminal offence as detailed in the Bill will not be able to run a brothel, nor will a licence be granted to a corporation, a minor, an insolvent under administration or a person who has previously had a brothel licence cancelled in this State or elsewhere in the last three years. A final "catch all undesirables" provision is the role of the Prostitution Licensing Authority. This authority has substantial power to deem an applicant ineligible to hold a licence if there is serious concern about the applicant's integrity, honesty and past record of offences.

This screening process is an essential tool in the fight to keep prostitution free of its past association with organised crime. A final safeguard is the power in the Bill for licenses to be cancelled automatically. This Government is making a concerted effort to keep the colourful, corrupt characters of past days out of the sex industry in Queensland. Brothel managers will also face similar scrutiny.

The Minister is responding to majority public opinion in the drafting of this Bill, and he has undergone a lot of consultation. To suggest that our Government is bowing to a small minority is nonsense. For instance, in a QStats survey of 1997, 93% of people in Queensland stated that prostitutes should not be able to solicit in a public place. This Bill ensures that street prostitution remains illegal. In the same survey, two-thirds of Queenslanders stated that two or more prostitutes should be allowed to work from premises in a non-residential area. Again, we are responding to the majority in legalising and regulating small brothels.

If the moral outrage about our laws is widespread in Queensland, why is our public gallery not filled with interested opponents or protesters? In conclusion, I restate the view that demand for prostitutes is not declining, but I put the proposition that we may be able to limit the supply—at least of female prostitutes—by overturning the economic disadvantage and oppression that millions of women endure throughout the world, including women in this great State of ours. Equal pay, more job options and income scrutiny measures are essential to do this. I commend the Minister for the comprehensive consultation and thorough way that he and his staff have developed this Bill. He has formulated practical, responsible strategies to handle some very complex and controversial matters.

The Opposition is full of scaremongering, not solutions. I have sat through long speeches from leaders in the National and Liberal Parties and I have not heard any answers—no well developed solutions—to these complex issues. Their scaremongering is totally irresponsible. I would suggest that that is why their vote is 43% and ours is 57%. We seek and implement solutions, and that is what the public want. They do not want this irresponsible scaremongering.
