

I am a sex worker who lives in Sydney. I am 38 years old and I have done sex work worked in Western Australia, Queensland, South Australia, Northern Territory and Victoria. In each of these states and territories I have varying degree of protection in regards to discrimination.

I believe the Senate Committee should seriously consider recommending protection from discrimination based upon a person's occupation for inclusion in the Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Bill. This would bring the other states and territories in line with current approaches in ACT and South Australia.

No one should be discriminated against for their job.

Currently sex work is used like a political football across Australia;

- motel owners discriminate against us because of our job, throwing us out if they feel like it, resulting in at least one high profile anti-discrimination case in Qld.
- newspapers discriminate against because of our job, charging us up to 400% more for advertising, in NSW particularly. This form of discrimination was challenged and overcome in Qld and ACT due to local state/territory protections
- banks discriminate against us, refusing bank loans because we are sex workers. It is hard to quantify this, but I am aware of a number of cases. Rather than challenge it, sex workers usually keep on trying other banks until the loan is approved.
- its almost impossible to get work insurance because insurance companies discriminate also. There are a few sex workers in Australia who have succeeded in gaining insurance but it is more expensive than, for example, a beauty therapist.
- the Family Court has determined custody based upon a person's sex work status, only to result in years of custody battles and heartache. In the cases where this happened, finally, after many years, the sex worker was able to regain custody, but by then the children's lives were negatively affected forever.
- police discriminate when we are sexually assaulted, believing its 'part of our job' and less likely to take our complaints seriously. This is systemic across the country. A strong statement about this in the Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Bill would have an impact on police everywhere.
- local council candidates make sweeping statements about us during their election campaigns, simply because they want to look like they are 'tough on whores.' Its a ruse, its discrimination, and it breeds whorephobia on a local level. In NSW it is particularly rife, but unlike other states and territories, we are not protected from this form of discrimination.
- national media outlets (particularly the ABC) continue to use the word 'prostitute' even though its an outdated and stigmatised word. They don't seem to take complaints seriously. They, like many national institutions in Australia, don't understand that it is actually a crime to discriminate against us in many states and territories.

These forms of discrimination against sex workers undermine civil society in this country. Sex workers don't feel included, are not protected if we come out of the closet; there is no incentive to be open about our work. There is no incentive to participate. There is only incentive to stay hidden and be ashamed. There are about 20,000 people working in sex work at any one time. I estimate that there is at least 1 million Australians that have done sex work. Please protect us in this bill. States and Territories have tried to do a good job - its time for the Commonwealth to take the lead.

We are not asking for anything new. We are simply asking for a national approach to the rights we have been fighting for, and granted in a range of forms, across Australia, over the last 30 years of the sex worker rights movement.

If the Senate Committee recommended that discrimination based upon occupation be included in the new Federal Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Bill, as it is already in the ACT and South Australia, it would mean a lot to sex workers.

Australia leads the world on these issues. Don't let this Bill let us down.

Sincerely,

Elena Jeffreys
Sex Worker