Message from the Chair

It has been another busy and successful year for the Prostitution Licensing Authority, which continues to administer a regime that ensures only suitable persons may operate or manage a licensed brothel, promotes the health and safety of clients and sex workers, secures the autonomy of sex workers, and combats the involvement of corruption and organised crime in the licensed brothel industry.

Although the licensed brothel industry experienced a slight contraction in 2007-08, during the last year an additional two brothels have commenced operation, bringing the total number of operational brothels in the state to 25. Despite the economic downturn, not a single brothel in the state ceased operation, although the Authority is aware that a number of licensees are struggling financially. In addition, the PLA granted an individual a brothel licence to operate a brothel in Toowoomba which has not yet opened.

The community reaction to the development application for a brothel in Toowoomba demonstrated that prostitution remains a controversial and divisive issue, capable of arousing strong passions from detractors and supporters alike. Whilst community concern is understandable, it has been the experience of the Authority that at worst licensed brothels have a negligible impact on community amenity. The PLA’s probity and compliance functions ensure that the state’s licensed brothel industry is strictly regulated in the public interest. The Authority acknowledges that there will always be elements of the community that object to any form of legalised prostitution, but the Authority is firmly convinced that it is superior to the alternative of an underground and unregulated industry, which places sex workers at far greater risk of coercion, violence and unsafe sex.

This year, the PLA was captured by the Independent Review of Queensland Government Boards, Committees and Statutory Authorities, which could potentially have ended in a recommendation that it be abolished, subsumed into a government department, or merged with another entity. The Authority made two thorough and comprehensive submissions to the review, seeking to demonstrate the need for and on-going relevance of the PLA. The Authority was pleased that this was accepted by the Independent Reviewers, who recommended the retention of the status quo. The Authority was equally pleased when the Government announced that it had accepted this recommendation.

In October 2008, the Government released its response to the recommendations of the Crime and Misconduct Commission report, Regulating Outcall Prostitution: Should legal outcall prostitution services be extended to licensed brothels and independent escort agencies? The Government accepted the recommendations of the CMC that the prohibition on outcalls from licensed brothels should be retained and that outcall prostitution services from escort agencies not be legalised. The PLA had advocated the introduction of outcalls and was disappointed that its arguments had not been sufficiently persuasive with the Government. The Authority had no interest in expanding prostitution in the state, but wanted a relaxation of the current restrictions on outcalls so that licensed brothels could more effectively compete with the still substantial illegal sector. The Government also announced measures that will support the licensed brothel industry by making it easier for police to target illegal operators and to secure convictions and the PLA welcomes those initiatives. The Authority also strongly supports those measures announced by the Government which will enhance the safety of sole operator sex workers.

In 2009-10, the Authority is determined to ensure the maintenance of a quality, effective and efficient brothel licensing regime that serves the public interest.

I place on record the PLA’s appreciation of the support given to it by both the former Minister, the Hon Judy Spence MP, and the current Minister, the Hon Neil Roberts MP. We also recognise and value the assistance of various government agencies that have so professionally supported and enhanced the work of the Authority.

I extend my thanks to my colleagues on the PLA Board who have a great wealth of knowledge and experience and who are invaluable in assisting me as Chair.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that to a large degree the achievements of the Authority are a result of the significant administrative and leadership abilities of the Executive Director, Ms Margaret Isaac, who has led the agency so ably for the last nine years. My appreciation also goes to the PLA staff for their ongoing dedication and committed professionalism.

Manus Boyce QC
Chair