



Speech by

Dr PETER PRENZLER

MEMBER FOR LOCKYER

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PROSTITUTION BILL

Dr PRENZLER (Lockyer—ONP) (4.55 p.m.): I rise to speak on the Bill to regulate prostitution, namely the Prostitution Bill 1999. Perhaps the Bill should be called the "Debbie does George Street" Bill 1999.

According to the Minister, this legislation is based on a framework of five principles. It should not have escaped the attention of even the most casual reviewer that the Minister's principles have been couched in a very interesting manner. Is it coincidence that those principles which relate to society in general refer to "ensuring" this and "ensuring" that? Those are strong words indeed! Unfortunately, they refer to "values" which are vague in terms of both meaning and cost.

On the other hand, those principles which relate to the rights and interests of prostitutes are far more weakly expressed. These issues are merely "promoted" or "addressed". A cynical person may be excused for believing this to be an intentional attempt to placate the general public and lull them into a false sense of security. I propose to address each of those principles in turn.

This legislation will not ensure quality of life for local communities. How can it, when it will allow legalised brothels to operate as close as 200 metres to schools, homes and churches? Would the Minister appreciate such a facility so close to his own front door? Of course not! That will not happen. No-one in his right mind would try to set up a prostitution business 200 metres from the Police Minister's door.

That privilege will be reserved for families living in or close to zoned industrial areas. Almost by definition, these are the families least able to influence the approval process. This legislation provides for the setting up of legalised brothels in industrial areas. It seems that the Government sees no problem with this. What about the hundreds of workers in those industrial areas who will be confronted on a daily basis by the presence of a brothel next door to their place of work?

The rights and liberties of the community include the right to freedom of movement and activity, free from intimidating or threatening behaviour from owners or clients of brothels. So much for ensuring the quality of life of local communities!

The Minister claims to be "safeguarding against corruption and organised crime". Street prostitution will continue, because many of these people are drug addicted. Why else would one take customers from the street and perform sexual acts on them in alleys or cars? These people will not be permitted to operate on licensed premises. They will therefore have no choice but to continue working the streets. Thus, Minister, from where will these girls be recruited? Will they be recruited from our universities? Will they be recruited from our unemployment queues?

Illegal brothels currently operate in Brisbane, and because of the highly restrictive and prescriptive regulations proposed, these illegal operators will not be able to comply with the laws and will continue to operate illegally. Wherever there are legal brothels, organised crime and official corruption will flourish. It must! It does everywhere else in this nation and across the world. One has simply to look at the Victorian example to see this.

Brothel owners will, as in the past, engage in price wars to increase market share. This will almost invariably result in the use of standover tactics to regulate the market which, in turn, will lead to official corruption. A police officer does not have to physically enter a brothel to become entangled in a

prostitution-based web of official corruption. Fancy demanding that an applicant for a brothel licence has to be of good character! People of good character and standing simply would not be interested in such a business.

I ask: what does this Government expect to happen? Does the Government think that every person currently involved in illegal prostitution is going to go away? Does the Government believe that it is going to get a brand new crop of squeaky clean, snow white saints rising phoenix-like from the ashes of the current system and putting their hands up to run our new-age, cleaner than clean, brighter than bright brothels? Of course not! If the Government believes that, then those opposite are probably still waiting for the tooth fairy to come.

What we will get will be front men and front women who have always been involved in illegal prostitution but who have not yet been charged with or convicted of any offence. They will stand up and apply for licences on behalf of criminals. So much for safeguarding against crime and official corruption!

The Minister claims to be "addressing social factors which contribute to involvement in the sex industry". Finally, the Minister is being honest with the House. He is indeed addressing social factors which contribute to involvement in the sex industry. He is actively promoting them. By legalising brothels as opposed to single-worker operations, one introduces a business focus which will seek to legitimise prostitution as a career option for young people leaving school. As a result, we will see an increase in prostitution. In this era of strict political correctness, I can see a brothel owner offering work experience in his business to high school and university students. How could the authorities argue against this move, as the business would be legal and licensed? The next thing that we will find is a brothel owner taking a school or university to the Anti-Discrimination Commission for discriminating against and smearing his perfectly legal and legitimate business. By legislating to expand the sex industry in this State and, by default, promoting the industry as a viable and socially acceptable career path, the Minister—and, in fact, every single member of this House who supports this Bill—is guilty of inducing more and more young people and vulnerable people into this debasing industry.

