

LETTER

PROSTITUTION LAW REFORM IN QUEENSLAND

Dear Editor,

I would like to respond to the article by Ms Linda Banach *Regulating Morality?* ((1992) 17(1) *Alt.LJ* 41), which discussed, among other things, proposals by the Criminal Justice Commission to reform prostitution laws in Queensland. Ms Banach is critical of the Commission's Information and Issues Paper released in February 1991 prior to the Commission's 370 page final report to Parliament.

The Paper was the first step in the Commission's review of the laws. It was publicised as a discussion document only, designed to assist the community make informed comment in submissions on prostitution. Ms Banach says the Commission 'failed to identify relevant issues or outline potential legal models' and 'did not consult with sex workers' in its Information and Issues Paper.

All three of these allegations are wrong. The relevant legal models were discussed in detail on pages 55-61. Also included were explanations of different types of prostitution; historical background as to how the Commission came to review the laws following the Fitzgerald Inquiry; an account of the present laws; figures on prostitution related offences which came to the attention of the police; health and drug issues; an overview of

the extent of prostitution in different parts of Queensland; the costs of enforcing the laws; taxation matters as they might affect sex workers; social and community welfare aspects of prostitution; examined efforts to reform prostitution laws in other states and in Canada and the United Kingdom. The Paper presented the argument of some feminist commentators who questioned that society must make prostitution available to men so they do not become rapists or sexually abuse children.

Finally, a discussion of sex workers' backgrounds following the research done in the reports of the Victorian Inquiry into Prostitution, the NSW Select Committee on Prostitution; and the academic and sex worker representative Roberta Perkins, was included in the Issues Paper.

In preparing the Information and Issues Paper, the Commission had several consultations with the sex workers' organisation Self-Health for Queensland Workers in the Sex Industry (SQWISI) and 47 individual sex workers. The Commission told sex workers at the time it would more fully seek the views of sex workers around Queensland when it carried out a survey for the final report. This it did when it interviewed a further 73 sex workers. For the Victorian report, 115 sex workers were formally inter-

viewed and for the NSW report 134 were interviewed. The number of sex workers interviewed in Queensland by the CJC compares favourably with those interviewed in the other states in terms of population alone.

It is difficult to know to what Ms Banach is referring when she says 'under resourced agencies had to spend limited funds on resourcing a well-funded Commission'. It seems to suggest this Commission received resources from SQWISI or other agencies. At most, it could only refer to agencies devoting resources to the preparation of a submission. While the Commission recognises this takes time and effort, it is committed to seeking the opinions of the public on matters of law reform and considers this process an important tool in so doing.

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If you wish to submit an article/brief to the Editors for Consideration, a 'Guideline for Authors' is available from the Editorial Co-ordinator, C/- Law Faculty, Monash University Clayton, 3168. Tel. (03) 565 3362, Fax. (03) 565 5305.

Shorter items are preferred (articles: 2000 - 4000 words; briefs: 800 words). Contributions are welcomed for the regular columns: Sit Down Girlie, Legal Studies, Law Reform and Legal Centres.

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