



Speech by

Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard 8 November 2001

PROSTITUTION AMENDMENT BILL

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (10.15 p.m.): It is no surprise that the Beattie government has supported setting up a legalised brothel industry in Queensland. That legislation was passed by Labor members in 1999. I disagreed with the Labor government at that time. While I was not persuaded by the Premier's arguments that this would be the best and toughest brothel legislation in Australia or his reasons as to why he thought it was necessary, I listened to the Premier's arguments. He is a very clever politician and in the ilk of his former occupation as a lawyer he has a very slick turn of phrase and can cleverly argue the virtue of having no virtue in law-making. He did argue in 1999 that his prostitution law was going to make prostitution safer, but we argued at that time that there would continue to be illegal prostitution and streetwalkers plying their trade in Queensland. He also argued that as his legislation was supposedly tough, criminal elements would not be able to get into the industry.

Now we see these 2001 amendments being brought in to relax the character requirements of potential brothel owners to make it easier for people with criminal backgrounds to gain a licence. We also see in this bill before the House the creation of a so-called Independent Assessor to help fast-track approvals of brothel applications and circumvent the normal appeal process through the Planning and Environment Court. This is some of the strangest legislation to come before this House, firstly, because of the urgency that has been given to it and, secondly, because of its extraordinary bias in favour of brothels being established against the wishes of local communities and local government.

When I consider the issues of importance in this state that fail to receive the driving attention of the Premier, for example, the shortages of nurses and specialists in the hospital system, the numbers of people dying while they await hospital beds or the children in danger of abuse who sit on lists waiting for the Families Department to assess their case, I have to wonder why brothels are of greater priority for the Premier. I am angry about this, because we see a government that has its priorities wrong. We see legislation which is skewed against the wishes of local government and the community. We have to ask: who is advising the Premier and his ministers? Given the fact that this industry is based upon a lot of human misery and the abuse of women, we have to ask: who has the ear of the Premier and his ministers to make this issue of such pressing importance when there are people in our hospitals and children at such risk in this state who need the ear and attention of government but who cannot get it because these are the real issues of the people of Queensland?

Prostitution is not a nice industry. There had been a legal prostitution industry for a while and then in 1999 this government decided to give legal status to brothels. For the information of the previous speaker and I am sure some of the upcoming speakers opposite, I point out that the issue of money laundering and the type of people who get into running brothels and wanting to run networks of brothels is a very real problem. If they are talking about relaxing the character requirements of applicants, we have to look at the other things that go hand in hand with the brothel industry.

I have talked about the abuse of women, but the fact is that drugs are part and parcel of this industry. If we cannot keep drugs out of prisons in Queensland, how on earth are we going to keep drugs out of these so-called nice clean, legal brothels that Mr Beattie wants throughout Queensland? Establishing this legal network will only increase the problems with drugs and prostitution in Queensland. Many women in the industry cannot keep going in the industry without being hooked on

drugs. It is a vicious cycle. I have talked to women who have got out of the industry. They have pleaded with me to get the message out that these problems go hand in hand. There is already a problem with drugs in the seedier, so-called legal nightclubs, strip clubs and adult entertainment facilities. But these issues go hand in hand, and there is a problem with drugs and there is a problem with abuse. It is not a nice industry. The fact that the Premier wants to make it easier to establish legalised brothels throughout Queensland against the wishes of the community ignores the human misery and ignores the very real concerns of these local communities.

The Scrutiny of Legislation Committee raised some very good arguments, as did my colleague the shadow minister, with regard to the Independent Assessor and the question marks over how this Independent Assessor will remain independent. Because of their background and training, we accept without question that judges in the Planning and Environment Court do have an independent role. But when it comes to a so-called Independent Assessor set up by this government to help fast-track brothel applications in communities throughout Queensland—he is appointed by the minister and only has to have five years of legal experience—one has to question whether the person in that position will be independent of the government, especially when that role is to specifically make it easier to set up brothels in Queensland against the wishes of the local government. This situation is extraordinary. I really have to wonder about the driving influence behind this government. I really have to question why it would go to the extraordinary extent of changing a law in this way to bring in a process that makes it not only difficult but also impossible for a lot of local governments to look after the amenity of their areas and listen to the wishes of their communities.

The member for Caloundra, Mrs Sheldon, talked about specific issues relating to her electorate such as protecting the amenity of tourism areas. Maroochydore is another tourism area, and there are very real community concerns about some of the proposed brothel applications for the area. Local government members have been talking about how they have concerns as to the geographic position of some applications. Some of these councillors do not have a problem with the concept of legalised brothels, but they do have a problem with not having the right to decide the appropriate area and a limitation placed upon their planning decisions as to where legal brothels should be placed. This is going to be a very real problem. There will be brothels placed in communities against the wishes of those communities.

How fair is it for local property owners who suddenly find that the value of their property is reduced? How fair is it for a community which finds an element of people coming into the local area affects their local businesses and other businesses and results in a decrease in trade and raises concerns about their security but they have no recourse through local government with regard to planning issues? It is just incredible to think that I have heard members on the opposite side say that this bill is in the public interest of Queensland and that the people gave a mandate at the last election and, like it or lump it, we have got it. I disagree.

Local governments should have a say in this issue. The local people should have the right to have a say. When brothel applications come up, particularly in the electorates of Labor members, they will have to answer to their local constituency as to why they did not listen to their concerns. They will have to answer to their local government members as to why they did not listen to their concerns. They will also have to answer in the future to those people who have found themselves drawn into this industry because it was made easier by this government, an industry which destroyed their families. They will have to answer why they have made it easier for people involved in drugs and money laundering to get involved in this industry and get a foothold into communities throughout Queensland where they currently do not have that foothold. Those opposite will have to answer to the people of Queensland, and they will have to answer them soon as these applications are pushed through by this so-called Independent Assessor.
