



Speech by

KEN TURNER

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

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PROSTITUTION BILL

Mr TURNER (Thuringowa—IND) (5.17 p.m.): I find it absolutely amazing that this Prostitution Bill has climbed to the top of the charts, from No. 24 to No. 1, in just a few days. If this were the music industry, any artist would be ecstatic at that result. I question this Bill's priority over other more important legislation.

Mr Sullivan: That just shows you don't know how the Notice Paper works.

Mr TURNER: I have noticed that the Government can swap things around when it suits it.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr Clark): Order! The member will continue with his speech.

Mr TURNER: I commend the Minister for Police and Corrective Services for having the courage to introduce this Bill. Assessment of prostitution laws is overdue. The Minister states that the object of the Bill is to regulate and control prostitution and related activities by safeguarding against corruption and organised crime, addressing social factors that contribute to involvement in the sex industry and promoting safety. Does this Bill do that?

In Victoria, prostitution was legalised in the mid 1980s to safeguard against corruption and organised crime, address social factors that contribute to involvement in the sex industry and promote safety. By the mid 1990s it was not working, so they introduced legislation to make it easier to get brothel licences to safeguard against organised crime, address social factors that contribute to involvement in the sex industry and promote safety. As we speak, Victorian police admit more than 100 unlicensed, illegal brothels are operating in Melbourne. There has been an 88% increase in brothels in three years. There is still criminal involvement. Illegal immigrants who are contracted to work by international crime organisations are working in legal brothels in Victoria. Those women are forced to work seven days a week to pay off their debt bonds.

There is still street prostitution, because brothels cannot hire women or young men with drug addictions. Victoria has more child prostitutes than any other State and the occurrence of sexually transmitted diseases has not changed. The legalisation of brothels in Victoria since 1994 has not had the intended result, yet the Minister assures us that it will be different in Queensland. The Minister assures us that corruption and organised crime will be reduced by having only upstanding people in the community eligible to hold a brothel licence. That is an oxymoron. Brothel barons from the south are already lined up for the best locations. Victorian operators are jockeying for prime Brisbane City sites, such as Elizabeth Street and Albert Street. They are already planning happy hours, lunchtime specials and Friday clubs.

A prostitute unfortunate enough to have been charged with illegal prostitution will be ineligible to manage a brothel. Heaven forbid we have an experienced prostitute running a brothel or turning to legitimate business! The Minister suggests that sex workers will be relieved from running a business. Is that "relieved" or "deprived"? Traditionally, brothel owners do not supply this service to the community without expecting to make a huge profit. In the Labor Government's brothel design they are allowed to own only one brothel with five rooms available for sex. With a limited number of workers, they will look for the prostitute who will give the best return.

Who will get the jobs? The Minister has said that drug addicted men and women will not be allowed to work in brothels. That is 80% of the sex workers at the moment. What will these people do?

No doubt they will continue to do what they are doing now—work the streets. With 80% of the workers not being suitable for the legal brothels because of their drug dependency, that leaves only 20% of the workers currently doing the job to fill all of these positions. Of that 20% no doubt some will not be acceptable to the brothel owners. Who will get the jobs? The drug free, the young or the most attractive? We are creating a new job market, so how will we fill it? Will it happen in the traditional way? Would parents be comfortable as pimps, now called "managers", recruiting and soliciting our young people as prostitutes, now called "sex workers", to work in the Government approved sex industry? Will young women be tempted to enter prostitution? Will they say, "Why bother to work for \$200 a week when I can earn \$2,000?" Some university students now work as prostitutes to boost their Austudy. If it is legal, how many more will believe that it is okay to do the same? Passing this Bill and giving prostitution the Government stamp of approval is encouraging people who would never have looked at prostitution as an employment option to consider it. Is this another way for the Premier to reach his 5% unemployment level in Queensland through job creation?

