

## **Michelle Pearse, Western Australian Prostitution Bill 2011**

Katherine Spackman: Welcome to the political spot I'm Catherine Spackman. One issue the Australian Christian Lobby monitors government making laws about is prostitution. Right now in Australia, the Western Australian government has introduced a prostitution bill, and to join me now to talk about is Michelle Pearse, the ACL's spokeswoman on prostitution and trafficking. Welcome to the program Michelle.

Michelle Pearse: Thanks Katherine.

Katherine Spackman: What is this actual bill proposing?

Michelle Pearse: This bill is proposing to remove brothels and prostitution from suburbs and community areas and to actually allow a certain amount of brothels to operate in industrial zones. It's in the interest of community safety, the government is saying, to remove them from around where people live, and to put them in say, business areas.

Katherine Spackman: Is there any particular reason why this change has come about?

Michelle Pearse: Yeah, it's been a number of years that governments have struggled with trying to deal with prostitution and brothels in Western Australia. At the moment, they are proliferating through suburbs. We have a number of prostituted women working from their homes and there has been an outcry in certain sections of the community that they don't want prostitution within their zones, and so the government is proposing to remove them from the community to place them somewhere where the community won't be disturbed by brothels.

Katherine Spackman: Some might think that this is a good step then, because it's addressing how far prostitution is in Western Australian cities.

Michelle Pearse: Yeah, yeah, that's right and that's what the government wanted to do, was to make it palatable for the community, to say well it's not going to be in my suburb, so I'm OK with it, but what it isn't addressing is the actual exploitation that the women do suffer in prostitution. Just moving them from one area to another isn't going to address the psychological and physical damage that happens to every woman that's in prostitution. And it actually doesn't address the demand side of it either. The reason why prostitution is proliferating throughout Western Australia is that there is a high demand for prostituted women. So just moving it from one area to another isn't going to deal with the demand, and we're going to continue to have an illegal industry thriving, simply because there is profit to be made from the men who are choosing to use prostituted women.

Katherine Spackman: When is this bill likely to be passed?

Michelle Pearse: Well it's likely that it could be passed before the end of the year. It may go into next year but we are really encouraging people to contact their local member of parliament before the end of the year, within the next couple of weeks to make their voice heard, because it's a possibility it could even be passed before the end of the year.

Katherine Spackman: How should people respond, that there shouldn't be legalisation of prostitution anywhere?

Michelle Pearse: I think that the government needs to recognise that all forms of prostitution is exploitation. I mean there was a statistic quoted by the US bureau of public affairs that says that 60 – 75 per cent of women in prostitution are raped, 70 – 95 percent physically assaulted, and 68 per cent having post traumatic stress disorder. These kind of statistics do show that women are damaged in prostitution. And as Christians we are the voice for the vulnerable – those that can't speak out for themselves and this is an opportunity to be a voice for the voiceless and make this known to our government, that no amount of prostitution should be tolerated. We didn't tolerate slavery but it was a campaign by Christians that actually made slavery illegal, and this is a new type of slavery. A modern day slavery.

Katherine Spackman: Earlier this year you were in Canberra appearing at a prostitution enquiry in the ACT with the Australian Christian Lobby's director, Nick Jensen and there's been some media reports on that particular enquiry and suggestions that the recommendations out of that should be that sex traders should be allowed to work in groups from private homes under prostitution laws. Why wouldn't that work?

Michelle Pearse: Well, once again it's moving in completely the wrong direction. If the government wants to look at how to create a normal industry, for you know, like sex industry becomes a completely acceptable and normal part of the community and that it should be growing and thriving, then go ahead and create more avenues for it to do this and by allowing more than one sex worker to work from their home is moving in that direction, but the fact is that it is not a normal industry. It's a very damaging industry. It's an industry fraught with crime and exploitation and trafficking, and so the government needs to move in a direction away from allowing for it to continue growth. States across Australia have attempted to regulate, and decriminalise and to legalise the industry to try and make it safer for sex workers, but it hasn't achieved its aims. Women are still exploited, the demand is still high and most of the industry is still illegal and Western Australia would just be following a pathway that the other states have led in continuing to expand this damaging industry.

Katherine Spackman: That was Michelle Pearse, the ACL spokeswoman on prostitution. She was talking about the WA prostitution bill and an enquiry into prostitution in the ACT.