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MEDIA RELEASE

Regulation of brothels inquiry report released

The report of the inquiry into the regulation of brothels in NSW has been tabled in State Parliament, the Chair of the Legislative Assembly Select Committee on the Regulation of Brothels, Alister Henskens SC MP, the Member for Ku-ring-gai, announced today.

Mr Henskens said the report contained 25 findings and 37 recommendations aimed at improving the regulation of brothels in NSW.

Mr Henskens said the inquiry also heard deeply concerning reports of increased sexual slavery in NSW brothels concerning young women from Asian nations and claims that it is more entrenched than official figures indicate.

“One case of sexual servitude is one too many and if this inquiry helps in any way to stop it happening to a vulnerable young woman, then it has served its purpose.” Mr Henskens said.

Police at the most senior levels also gave evidence of organised crime links to the sex industry and therefore the need to have it better regulated. Of the estimated 340 brothels in NSW, Police believe 40 have some recorded connection or ties to outlaw motor cycle gangs.

“First and foremost, we have recommended the introduction of a licensing system for most premises where sex work takes place in NSW,” Mr Henskens said.

“The Committee identified a number of problems in the sex services industry and a licensing system will help to address these. The Committee found that a substantial section of the industry is operating in unauthorised premises, that is, in premises for which there is no planning or development approval to provide sexual services.

“This inquiry was never about re-criminalising the sex industry, but rather examining better safeguards to protect workers and the interests of the general public”.

NSW Police gave evidence that it is harder to buy a dog and license it than it is to operate a brothel in NSW. There is currently next to no regulation.

“We support decriminalisation and do not support the re-introduction of criminal penalties for sex work or owning and operating brothels in NSW.

“Under the current system, the authorities have insufficient visibility over the industry, particularly as a substantial section of it is operating in unauthorised premises that have not been given council approval. This is of particular concern given it is likely criminal elements are operating within the industry.

“A licensing system will help solve these problems. It will assist with the proper enforcement of planning laws, help to fight organised criminal elements in the industry by giving Police more appropriate powers of entry and evidence gathering, ensure that only fit and proper persons control and operate brothels and help protect sex workers from exploitation and danger.

“Local Councils are currently the lead agencies for regulating brothels, but they are ill-equipped to deal with unauthorised brothels and with the criminal activity associated with some brothels.

“For this reason the Committee has also recommended the creation of a special Sex Services Industry Coordination Unit within the NSW Police Force, greater coordination between relevant government agencies and appropriate powers of entry, search and seizure for authorities to deal with brothel owners who are not doing the right thing”.

Mr Henskens emphasised that Councils would continue to have a role under the new system, saying they are best placed to assess what is appropriate for their local government areas.

The Committee received 177 submissions from a broad cross section of stakeholders during its inquiry including sex workers, sex worker support and advocacy organisations, local councils, government agencies, NSW Police, Federal Police, Victorian Police, healthcare providers, academics and members of the public. It also heard evidence from 45 witnesses at three public hearings held in Sydney during September.

Further information can be obtained by visiting the Committee webpage at www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/regulationofbrothelscommittee or by contacting Roger White on 0478 092 425.