

26 Oct 2011

A complaint to 4 Corners

Nothing About Us Without Us is an unfunded, volunteer, loose collective of sex workers who formed to ensure a sex worker voice in maintained in the efforts to keep, defend and create the decriminalisation of sex work in NSW.



We believe your reporting of trafficking for sex work in Australia was unethical, without conscience, against the best interests of migrant workers in Australia, shortsighted and incredibly damaging to the sex worker community in Australia.

1) Police corruption and DIAC harassment of sex workers as a result of your story.

We do not believe that you “uncovered” “trafficking” in the course of your “investigation.”

We believe the incidents alleged to be “trafficking” by you were not actual cases of trafficking. We know that you know that these particular incidents were about as far from trafficking as anything could be in Australia; with the only commonality with actual trafficking cases in Australia being that they involved individual sex workers of Asian backgrounds on work visas who identify as female. Yet since the 4 Corners program sex workers in a number of jurisdictions have alleged to us that Australian Federal Police are conducting raids on sex worker workplaces asking to find “sex slaves” and “trafficking” --- *knowing that there is none going on.*

Let us rephrase.

We know that corrupt police, allegedly those within the Australian Federal Police, are taking advantage of the media hype and political uncertainty

following the 4 Corners “investigation,” to harass, pressure, and conduct spoof raids on premises that they know, *as a result of their own intelligence*, are not linked to any such activity, but that they know they can get away with because of the momentum as a result of the 4 Corners reporting.

We also know that DIAC have, as a result of your show, taken advantage of the political climate, and moved in on hundreds of workplaces to check and cancel Visa’s if people are even one step out of line with the arbitrary visa conditions under which they are travelling.

Do you understand that we always see a spike in corrupt activity following sensationalist high profile media coverage of these issues? Do you understand that we always see a spike in aggressive DIAC targeting of sex work workplaces following sensationalist high profile media coverage of these issues?

Was this your intention as a result of your report?

We demand an apology from 4 Corners for unwittingly contributing to police corruption and sex worker harassment by DIAC.

2) Support for the criminalisation of sex work and the expansion of police powers as a result of your story.

Decriminalisation is the best legal framework for sex work, it has created a landscape of transparency and access to justice for sex workers in New South Wales and the ACT that is unmatched across the rest of Australia. You did not investigate this in your report.

Regardless, in the wake of the 4 Corners reporting, the increased criminalisation of sex work and increased police powers proposed in Victoria and New South Wales have all been announced, under the cover of the unfounded “allegations” made by 4 Corners.

4 Corners interviewed a sex worker who was in contact with an abolitionist anti-sex work group in Taiwan. That sex worker had wanted to come to Australia to do sex work, and has a legal right to migrate here and do so, but was deceived about their work conditions and exploited while they were here. This is not evidence of the need for criminalisation of sex work or increased police powers in Australia. It is evidence of increasing need for sex worker peer education services to be expanded to reach even more sex workers and let migrant sex workers know about their human rights.

4 Corners did not interview VIXEN or RhED in Victoria, SWOP NSW, SWOP NT, SWOP ACT, Magenta in WA, SIN in South Australia, Respect Inc in Queensland or Scarlet Alliance (national and in Tasmania). 4 Corners did not approach the Sex Workers Union and did not approach us. 4 Corners instead interviewed a tiny abolitionist, anti-sex work group in Melbourne, and a discredited Greens local politician, who ran through a series of trafficking “figures” that we all know are bullshit. This biased reporting is not evidence of the need for criminalisation of sex work or increased police powers in Australia.

4 Corners did not interview COSWAS in Taiwan, Zi Teng in Hong Kong, Giant Girls in South Korea, Empower in Thailand, or any of the other sex worker groups in Asia. This is further evidence of your biased reporting. This is not evidence of the need for criminalisation of sex work or increased police powers in Australia.

4 Corners interviewed the parents of a man who died in a murderous crime committed in relation to brothel violence in Victoria. We are sorry that man was killed. No one should be murdered. However, this is not evidence of the need for criminalisation of sex work or increased police powers in Australia. In fact, police already have massive powers in Victoria. To expand them would be totally ludicrous.

