



**HUMAN TRAFFICKING WORKING GROUP**

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[www.law.uq.edu.au/humantrafficking](http://www.law.uq.edu.au/humantrafficking)

**NEWS REPORT**

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New research has shown how vulnerable the Far North is becoming a slave trafficking paradise because it has so many remote hiding spots.

The jailing of a Weipa couple in Queensland's first slavery trial two years ago exposed how easily slaves could be hidden in remote parts of the region, Prof Andreas Schloenhardt told *The Weekend Post*. "We're now realising there's a vulnerability in the Far North and other remote parts of Australia that you wouldn't necessarily see in a large city," Prof Schloenhardt said. "It's really scary because for five years, federal and state governments have been paying attention to the sex industry and nobody's really thought about different ways slaves could be coming into the country and being trafficked into really remote places. "Police are doing brothel raids but there's nothing to uncover slavery in a domestic sense; it's a dimension to this problem nobody's really thought about."

The concerns were aired at a presentation by Prof Schloenhardt and his University of Queensland colleagues in Cairns earlier this month. The team began analysing the extent of human trafficking in Australia a year ago, and is now focusing on the exploitation of foreign workers in the Queensland sex industry and why there have been so few successful prosecutions.

Prof Schloenhardt said they were also looking at whether legalised prostitution had made it easier to find offenders. "Cairns has got two brothels but has that made things more transparent or is there an underground industry- which I suspect is the case."

During the 2007 trial of Weipa's Zoltan Kovacs and his wife Melita, it was alleged the couple arranged a sham marriage for a Filipina woman to bring her to Australia in August, 2002, where they then used her as a domestic and sex slave. The woman was allegedly forced to work 17 hour days in their takeaway shop and cleaning their home with no days off and little or no pay. She was also allegedly repeatedly sexually abused and raped before managing to escape in December, 2002.

The pair was jailed. Zoltan Kovacs was jailed for eight years and Melita for four years but the case but will be retried after a successful appeal. Prof Schloenhardt will give his presentation, *Trafficking in Persons: Myths and Realities*, at MacDonnells Law at the corner of Shields/Grafton Streets on Friday from 5-7pm.

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