



Speech by

**JEFF SEENEY**

**MEMBER FOR CALLIDE**

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Hansard 20 February 2002

**PROSTITUTION AND FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr SEENEY** (Callide—NPA) (9.27 p.m.), in reply: I begin by thanking all members of the House who made a contribution to this debate tonight. On the opposition side I thank the member for Toowoomba South; the member for Nanango, who made some very succinct points about the government's FOI record; the member for Southern Downs; the member for Surfers Paradise; the member for Nicklin; and the member for Gladstone. I also sincerely thank members on the government side who made a contribution to the debate. I thank the minister for his comments and the members for Albert and Kurwongbah. Suffice it to say that I did not agree with some of their comments, and I will go through those comments and the reasons I did not agree with them. However, I thank those members for participating in the debate tonight. I particularly thank the member for Kurwongbah, who made a very sensible and a very measured contribution.

Unfortunately, I think that the debate in the House tonight has been somewhat spoilt by a couple of members up the back who like to come in here after dinner with some sort of a licence to be yobbos. It is marvellous how an hour and a half spent at dinner can make some members grow a foot and, in their own minds, get a heck of a lot more wisdom. I note that those members did not take the trouble to get on the speaking list and contribute to the debate, and that is regrettable.

I turn now to deal with some of the issues raised. The crux of the government's opposition to this bill was that it would threaten the process of probity checks that we all agree are very important in processing applications for brothel licences. This was not a debate about whether we should have prostitution or whether prostitution is a good thing or a bad thing, although I acknowledge that some members had the right and took the opportunity to reinforce their particular views. This was not a debate about that. This was a debate about whether or not that process of ascertaining whether people were suitable to be participants in that industry that was legalised by the legislation that was passed through this House was adequate, whether or not the public had a right to know all of those details and whether or not the public had a right to be able to judge whether or not the government's rhetoric was being delivered.

Every one of us who can remember the debate in this House and in the public media when that legislation was passed would have to admit that we heard a fair bit of rhetoric from the government about how this was going to be the best legalised prostitution industry in the country. Everything was going to be done to make sure that all the concerns raised by the community would be met. Every possible action was going to be taken to make sure that the traditional linkages between crime and prostitution and between drugs and prostitution would not be established. We all know and accept that historically they have been part of prostitution, wherever it occurs. That was not going to happen in Queensland because the government was going to put in place this wonderful process that was going to make sure that these people were lilywhite. Even the most circumspect of members would have to admit that it almost got nauseous. It was almost as though Snow White and the seven dwarfs were going to be running these brothels. Somebody said that the father of the year was going to be the only person—that was the point it reached.

Nobody disagrees with the thrust of that, that if we have to have this industry—and plenty of people disagree that we have to have it—there has to be the strictest process possible to ensure that at least some of that rhetoric is delivered upon. There has to be a mechanism whereby the general public out there—the ordinary Queenslanders, especially those people who are concerned about the industry and especially those people who really did not want to have the industry realised in

Queensland—knows whether or not that rhetoric is being delivered on. They have a right to know whether or not any of that nauseating rhetoric that we heard is actually going to be delivered in reality. That is what this bill was about.

This bill was an attempt to allow the general populace out there in the state, especially those people who have grave concerns—and irrespective of what honourable members in this place think, they have to acknowledge that there is a significant body of Queenslanders who have grave concerns about this industry, and rightly so. They have grave concerns simply because of the historical fact that wherever this industry is established—either legally or illegally—there are those traditional linkages between prostitution and corruption. It happens all over the world. There are traditional linkages about those linkages being established here in Queensland. There needs to be a mechanism that will give those people confidence that the rhetoric that we heard delivered in this parliament and in the public media when this legislation was passed is being delivered on. There needs to be a mechanism so that those people can be confident that their concerns about those linkages being established here in Queensland can be addressed. That is what this was about.

I take the minister's point. The point that the minister made and the point that the whole of the government's opposition to this bill was based on has some validity. I make this offer to the minister quite genuinely: let us go to the committee stage of this bill when the minister can move an amendment to cover those areas that he is concerned about. He seemed to be concerned that certain areas of investigation needed to be kept confidential and should not be available to FOI applications. I take that point. I am not exactly sure what the mechanism is in the Police Department, but no doubt there are undercover police investigations and things like that that should not be subject to those requests. I take the point that there are probably going to be similar investigations in this particular area that I, too, would agree should not be subject to FOI applications.

If the minister is fair dinkum and serious about the reason for opposing this legislation, let us go to the committee stage and address his concerns. I make that offer quite genuinely. I think the member for Southern Downs alluded to the fact that it was possible. I agree wholeheartedly with the member for Southern Downs; it certainly is possible. Let us see how genuine the reasons for the government's opposition to this legislation are. Let us go to the committee stage and sort this out. Let us go to the committee stage and have a genuine, bipartisan attempt in this parliament to amend this piece of legislation, to make it do what it should do: to give the people of Queensland confidence in the government. That is not a big ask, and it is certainly within the bounds of our abilities to do that tonight. It will show every member of this parliament and every Queenslanders just how genuine the government's rhetoric is, not just about the whole prostitution issue but about how genuine was the rhetoric that we heard from the minister and the members for Albert and Kurwongbah. Each of them based their opposition to this legislation on that single point.

