



Speech by
**Hon. NITA
CUNNINGHAM**

MEMBER FOR BUNDABERG

Hansard 20 June 2001

PROSTITUTION AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. J. I. CUNNINGHAM (Bundaberg—ALP) (Minister for Local Government and Planning) (8.56 p.m.): I rise this evening to speak against this private member's bill, the Prostitution Amendment Bill, and to clarify that the legislation we are discussing was passed by the previous parliament when the government had a majority of one.

There are two main regulatory components to prostitution reform in Queensland. One deals with the licensing of brothel operators, which is determined by the Prostitution Licensing Authority. The other component deals with the development assessment for sites for use as brothels, and this is the responsibility of local governments using the Integrated Development Assessment System. Local governments must assess brothel applications in industrial areas, the preferred location for licensed brothels, against the state IDAS brothel code. The Department of Local Government and Planning is continuing to monitor the implementation of the code.

Under section 64 of the Prostitution Act 1999, a local government can, with the agreement of the Minister for Police and Corrective Services, require that all brothel applications be refused in a town with a population of fewer than 25,000 people. However, the bill before the House this evening seeks to give local governments the right to refuse brothel applications in towns with populations greater than 25,000 people as well, that is, give that right of refusal without any planning consideration to all councils. If that were the case, there would be no point in having the legislation at all. We could all go on sticking our heads in the sand. We could all go on with prostitution occurring in residential areas, right next door to homes with teenage children, and we could go on having women assaulted and murdered. However, I am sure we all want better than that.

As Minister for Local Government and Planning, I encourage all councils to work with the state government on prostitution reform and to take a positive approach to what is necessary legislation. Control of prostitution is necessary for health and safety reasons, and our communities need protection from the potential for corruption, drug dealing and organised crime that is perceived to be associated with prostitution.

We would all like to see prostitution stopped—we could all be fooled into thinking that there is none in our local areas—but prostitution has been in existence throughout history in almost every country of the world. The name has changed over time to suit different cultures and to suit the society's standards in each particular era, but it has always been in existence. Anyone who claims it has not, or anyone who claims it can be stopped, is being less than truthful. Any government at any level that ignores the problems associated with prostitution is not being a responsible government.

There has been talk in the media recently about decisions on brothel site applications being taken out of the hands of councils, and I can understand councils being concerned if that were to happen. It has been reported since in the media that councils have now expressed a willingness to work with the state legislation, saying that their grassroots role in representation of their communities and in local planning is vital. That is absolutely right, and it is good to see that happening. I am pleased to work with councils on this issue to overcome their concerns and to ensure that Queensland communities do have the benefit of the tough guidelines and the stringent control of prostitution as provided for by this government's legislation.

In my role as Minister for Local Government and Planning I have met face to face with representatives of almost 60 councils since the Beattie Labor government was re-elected in February. I

can assure this House that most of the councils that are expressing concerns know that this legislation is necessary, but they do have a problem with having to make the hard decisions while one or two of their members take the supposedly high moral ground for their own political ends—and this is clearly happening in this debate tonight as well. But councils do accept that the legislation is necessary.

If we were to remove the 25,000 population cap from this legislation as suggested by the opposition, we could end up with councils refusing applications on moral grounds and depriving their communities of the stringent controls that are needed in the prostitution industry. That is not good local government. It is not good state government. It is not addressing community problems and it is not standing up and making the hard decisions that representatives of all levels of government are elected to make.
