



Speech by

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PROSTITUTION AMENDMENT BILL

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (12.03 a.m.): I rise to speak on the Prostitution Amendment Bill 2001. This controversial bill was passed in 1991, only on the casting vote of the Speaker. All members are aware that prostitution is professed to be the oldest profession. However, many people still oppose this legislation, not the least of whom are those concerned about the degradation and violation of women for the gratification and lust of men.

Our Westminster system of government is based on Christianity, and I noted in the House this morning how we started the day with a prayer. Most members bowed their heads and, at the end, some on the government side of the House, I noticed, even made the sign of the cross. They were indications, I believe, of acceptance of and participation in the Christian way of life—a way of life which places great importance on moral values and the strength to stand by those values.

I feel great sympathy for those particular members on the government benches. After all, they will be expected by their party and their Premier to vote for this bill. Of course, as people of principle and as moral members of the Christian faith, they should not do so. After all, one does not have to be a bishop to see that making brothels easier to establish, increasing the area in which they may be established and degrading the controls over who may be involved in them are pretty far removed from what I believe is a moral, Christian stance. To pray for god's help this morning and to vote for this legislation this afternoon can hardly, in my view, be considered the Christian thing to do. Politic, perhaps—Christian, no. I wonder how many on the government benches went to church on Sunday, prayed, spoke to fellow members of the congregation and perhaps to the minister, yet came here today intending to vote in favour of this bill. Where in the Bible, pray tell, does it say that prostitution is okay? Yet here we are now debating a bill which will allow any number of brothels in an industrial area, the definition of which will be extended by these new amendments.

Section 15 of the Prostitution Act 1999 required the Prostitution Licensing Authority to refuse a brothel licence if the applicant had been convicted of an offence, the facts of which constituted the running of a brothel. Clause 5 of this amendment will delete this automatic disqualification, instead making such a criminal conviction nothing more than a 'relevant matter' which the authority 'must consider'. How is that for watering down the legislation!

Clauses 5 to 8 remove the existing absolute prohibition on persons with previous convictions for running a brothel from obtaining brothel licences or approved managers certificates. They replace that with nothing more than a requirement for the authority to have regard to those convictions when reaching their decision. Those people are law-breakers—criminals—in the exact area of activity we are considering here tonight. The Beattie government argued when introducing legislation in 1999 that it was necessary to get the criminal element out of the industry, yet this same government is now prepared to lower the bars to get their prostitution game off the ground. This government cannot wait to get its hands into the pockets of the prostitutes to grab its share of the dirty money.

Should local authority have the temerity to interfere with the bold-faced government money grab by turning down a brothel application, an appeal mechanism is provided on a code assessable development application which will take the place of the present Planning and Environment Court. At present, the Planning and Environment Court is constituted by District Court judges. The District Court is a court of record which can guarantee to provide a very high level of independence. However, the new

proposal will do away with that experience and wisdom and instead use an Independent Assessor, by contrast, a lawyer who needs only five years experience and who is appointed by the minister. One would hope the minister of the day was fully versed in all relevant issues because in this industry the wrong person in the wrong position could be a real disaster.

Further, this bill provides no minimum term of appointment, nor does it state the grounds upon which the assessor's office becomes vacant or he or she may be removed. The Independent Assessor is not subject to control or direction by anyone in the way the Independent Assessor performs his function. It is questionable whether the Independent Assessor will have the appropriate degree of independence; or will it be just a job for one of the boys? Remember, this independent post is a ministerial appointment.

The required minimum of five years standing is an alarmingly short amount of experience in most people's estimation. I would have thought that experience was everything. It is also a slight on Supreme Court judges, who are required to have many years experience before gaining the benefits provided to them. Nevertheless, the Independent Assessor will have the same protection and immunity as has a Supreme Court judge in a proceeding in the Supreme Court. Therefore, a solicitor of five years experience could enjoy the same immunity and protection as that enjoyed by judges of the Supreme Court. And this is all in the name of prostitution.

It should also be noted that the assessor's decision cannot be appealed. Surely, the lust for this bill on the government benches is not so strong that even they cannot see the dangers that may be posed when the assessor may have only five years experience in law. We have just seen the Beattie government foist a \$20 per hour fee on ordinary citizens for freedom of information. These amendments, I believe, are just another money grabbing exercise.

I believe that this amendment will not stop illegal prostitution, as only clients from the higher-paid echelon will be able to afford the prices charged at legal brothels. I understand that at the new Purely Blue brothel in south-east Queensland, the introductory special prices are \$125 for half an hour and \$250 for an hour. I understand that some men get around these prices by sharing time. Can members imagine it? Where are the morals? Where is the decency?

Even health concerns do not rate with this government. I note that individual workers do not need to be licensed. I wonder how the minister will describe his position on that issue. At present, an appeal can be made on the grounds of an error or a mistake in law on the part of the court. But these amendments will bring that situation to an end. Local councils strongly oppose this legislation as they have enough to worry about without the added burden of this immoral activity going on in their backyards. In fact, 102 small towns in Queensland have declared themselves brothel free. Certainly, the smaller councils still have a say, but local authorities with populations over 25,000 can be overridden by the state on this matter, and they strongly disapprove of the way in which this legislation is formulated.

Townsville Mayor, Tony Mooney—a long-time Labor man—commented on his council's approval for Queensland's first legal brothel. He said that, essentially, the council had no choice. The council had no right to reject the plan without a costly legal battle, for which they could be held personally financially liable. So much, I say, for this Premier listening to the people. It is only commonsense that local authority, which is the government that is closest to the people, should have the last say in this matter. I remember only a few months ago how the Premier complained loud and long when the federal government was talking about constructing a detention centre in his backyard of Brisbane. He did not like being overridden then, but it is okay for him to override local government. Obviously, it is a case where what is good for the goose definitely is not good for the gander.

Not only that, the number of workers in brothels will be increased to cater for the arduous nature of their duties. The Prostitution Advisory Council has called for more staff, because limits on prostitution numbers could lead to occupational overuse and fatigue.

In conclusion, I say that while girls may prostitute their bodies, I wonder how many in this place are considering prostituting their morals. In a small brothel, the demand for girls is higher than the supply. It begs the question: who is it who uses this facility so much? It certainly is not my husband, brother, uncle or friend. It has to be somebody else's, the dirty dogs. I oppose this amendment.
