

26 October 2011

An open letter to the Australian Federal Police, Trafficking Team,

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 have recently had communication from our extended membership in Victoria that a series of unjustified and potentially corrupt Australian Federal Police raids have been occurring in sex work workplaces in response to the recent 4 Corners program alleging trafficking is rife across Australia in brothels.

Sex workers may not be calling the dob-in line, but we are certainly a member of the 'partnership' in the trafficking response, and have shared information on where trafficking ISN'T happening, and how sex workers rights, including migrant sex workers, are protected.

We have a number of questions for the Australian Federal Police Trafficking Team that we would like answered.

We want to know what the Australian Federal Police Trafficking Team are doing to counterbalance the damaging anti-trafficking sensationalist lying media in this country, the steady erosion of our rights, and the corruption within your ranks which will only grow if the Victorian and New South Wales Governments get their way.

1) Why are you conducting knee-jerk reaction raids in response to media and political pressure born from the sensationalist 4 Corners, Age and Sydney Morning Herald coverage of imaginary “trafficking” incidents in Australia that you know to be false?

We know that you know that the incidents alleged by 4 Corners 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 programme 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.

What is the Australian Federal Police Trafficking team doing about this police harassment and potential corruption?

Do you realise that corrupt police action at this point is alienating & hurting sex workers in Australia?

Do you realise that corrupt police motives are compromising sex workers privacy, and making sex workers feel physically unsafe in their workplaces?

Do you understand that we always see a spike in corrupt activity following sensationalist high profile media coverage of these issues?

Is there anything the Australian Federal Police can do to prevent the unwarranted and unwelcome harassment of sex workers?

It is possible that some of our extended membership would like to talk to you about their personal experience in these raids. We offer to you an opportunity to discuss it more.

2) Why is Chris McDevitt of the Australian Federal Police Trafficking Team promoting the idea of the criminalisation of sex worker clients in Australia?

We know that you know that your best intelligence about actual crimes against sex workers in Australia comes from sex worker clients. Yet your spokesperson, Chris McDevitt, in the sensationalist 4 Corners “investigation”, and quoted in hundreds of media articles online and in newsprint, claimed that he would love to arrest clients of migrant sex workers affected by trafficking.

Sex worker clients have offered a lot of information to you over the years which have saved a lot of resources within investigations. By claiming to be anti-client you like you sympathise with the Swedish model of criminalisation.

Do you intend to alienate and distance yourself from the very people that migrant sex workers may lean upon in order to get outside help and support?

Do you commonly let sensationalist media frighten you into saying things that are illogical to your own interests, and against the interests of the people you claim to assist; migrant sex workers affected by trafficking?

Do you realise that this will send shockwaves through the community of sex worker clients in Australia? And send them a message NOT to contact you in the case of coming into contact with a migrant sex worker affected by trafficking?

We realise that the political implication of Chris NOT saying such a thing on the clearly biased and agenda driven 4 Corners program would have resulted in him sounding like he condones the decriminalisation of clients of migrant sex workers affected by trafficking in Australia. But he does, so why did he lie about it on national television?

Do the Australian Federal Police Trafficking Team realise that Chris’ statement was providing oxygen to the horrendous police powers proposed by the Victorian Government, police powers that would see the criminalisation of clients who see sex workers affected by trafficking?

Why does the Australian Federal Police support a law that will create an intelligence vacuum in Australia?

3) Why has the Australian Federal Police Trafficking team remained silent in the wake of the misinformed, whorephobic, sensationalist, agenda driven drivel that 4 Corners aired?

You have a massive team of paid staff to work on this issue in Australia. You know that decriminalisation is the best legal framework for sex work, and you know this because of the impact it has had on investigating crimes against sex workers in Australia. You know that 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.

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

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 evidence of their agenda driven and 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. However, nothing in that interview provided 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.

Why do you stand by silent? How can you stomach leaving Scarlet Alliance and its membership as the lone voice in the entire country defending sex worker rights and pointing out that the laws this media reporting is being touted as “prompting” are against the best interests of everyone, including police? Are you so spineless that you would sit by and watch while our rights as sex workers are drained from each state and territory on the basis of bad media reporting and abolitionist lies?

You know that the supposed “un-prosecuted” “trafficking” case that 4 Corners allege happened is a figment of a dead mans wishful thinking and his parents’ imagination. You know that the political fall out that is occurring right now might take 100 years of sex worker activism and struggle to undo. You know that the last 22 years of sex worker organising on trafficking issues has been invisibilised in the Australian psyche as a result of 4 Corners spooky music and shady dramatisations. Will you stand up for us? Or will you let your corrupt elements continue to exploit our bad media fortunes, harass and raid us for no reason, destroy all trust that ever existed between sex workers and police, and rub your hands with glee as state police are given more pointless and damaging powers that will further marginalise and silence us sex workers.

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