

The environment in which we operate

On 4 July 2014, a new brothel, Lush, opened at Marcoola. It brought the total number of brothels in the state to 27, which was the highest number on record. For most of the year there were 27 brothels in Queensland but on 27 May 2015 the brothel, My Room, at Mt Isa, ceased to operate, so that 2014-15 closed with 26 brothels operating. At the time of preparation of this annual report, another two brothels had ceased to operate. On 1 July 2015, the brothel, Australian Maid, in Townsville, ceased to operate. Then on 7 July 2015, the brothel in Mackay, Club 7 on Enterprise, closed. There are currently 24 brothels operating in Queensland, the same number as at year end in 2012-13. There is the potential for brothel numbers to decline further in 2015-16. The continued operation of brothels is a matter for individual licensees.

In addition to personal factors unique to each licensee which will impact on their decision to remain in business, 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 or are not restricted to certain locations, and who do not have to pay licensing fees
- the regulatory framework for brothels.

With the change of government in February 2015, the PLA has engaged with the Attorney-General 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 will continue this engagement in 2015-16 but 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.

Last year, the PLA reported that it planned to distribute a resource for sex workers to give to General Practitioners (GPs) at consultations to aid GP familiarity with the conduct of sexual health checks of workers. This was in the form of a 'z card' sexual health resource. The 'z cards' are addressed to GPs (Dear Doctor) and until folded out are business card sized. They explain why the worker is seeking a sexual health check, and include guidelines for the conduct of sexual health checks, and a Sexual Health Check Certificate of Attendance that can be photocopied and filled out by the GP. The PLA did not develop the 'z card' resource but was given an opportunity for input. The resource was developed, in partnership with Respect Inc (a Queensland sex worker organisation funded by Queensland Health), as part of a project to support the provision of sexual health services in the primary health care sector. The project partners were: HIV and HCV Education Projects, School of Medicine, The University of Queensland; Medicare Local Metro North Brisbane; and Family Planning Queensland. The project was funded by the Metro North Hospital and Health Service.

The PLA originally had 5,000 of the resources printed. Feedback has been very positive and demand has been such that the PLA has had another 5,000 printed for distribution as needed. To date, the PLA has distributed the resource as outlined:

- more than 3,000 in total to the state's licensed brothels
- 2,400 total amongst the four Respect Inc offices in the state
- 400 to HIV and HCV Education Projects, School of Medicine, the University of Queensland, for dissemination to GP clinics
- 600 to the Metro North Public Health Unit.

In late 2014-15, the Authority made a number of philanthropic contributions under s. 125 of the Prostitution Act. Three separate contributions were approved, with a total value of \$137,740, to two organisations:

- \$49,040 to Respect Inc to conduct a needs assessment of sex workers at licensed brothels
- \$43,200 to Respect Inc for a sex worker exit and retraining program courses costs subsidy
- \$45,500 to Australia's CEO Challenge to deliver a workplace domestic violence prevention program to each of the State's licensed brothels and to the PLA.

The PLA relies on the Licensing Enforcement Unit (LEU) of QPS for probity checking of applicants for brothel licences and approved manager's certificates. Last year's annual report noted that the LEU would be responsible for probity checking under the licensing regime for the tattoo industry and said that the PLA would monitor the impact of this to ensure that processing times for applicants are not unduly impacted. During 2014-15, there was no appreciable impact on applicant processing times.

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 2015-16

Key priorities for the PLA in 2015-16 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
- engage with the Attorney-General on proposed amendments to the Prostitution Act
- 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.