

The environment in which we operate

The licensed sector grew by two brothels in 2013-14, bringing to 26 the total number of brothels in Queensland. On 26 September 2013, Pryana Rose opened at Yatala, and on 25 April 2014, The Blue Lounge opened at Bowen Hills. Each of these brothels is located at the site of a defunct brothel. 26 brothels is equal to the peak previously achieved in 2009-10. On 30 June 2014, the PLA granted an individual a licence to operate a brothel at Marcoola. The brothel, Lush, opened on 4 July 2014. This brothel is also located at the site of a defunct brothel. There are currently 27 licensed brothels, the highest number to date.

In the absence of legislative reform, the PLA does not foresee any prospect for significant growth of the licensed brothel sector, and expects brothel numbers to remain stable. In particular, the size of the sector may be explained by:

- prevailing economic conditions
- the return on investment of licensed brothels in comparison to other businesses
- the entrepreneurial ability of individual licensees
- competition with illegal operators who do not have the same overheads or regulatory burden, and who do not have to pay licensing fees
- the regulatory framework for brothels.

During the year, the PLA continued to engage with the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice on its proposal for legislative reform of the sex industry, designed to target illegal operators, minimise the scope for the involvement of organised crime and the incidence of official corruption, improve the health and safety of sex workers, and enhance the scope of regulation of the sex industry. The PLA had supported a re-examination by the CCC of its rationale for its recommendations in its October 2006 report, *Regulating Outcall Prostitution*, that outcalls from brothels should continue to be prohibited and escort agencies should continue to be illegal. The PLA had addressed this matter in its submission to the 2011 CCC review of the Prostitution Act. The Attorney-General has indicated to the PLA that he will not ask the CCC to reconsider the matter, citing the risks identified by the CCC in its report. The PLA acknowledges the many competing priorities of the Government, and that the regulation of the state's sex industry is ultimately a policy matter for the Executive. It is for industry stakeholders to convince the Government of the merits of outcalls from licensed brothels and the legalisation of escort agencies.

Since its establishment, the PLA formed part of the police portfolio. On 1 November 2013, the Attorney-General assumed ministerial responsibility for the Prostitution Act and consequently the PLA. This machinery-of-Government change resulted from a recommendation of the final report of the Police and Community Safety Review. The structure and functions of the agency are otherwise unaltered. The PLA's clients will have noticed no difference. A significant implication of the machinery-of-Government change for the PLA has been with the provision of corporate support services. Due to the small size of the agency, it has relied on the QPS for a range of corporate support services. Following the machinery-of-Government change, these support services will instead be provided by the Department of Justice and Attorney-General. The process of transition commenced in 2013-14 and will continue over the next year.

During the year, the provision of sexual health services at the Brisbane sexual health clinic (Biala) was scaled back. This has meant a greater reliance by sex workers on General Practitioners (GPs) for sexual health checks. One problem with this is that not all GPs are familiar with the requirements for conducting sexual health checks of sex workers. In 2014-15, the PLA plans to distribute a resource for sex workers to give to GPs at consultations to aid GP familiarity with the conduct of sexual health checks of workers.

The PLA relies on the Licensing Enforcement Unit (LEU) of QPS for probity checking of applicants for brothel licences and approved manager's certificates. The LEU will also be responsible for probity

checking under the new licensing regime for the tattoo industry. The PLA will monitor the impact of this to ensure that processing times for applicants are not unduly impacted.

Finally, the PLA notes that whilst prostitution continues to be a contentious phenomenon in the community, the decision to regulate the sex industry is a pragmatic one, with the principle of harm minimisation at its core, and designed to limit the impact of prostitution on the community.

Priorities for 2014-15

Key priorities for the PLA in 2014-15 are to:

- engage with the Attorney-General and with other government agencies on the regulation of the state's sex industry
- contribute to any reviews or inquiries impacting on the PLA or the state's sex industry
- distribute an information resource for sex workers to aid GP comprehension of the requirements for sexual health checks of sex workers
- educate the community and stakeholders about issues to do with prostitution, including PLA expectations about industry compliance
- review best practice standards appropriate to the operations of licensed brothels and review brothel licence conditions for relevancy and consistency.