I concede that we need to do something to address that particular concern. So let us do it. Let us move into the committee stage and let us address that point so that we can pass this piece of legislation and give the people of Queensland the confidence that they should have in this legislation. I say quite genuinely that their confidence has been shaken of late. That is not just my opinion and it is not just an opinion that is expressed by the opposition. It is a widely expressed opinion in the community: the confidence that the Queensland community has in the openness and accountability of this government has been shaken of late. There has been a whole series of examples, a whole series of incidents. The Opposition Leader, the member for Toowoomba South, went through a lot of those in his address in the second reading debate. It serves little purpose for me to repeat them. Every member in this House knows what they are because they have been debated in this House. Those issues have been brought up in this House by the opposition in performing our role.

It cannot be argued that there is increasing doubt in the minds of the Queensland public about how serious this government is in its commitment to freedom of information. It waxed lyrical about it while it was in opposition when some of the high profile members of the government sat where we sit, and some of their speeches make interesting reading. When they sat over here they were passionate in their commitment to freedom of information and all the concepts that it encompasses. But since they have been in government, since they have been the subject of the FOI applications rather than the promoters of them, they have lost their enthusiasm for the whole process. That is starting to cause a great deal of concern out there in the general community. If this House defeats this legislation tonight, then it is simply going to add to that uncertainty. I am quite genuinely giving the government the opportunity not to add to that uncertainty but to take a step tonight to put some of that uncertainty to rest. I make that offer quite genuinely and quite honestly.

There is one other unfortunate part of the debate tonight which I cannot let pass, and I have spoken about it in this House before. There seems to be a lingering belief among some members of the government that they can stand up to justify the government's position in this place by reflecting on past misdemeanours of political opponents who have long gone. It really is something with which I have

difficulty coming to terms. The government has a huge majority, but the purpose of the debate is not to prove its numerical majority. That numerical majority is always going to exist.

The purpose of the debate in this House is to establish some sort of moral authority for the position that the government takes. It amazes me—and we have seen it again tonight—that people come into this House and seem to think that they can establish that moral authority by standing up and regurgitating endlessly stories of misdemeanours committed in the past by people on the opposite side of politics. It is an absurdity to suggest that the actions of the government tonight, in defeating this legislation, can somehow be justified by what was done five, 10, 15, 30, 40 or 50 years ago by people who are no longer members of this place. It is an absurdity. It does the government no credit and it does the members who elect to use that tactic no credit.

I suggest to the members of the government that it is a very dangerous tactic. I could stand in this place and speak for all of my allotted time about people such as Mr D'Arcy, Mr Keith Wright, Jim Elder and that other bloke, Mike Kaiser. I could speak at some length about the latest addition to that long list of names, one Mr Michael Choi, who has certainly a case to answer.

**Mr CHOI:** I rise to a point of order. I find that comment offensive and I ask the member to withdraw.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr McNamara): Will the member withdraw.

**Mr Cummins:** He needs to think about it. It's a hard question.

**Mr SEENEY:** I need to think about the comment that the member has found offensive.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member has asked that it be withdrawn.

**Mr SEENEY:** I withdraw whatever the member found offensive. I make the point that there is a long list of Labor members who also have committed misdemeanours. I would never suggest that I or any other member of the opposition would come into this House and justify our position on a piece of legislation by endlessly reciting the misdemeanours of a long list of Labor members. Yet that is the very strategy that members of the government adopt endlessly.

Tonight, we saw it adopted again by the member for Albert. She was not even in the House when half of the alleged misdemeanours were committed. Yet the honourable member seems to think that the recital of the Labor version of history somehow justifies the government's position tonight. It does the member for Albert no credit and it does the government no credit to adopt that sort of approach to this legislation.

Honourable members who have taken offence at what I have said can be assured—and I hope that no member of the opposition ever comes into this House and tries to justify a position by reciting a version of an historical record—that we should be able to debate in this House points of view based on their merits. Tonight, to her credit, the member for Kurwongbah did that and the minister did that. I quite genuinely congratulate them on that.

In conclusion, I repeat the offer that I have made to the government. In the interests of bipartisanship, I say again that I am prepared to work with the minister in the committee stage of this bill to address the concerns that he has raised tonight. I acknowledge that those concerns have some merit. Those concerns were repeated by the other two members of the government who spoke. Those concerns can be addressed in a very succinct amendment. Then we can pass this legislation. In passing this legislation, the whole parliament can join with the opposition in doing what I believe the Queensland public want us to do, and that is to provide them with a mechanism to be confident in the government and to be able to monitor how much reality there is behind the government's rhetoric. The public wants to see just how fair dinkum this government is in relation to this legalised prostitution industry, which the government has foisted upon the people of Queensland, especially those Queenslanders who are concerned about that. No member in this House can deny that in every one of the 89 electorates there is a significant body of people who are quite genuinely concerned about the establishment of this industry. This parliament should take note of their concern. This legislation would go a long way towards meeting that concern and providing people with the confidence that they should have in the government.

I commend the legislation to the House. I hope that the minister will take up the offer that I made quite genuinely to him in the parliament tonight. We will see how fair dinkum he is and we will see how fair dinkum the government is.

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