




Speech By
Melissa McMahon

MEMBER FOR MACALISTER

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**CRIMINAL CODE (DECRIMINALISING SEX WORK) AND OTHER LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mrs McMAHON** (Macalister—ALP) (4.10 pm): I am going to take my time making my contribution to this bill. From the outset I will put on the record that prior to coming into this House this was not an industry, organisation or group of people I had ever had much to do with. In the last term when a bill surrounding this workplace and industry was introduced I was glad to see it referred to the Queensland Law Reform Commission. This is a longstanding industry with a long history. I am not going to go into the member for Clayfield's speech, but since the bill was introduced I have attended forums and public information sessions. I visited Respect Inc and spoke with sex workers. I have also informed myself of the work of the Law Reform Commission.

This is a bill about workplace health and safety. I will begin with the proposition that all workers deserve a safe space to work and that historically sex work is work. It is one of the longest surviving occupations we have. Unfortunately, as things stand it is not safe work. I understand that the Prostitution Licensing Authority was created with the remit of increasing the safety of women, but we have heard that it does not. Practices which have development through regulation have meant that women working in this field, vulnerable people, are not safe. We are starting from the position that what is here at the moment is not a safe workplace, so the role of this bill is to provide safety for people working in this industry.

The idea that decriminalisation and removing those regulations will all of a sudden introduce a criminal element into this industry clearly misses the fact that there are already criminal elements that operate by using loopholes in the regulation. I am not sure about other people's workplaces, but when you involve the Workplace Health and Safety Act and various industrial relations acts there is going to be quite a lot of regulation in the industry, so it is not like all of a sudden everything has gone out the window and it is a free-for-all. We will now have workplaces and workers who have to comply with workplace health and safety laws just like every other worker.

We have spoken about the need to keep women safe in this parliament many times already this week. What I hear from those opposite is, 'We support women in this work. We want them to be safe, but'. That is what we hear from over here. 'Yes, we want women to be safe, but not this way.' For them, women's safety comes second in this bill. It comes second to planning regulations they have not yet cited. It comes second to moral high horses because they do not regard this as a legitimate occupation. That is where they are coming from at the outset.

I put on the record that I support a person's right to choose their industry. Apparently, according to the previous speaker, those who work in this industry are not normal and they are not healthy. To me, that does not come from a position of deliberate consideration; that comes from a moral perspective and deciding to put someone's moral rights over the safety of women. That is really what this is about. It is about deciding that someone else's perspective and moral outlook is more important than a woman's right to be safe at work. You demean her work, so you demean her. That is what I reject.

What I want to know from those opposite is: how many more sex workers need to be injured? How many need to be sexually assaulted before they decide to do something? That is what we are looking at. We heard evidence about the overwhelming number of workers who do not report sexual assaults because of the stigma that is perpetrated in this industry, and it will continue to be perpetrated by those opposite. The Nordic model they propose has not increased women's safety anywhere because when a client is criminalised that behaviour is transferred to the sex worker. That is what happens.

I know we have more time to debate this bill and I know there will be issues about planning. I am more than happy that during consideration in detail we will have an opportunity to go into planning, but those considerations again are based on stigma—an idea the media perpetrates about what people who work in the sex work industry do, what they look like and how they operate. I would ask anyone making a contribution whether they have spoken to a sex worker. Have they spoken to sex workers who operate out of homes? Have they spoken to people who operate within this model? If not, what exactly are you voting against? I ask members to give this bill due consideration, because in rejecting this bill they are rejecting women's safety. I commend the bill to the House.