

HUMAN TRAFFICKING WORKING GROUP
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NEWS REPORT

Headline	Queensland sex industry still largely illegitimate
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After 10 years of legal brothels in Queensland, 90 per cent of prostitution here remains either unregulated or illegal, University of Queensland research shows. UQ's Human Trafficking Working Group, led by law academic, Associate Professor Andreas Schloenhardt reviewed patterns in contemporary prostitution in Queensland 10 years after the introduction of the Prostitution Act 1999.

Dr Schloenhardt said despite general support for a licensed sex industry in Queensland, many underlying concerns remained. "There are concerns within the community about the efficiency of the current licensing system, unregulated and illegal forms of prostitution, the trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation into legal and illegal brothels, as well as the possibility of regulating escort services," he said.

Most sex workers in illegal operations face threats to their safety and do not have the checks essential for their sexual health.

Dr Schloenhardt said the State Government had clearly failed to draw as many of the illegal operators and workers as possible into the legal industry. While only 10 per cent of prostitution was legal, 90 per cent including escort agencies, street prostitution, unlicensed brothels, and the sharing of premises by more than one sex worker were either unregulated or illegal. Legalising some parts of the industry, while policing illegal forms of prostitution, had not eliminated the existence of and demand for illegal brothels, escort agencies, and street prostitution, he said. He said legal brothels were extremely expensive to set up and most went broke after a few years.

Queensland's first licensed brothel in Queensland, Purely Blue at Bowen Hills, was the only one that had been operating continuously since licensing was introduced 10 years ago.

Contributing to the relatively high levels of illegal prostitution was the fact prosecutions and convictions of offenders were few and far between. LNP Member for Buderim, Steve Dickson, said legal brothel operators had told him that illicit sex rings were so common they were squeezing out the legal, tax-paying businesses.

While legal operators have to pay around \$30,000 a year in government fees and charges, illegal brothel operators are only fined about \$2000 if they are caught, he said. An illegal operator can be busted 15 times in a year before they face the same costs as legal operators. He said low fines were encouraging illegal sex rings and trafficking.

The Police Minister, Neil Roberts said the number of legal brothels in Queensland was steadily increasing, and those who operated illegal brothels or participate in illegal prostitution faced serious penalties.

Current penalty provisions include imprisonment of up to seven years for knowingly participating in the provision of prostitution and up to \$3,000 or six months in prison, for public soliciting for purposes of prostitution, he said. Proposed new legislation includes the creation of a new offence called carrying on the business of prostitution which will carry a maximum penalty of seven years imprisonment, he said.

Dr Schloenhardt will present the findings at the university at 5.30pm on Monday, September 21 as part of UQ's Research Week.

An electronic copy of this document is available at www.law.uq.edu.au/humantrafficking.