

Australian Sex Worker Rights Group Fails in Bid to Gag Professor

Jennie Herrera, Matthew Holloway and Isla MacGregor
Whistleblowers Tasmania, 3 June 2012

This is an edited version of the article that appeared in Tasmaniantimes.com on 4 June 2012

The Scarlett Alliance in Tasmania has failed in their campaign to have visiting Professor Sheila Jeffreys banned from speaking at a staff seminar at the University of Tasmania Law School and a public forum at the Friends Meeting House in Hobart.

Professor Sheila Jeffreys is from the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Melbourne and the Public Officer of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women Australia. CATW International has Category II consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. Professor Jeffreys is the author of nine books on the history and politics of sexuality including *The Idea of Prostitution* and *The Industrial Vagina: The Political Economy of the Global Sex Trade*.

In the weeks leading up to Professor Jeffreys' brief visit to Tasmania, the Scarlett Alliance contacted Whistleblowers Tasmania, Hobart Quakers and the Tasmania University Law School in an attempt to have a planned Public Forum and Staff Seminar cancelled. These attempts took the form of telephone calls and emails and included a barrage of accusations against Professor Jeffreys in order to discredit and attack her professional integrity. In addition, a threat was made to "smear" the Quakers (The Religious Society of Friends) if they did not cancel the public forum at the Friends Meeting House.

The international campaign against Professor Jeffreys is typical of the tactics used against whistleblowers by global industries who want to justify the impacts of their industries and further expand them and this is particularly apparent with the globalisation of the sex industry.

Whistleblowers Tasmania took an interest in the issue of legislative reform of the sex industry earlier this year because of concerns about the increasing links between organised crime, corruption, trafficking, human rights abuses, and violence to people in the sex industry across the globe.

In a *Herald Sun* report by journalist Keith Moor in 2007, former Victorian Police Commissioner Christine Nixon was quoted from a submission to a parliamentary committee: "Serious and organised crime is well entrenched in regulated industries such as prostitution and gaming."

Earlier this year the Tasmanian Government called for public submissions to its Discussion Paper "Regulation of the Sex Industry in Tasmania."

On reviewing this document Whistleblowers Tasmania were alarmed to find that the information provided was flawed, misleading and biased in particular when describing the Nordic model laws.

The paper went to considerable lengths to criticise the Swedish model without apparently doing any research into the way the Nordic model actually works and has been effective.

The Discussion Paper failed to provide any criticism of NSW, Queensland, Victorian or New Zealand

sex industry legislation and their impacts. All these models have been criticised and there is ample and an ever growing body of evidence that has exposed the problems with legalisation approaches in these jurisdictions.

The Tasmanian Government's discussion paper relied heavily on a report from the Queensland Prostitution Licensing Authority. This report specifically targeted Professor Sheila Jeffreys for criticism and made comments which were not substantiated or put in any context, neither were they relevant. These comments about Prof Jeffreys' views were referenced directly from the Scarlet Alliance website. The inclusion of this material in the report would appear to be designed to discredit Professor Jeffreys' research entirely and thereby justify the Queensland Government's policy decisions on the issues.

It became clear to Whistleblowers Tasmania that a very strong dissident voice was being targeted throughout Australia and that national and state governments were relying heavily on information from the Scarlett Alliance to discredit and attack advocates of the Nordic model in Australia.

The influence of the globalised sex industry in the Australian context is of particular interest at a time when Sweden, Iceland, Norway and South Korea already have adopted Nordic model laws. Israel is about to pass similar laws and France, Ireland and many other countries are looking to follow. It is the Nordic model laws that are being viewed as the most progressive laws internationally and yet Australia is going backwards in its determination to legalise an industry that has been exposed as being based on inequality and harmful to all people in society.

When Whistleblowers Tasmania decided to invite Professor Sheila Jeffreys to speak in Tasmania little did we know just how organised the sex industry has become in its attempt to silence the voices of those who speak out against the harms to people exploited in this ever expanding multi billion dollar global industry.

Professor Jeffreys spoke at the forums in Hobart about why legalising brothel prostitution is a failed social experiment and why it does not control the industry, eliminate corruption, organised crime or street prostitution. Professor Jeffreys explained that legalisation exacerbates all these problems. She went on to say that legalisation does not end the violence and abuse that women in prostitution suffer, but instead gives the seal of approval to the everyday violence of prostitution that women get paid to survive. As a warning to the Tasmanian Government she went on to say that if Tasmania goes down the road of legalisation it will make Tasmania a pimp state, which profits from prostituting women. And finally said how legalising the industry of prostitution threatens the equality of all women, including their rights to equality of relationships and equality in the workplace.

Responding to the Scarlett Alliance's attempts to gag Professor Jeffreys, Whistleblowers Tasmania put out a media release to alert the community of this attack on freedom of speech. ABC News covered the issue on the evening television news. During the interview with a representative of the Scarlett Alliance, images were shown of a propaganda poster vilifying Professor Sheila Jeffreys.

Whistleblowers Tasmania congratulate both the University of Tasmania Law School and the Quakers for resisting the attempts by the Scarlett Alliance to gag Professor Sheila Jeffreys from speaking publicly about issues that Tasmanians have a right to be fully informed about before the Tasmanian Government brings in any new laws which have been shown to result in an expansion of both legal and illegal sectors of the sex industry.