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**NEWS REPORT**

<b>Headline</b>	<b>Vic: Sex slavery 'dehumanising': judge</b>
<b>Reported in</b>	<i>AAP Australian National News Wire</i>
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Enslaving women for prostitution is dehumanising and "about as bad as it gets for a woman", a Supreme Court judge said. Justice Chris Maxwell delivered a withering rebuke during an appeal by a former Melbourne brothel owner against her jail term for enslaving five Thai women as prostitutes.

Wei Tang was sentenced to 10 years jail in 2006 for forcing the women to serve 900 clients to work off debts of \$45,000 each at her inner Melbourne brothel, Club 417. Her conviction was quashed and a fresh trial ordered in June 2007 by the Court of Appeal, a decision the High Court overturned last August.

Tang, who is appealing her sentence and non-parole period of six years in the Victorian Court of Appeal, struck a diminutive figure in court on Thursday and wept regularly throughout the proceedings.

Her counsel, Michael Croucher, said the crime of slavery had varying levels of seriousness, and that Tang's offending was at the lower end.

But Justice Maxwell rejected this notion outright, saying forced prostitution of women was demeaning. "We're talking about slavery, involving labour, being used as a piece of property," he said. "We should take the view ... that this is about as bad as it could get for a woman. "These women were treated as your clients' possessions and were subjected in their state of enslavement to compulsory prostitution. "This is as high as it gets in the dehumanising of a person." He said the crime was of "an almost unimaginable character" because slavery was considered to be a thing of the past.

Mr Croucher asked the Court of Appeal to consider that the original judge had made an error in sentencing, and to take into account the fact Tang had suffered considerable anguish after she was freed for 14 months but then sent back to prison after the High Court decision.

He also said she was unaware of her offending. "There is no way she knew what she was doing amounted to slavery," he said.

Wendy Abraham QC, for the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions, disagreed. "She intended to do it all," Ms Abraham said. "If it wasn't for people like Tang, there would not be women brought from overseas. The sentence isn't manifestly excessive, in my submission it is moderate. It was Tang who was involved in earning a substantial amount of money from those women."

Ms Abraham said formulating scenarios about the seriousness of different types of slavery in a bid to reduce Tang's sentence was a "futile exercise".

Justice Maxwell, Justice Peter Buchanan and Justice Frank Vincent will announce their decision at a later date.

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