This Bill does little or nothing to ensure a healthy society. In fact, by further legalising and, therefore, enlarging the sex industry in this State, the legislation is actively promoting an explosion of socially destructive diseases. Clauses 89, 90 and 91 of this Bill set out what could at best be described as guidelines for the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases in brothels. This is absolute fairyland! How does the Minister expect the legislation to gum them into compliance? That is the only way that it could happen, because the legislation has no teeth whatsoever. One could be forgiven for thinking that it has been written by a limp-wristed Labor lawyer. How on earth does the Minister propose to police such inane offences as failing to use a condom? If a person fails to use a condom in one of the Minister's boutique brothels, how and from where will the evidence be sought? Will it be sought from the prostitute? Not likely! Will it be gained from the client? I doubt that! What about the diseases that condoms are totally ineffective in preventing? Minister, the spread of genital warts—

Mr Sullivan: You are supposed to be addressing the Chair, not the Minister.

Dr PRENZLER: The member should just hang on. I did that. Madam Deputy Speaker, the spread of genital warts, one of the main causes of cervical cancer in women, cannot be controlled by the use of condoms, as they are spread by skin on skin contact. They can be transmitted even where condoms are worn correctly every time. There is no such thing as safe sex in a brothel. Comparisons of the occurrence of genital warts and the early stages of cervical cancer show a clear correlation with the incidence of prostitution. "So what is the problem?", the Minister asks. "Why worry about a few harlots with cervical cancer?", he says. "They should know the risks before they get into the industry", the Minister says.

Mr BARTON: I rise to a point of order. This matter is getting beyond the pale. To imply that I do not care about what happens to a few harlots I find unacceptable and offensive. I ask that the member withdraw that comment, implying that I do not care.

Dr PRENZLER: I withdraw that comment. Male brothel clients who contract genital warts pass the disease on to their wives or girlfriends back home. These women then become the innocent victims of prostitution, even though they may never know the true cause of their cervical cancer. That is the problem. That is why we cannot afford to accept the Government's lame assurance that the health safeguards that are contained in this legislation will actually work. How can they work? Who is going to be there to check that the condom is used correctly? What happens when the prostitute is coerced or bribed to have unprotected sex? "It will not happen", the Minister could say. "They are too smart for that", the Minister may say. No, they are not! If they were, they would not be working in a brothel in the first place. Increased prostitution in our community will increase the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases.

Finally, this Government seeks to convince us that by passing this flawed legislation we will be contributing to the promotion of safety in the sex industry. Single operators will still be at risk. Streetwalkers who do not qualify for employment in one of these brothels will have no choice but to

continue to ply their trade on the streets with all the inherent dangers that that entails. The only people who will feel safe under this legislation are the pimps—sorry, managers—or standover merchants and criminals who will be free to carry on their previously illegal activities under the new cloak of Government-endorsed respectability.

In summary, I find virtually nothing in this Bill that would allow me to support it. Therefore, I call on the members of this House to consider the Bill on its merits and to vote according to the wishes of their individual electorates. They should remember that they are the views that they are supposed to be representing in this place today. We were not elected by a party; we were elected by a community, whose views we are bound and have a duty to represent. It is time that we grew backbones and finally stood up for our communities. Otherwise, how will we be able to walk the streets of our home towns with our heads up? I call upon the Premier to allow all the members on his side a conscious vote on this issue and to not follow the party line.

I record my total rejection of this Bill and urge all other members to do the same. There are too many ifs in this Bill. The status quo, if regulated correctly, is good enough.