Yet Governments in Victoria and NSW are now responding to public pressure as a result of the 4 Corners program and using it to excuse their (already formulated) policies to increase police powers, criminalise sex work, and strip us of our human rights in those states.

Does 4 Corners intend to sit by and watch while our rights as sex workers are drained from each state and territory on the basis of your report?

We demand 4 Corners make a public statement that they did not intend to provide political support for Victoria or New South Wales in either the repeal of decriminalisation or increasing police powers, as this was not in the scope of your “investigation” and not an outcome that could be linked to the “findings” of the 4 Corners program.

3) “Bad” whore vs “Good” victim dichotomy.

Your show was not saved by the rhetorical intellectual bullshit sprouted by Mr Kerry O’Brien at the beginning of the show. In fact it simply exposes your lack of leg work on this issue. His introduction implied that it was ok to *only* take the abolitionist point of view because you *weren’t talking about whores, you were only talking about victims*. We feel sorry that someone

wrote such a script for Kerry, perhaps he didn't realise he was being the political patsy to your biased reporting and the political fall out that was about to ensue.

Let us educate you.

There are no "good" victims. There are no "bad" whores.

Perhaps you have missed the last 25 years of the sex worker rights movement but there is more academic deconstruction of this myth than there is evidence in all the schlock reporting ever done in Australia on mythical trafficking victim stereotyping.

We are not a species to be catalogued and separated in test tubes as a result of your prejudices and whorephobia.

A sex worker who faces bad work conditions and exploitation is still a sex worker deserving of human rights and dignity.

The incessant pathologisation of individuals who have experienced trafficking-like work conditions has poisoned Australian trafficking policy to the point and created serious human rights barriers to those who are brave enough to come forward and report trafficking crimes. Yet Kerry's introduction perpetuates this "good victim" "bad whore" myth and the bad policies it props up.

For example, magistrates making their witness protection visa's conditional on them *not doing sex work while awaiting a trial.*

Or people affected by trafficking like situations being told that *the stamp in their passport makes it illegal now for them ever to return to Australia to do sex work.*

Or migrant sex workers being told by Dept of Immigration that *due to Australian trafficking law migrants cannot legally work here.*

All of these actions by authorities in Australia are based on the myth that Kerry so confidently trotted out at the beginning of your show.

This logic is like telling a person who got held up in a bank robbery that they can never legally have a bank account again.

Or telling a person who was injured during a car crash that for their own good they can now no longer legally have a drivers license. Or ever travel again in a moving vehicle.

Or, as New Zealand has done, *criminalise ALL sex workers who are not New Zealand citizens*. For “their own good.”

Your show, its ridiculous promotions, shady re-dramatisations of imaginary events, exploitation of a dead mans parents’ grief and hopeful imaginations of their “heroic” son, use of quotes from Jennifer Burns on the advertising saying that most Australians don’t realise the extent of slavery *when Jennifer was talking about slavery that does not occur in sex work* yet you used to quote as if to say that she meant sex work, spooky music, your use of a spokesperson who has been discredited so many times we can’t even believe you bothered to interview them in the first place (and we all know who that is) and the fact that you couldn’t even fit into the story ONE counterpoint of view, leads us to demand:

That you remove the promotions, text, and full copy of your 4 Corners program on trafficking for sex work from the ABC website in an effort to prevent further damage and misinformation on this issue.

And that

Sally Neighbour and Kerry O’Brien be required to undergo a full weeks training on sex worker human rights issues, including trainers from Empower Foundation in Thailand, at the ABC’s expense, to ensure that this misguided “helping” of sex workers, which has actually irrevocably damaged migrant sex worker human rights and any possible useful trafficking policies in this country, doesn’t happen at the ABC again.

Yours sincerely,

A group of very angry sex workers

On behalf of Nothing About Us Without Us

CC: Consumer Affairs Victoria

CC: VIXEN

CC: RhED

CC: Scarlet Alliance, Australian Sex Workers Association

CC: CopWatch Melbourne