The Minister assures us that the proposed framework will ensure safe sex practices, with regular health checks for sexually transmitted diseases, that is, health checks for the 20% able to work in these legal brothels. It is a start, but it will not eliminate the problem, as it takes time for these diseases to be detected. The Minister stated that the new laws would allow all sex workers the option of going into legal brothels. How will the drug-driven streetwalker move into the legal industry? What will happen to the average sex workers, the mature sex workers and the less attractive sex workers who have been refused work in these legal brothels? The penalties for soliciting are to be increased, so these sex workers will be more at risk of being targeted by police.

The Minister said that the personal safety of single sex workers was the most frequently expressed concern during public consultation. Currently, 30,000 people are known to be working in prostitution in Australia today. The protection of these people and the public is of grave concern, yet this has not been addressed in respect of 80% of sex workers. Our vulnerable, homeless and drug addicted young people who have turned to prostitution are desperately in need of support and assistance. This month it was reported that 4,000 underage Australians—some under 10—were forced into commercial sexual activities to survive. The police will target young addicts who, lacking a building in which to operate, continue to work as prostitutes to support their habit or to maintain an existence. We cannot expect that, with the passing of this Bill, these young people will suddenly overcome their addictions or pack up and go home to abusive parents or homes where they are not wanted. Recent information shows that more than half of the men and women coming into the sex industry are clean of drug use. Many people see it as a temporary job to earn good money quickly, but after a few months they find themselves in physical and emotional pain and turn to alcohol or other drugs to dull the body and the senses.

Brothels are great shields for drug dealers, as they can pose as clients and offer drugs as payment without fear of being disturbed. Over 80% of all prostitutes end up as drug addicts, even though half of them come into the business clean. As these now drug addicted prostitutes are thrown out by the legal brothel owners, what will they do? If we cannot keep drugs out of our prisons, how can we possibly expect to keep brothels drug free? We need to look at the needs of those currently in the business and deal with their problems, not encourage more workers into the industry. Alternatives and rehabilitation should be our priority for people trapped into selling sex because of addictions, homelessness and poverty.

I applaud the introduction of a Prostitution Advisory Council. However, is an advisory council consisting of four people enough? The Minister's second-reading speech gives the subject of rehabilitation eight lines. The Bill glosses over these sex workers and places emphasis on the people who make the sex industry a career choice. We want caring, supportive agencies to assist with clothing, food, essentials, training and drug rehabilitation. We need former sex workers—people with first-hand knowledge of the suffering that goes with prostitution—to advise these agencies on how to deal with the effects it has on our young people.

Who will benefit from the Prostitution Bill—a Bill designed by the Labor Government to provide designer brothels where a man can be serviced with exclusive individual attention in pleasant, even sumptuous, surroundings in a safe haven free from the fear of being raided by police? The legislation will result in an exclusive club for the clients of prostitutes—the wealthy, the businessmen, the bureaucrats, the professionals, the judiciary, the politicians and the tourists. It will provide for the establishment of a men's club convenient to the office where men can go at lunchtime or after work—a boutique brothel where men will not have to put up with average working-class people—those people will not be able to afford them. The clients of brothels, brothel owners, drug dealers and a small percentage of prostitutes will benefit. However, who does not benefit from this Bill? Eighty per cent of sex workers addicted to drugs will not benefit. Rehabilitation is hardly a consideration, let alone a priority in this Bill. The young homeless will not benefit as the new legislation will add to their problems and further alienate them. Children in prostitution will not benefit. The community will not benefit as

prostitution becomes more acceptable and flourishes, as it has in Victoria. Without the fear of prosecution, more husbands and fathers will use these services.

The Minister stated that this Bill is over a year's work by the Labor Government. What does that say to the people of Queensland? He stated also that the Bill accurately reflects the views of the vast majority of Queensland people. Again, what would they say to that? This Bill is adding to the existing problem rather than working to improve the current situation. This Bill is legitimising the men who are the market for the sex industry—the men who are responsible for enormous damage to the lives of many women, young men and children and the breakdown of many families. This Bill is not taking sex workers off the streets, it is encouraging new workers under the guise of improved status, respect and acceptability. We can permit single operators to access security measures, we can establish an agency to assist those prostitutes who wish to exit prostitution and we can do more to protect our vulnerable young people without legalising brothels. We do not need this Bill.
