I am writing in response to the call for submissions regarding the upcoming inquiry into prostitution: as a private individual who has employed the services of escorts on numerous occasions, and as a campaigner for the rights of sex workers and their clients.

Firstly, it has to be pointed out that the terms of reference are causing alarm amongst both sex workers and their clients. "Whether criminal sanction in relation to prostitution should continue to fall more heavily on those who sell sex, rather than those who buy it" - surely criminal sanction in relation to prostitution should fall upon third parties who exploit sex workers (especially unwilling ones), rather than on either sex workers OR their clients? The wording doesn't seem to allow for this option.

Secondly, "What the implications are for prostitution-related offences of the Crown Prosecution Service's recognition of prostitution as violence against women" - no reference to this "recognition" is provided, and the language implies that it is uncontroversial that prostitution IS violence against women. While it is certainly true that a significant number of sex workers have experienced violence at some point, the vast majority of clients treat sex workers with great respect for understandable reasons (to put it bluntly, we are very grateful to them for the service they provide), and this is the opinion of the great majority of sex workers themselves, whose opinions on this are being disregarded by those who would prefer to believe otherwise for ideological reasons. On various occasions I have been offered extra time, and even free sessions - why would these women unnecessarily volunteer to experience more of this "violence"? Interestingly, when you compare the proportion of paid-sex encounters that have gone badly with the proportion of "normal" women who have experienced violence in a sexual context from far fewer sexual partners, it quickly becomes clear that men who pay for sex are far better behaved than average men - there is far more "violence against women" in normal sexual encounters than in paid-for ones!

Thirdly, "What impact the Modern Slavery Act 2015 has had to date on trafficking for purposes of prostitution, what further action is planned, and how effectively the impact is being measured." This is a semantic minefield. When used to describe the sex industry, the phrase "human trafficking" typically refers to any movement of sex workers from one country or region to another, usually facilitated by another party: but with complete disregard for whether or not the sex worker consents to this, disregard for what the other party's role is, and disregard for whether or not illegal immigration is involved. The implication is that unwilling "sex slaves" are being illegally shipped into this country by sadistic gangs, but in the vast majority of cases these are women who come here voluntarily from Eastern Europe (which is in the EU, therefore not an illegal-immigration issue) to earn far more money here than they could at home, and who may or may not be employing the services of a "fixer" of some sort. In other words, we should first be establishing that "human trafficking" in this context is actually a problem that needs to be addressed at all! It would be better to avoid the use of such an emotive and poorly-defined term. "Forced prostitution" is the primary issue to be addressed, with "illegal immigration" as a secondary issue for the minority of migrant sex workers who come from outside the EU.

Fourthly, "Whether further measures are necessary, including legal reforms, to:

- Assist those involved in prostitution to exit from it
- Increase the extent to which exploiters are held to account
- Discourage demand which drives commercial sexual exploitation"

- The first two are obviously desirable, and surely few would argue against them - I certainly wouldn't want to spend time with an unhappy prostitute, and I'd be furious if any of the escorts I visit were being exploited. Which makes it
all the more suspicious that the third point is being included as if it was somehow comparable. It is plainly a veiled reference to the so-called "Nordic model", the criminalisation of the purchase of sexual services. Yet there is no reference to the alternative path preferred by sex workers themselves, and recommended by organisations such as Amnesty International and the World Health Organisation after extensive research - the "New Zealand model" of decriminalisation. How about adding another line, "Reducing criminalisation which drives the industry underground and exposes sex workers to unnecessary danger"? And while we’re at it, how about changing "Assist those involved in prostitution to exit from it" to add the phrase "...if they wish to do so", rather than simply trying to drive them out of business regardless?

The widespread opinion of those in the industry is that this is simply another attempt to introduce the "Nordic model", rather than properly discuss the alternatives. If enacted, such legislation won’t really affect me personally, because I will simply ignore it: I do not respect unjust laws, and my chances of actually being caught are negligible (even Sweden seems to have pretty much given up on this now, and our police have far more serious matters to attend to than persecuting those engaging in consensual sexual activities behind closed doors). I am more concerned about the effect that it will have on sex workers, and I’m by nature a "science nerd" who objects to ideologies that contradict reality. Doubtless others have told you this already, but there is actually no evidence at all that the Nordic model has reduced prostitution in Sweden or anywhere else: it is sometimes credited with reducing on-street prostitution, but this was already in steep decline across Europe thanks to the Internet and the mobile phone. Reliable information about "human trafficking" (whatever that term actually means) is now impossible to obtain in Sweden since the industry was driven underground: indications are that activity has increased but convictions have decreased, and that the policy has turned out to be an unmitigated disaster which has now largely been abandoned by the Swedish police.

In this country, we do not have any significant problem with forced prostitution: police investigations keep failing to find any women actually coerced into the profession. The few cases that surface generally involve vulnerable women "passed around" within certain tightly-knit ethnic communities: such women are never made available to the general public for very obvious reasons. For the handful of women who are indeed being coerced, clients like me are their best hope of escape, but the tide seems to be turning against us. The Nordic model has now been introduced in Northern Ireland, ostensibly to reduce the number of cases of human trafficking there, which previously stood at precisely zero. Here in England, two big police investigations (Pentameter and Pentameter Two) which have actually resulted in hundreds of arrests for "trafficking" have unearthed precisely zero cases of forced prostitution. Since 2010, it has been a specific criminal offence to pay for sex with a woman who is under coercion, but apparently this law has never actually been needed since.

This is all due to a crusade by those ideologically opposed to the mere existence of prostitution: the hyper-religious, and a certain radical subset of the feminist movement (though many feminists regard prostitution as empowering, which of course it is). The latter are particularly troubling. They include Melissa Farley, notorious for generating bogus statistics based on highly unrepresentative cherry-picked samples (such as calculating the "average age of women entering prostitution" by sampling ONLY underage prostitutes, and trawling women’s refuges while declining to speak to successful escorts). Largely because of Farley and her ilk, an awful lot of people seem quite certain that most sex workers are coerced, most are addicted to drugs (based on a small sample of Mexican streetwalkers in San Francisco in the 1980’s if I recall correctly), most are mentally unstable (which is why the poor dears keep saying silly things like "we choose to do this"), and so forth - be alert for the phrase "prostituted persons", which implies that they have no free will. They even try to claim that prostitution is an unethical exploitation of poor prostitutes by rich clients, even though the average sex worker earns far more than the average client!
Among those driven by this ideological crusade, even those who claim to have the interests of sex workers at heart very quickly turn against those who refuse to repent: in Sweden, prostitution is deemed to be "self-harm" and women who refuse to quit are deemed to be unfit mothers by default. Sweden has the dubious distinction of being the only country in Europe where the government routinely kidnapsthe children of political dissidents for ideological reasons: Swedish sex workers are forced to send their children abroad to be raised by foreign nannies. Other examples of bigotry and harassment of sex workers by the government in both Sweden and Norway are rife, including confiscation of phones and laptops as "evidence", denial of access to state services, and pressuring landlords to evict sex workers (e.g. Norway's "Operation Homeless": yes, the Norwegian police are actually deliberately forcing sex workers to become homeless and work the streets!)

This is what happens when a very important line is crossed: the government decides that it has the right to dictate what people do with their own bodies and who they have sex with, regardless of the wishes of those involved, and that to believe otherwise must be a form of insanity. This sort of thing CAN happen here, and in Northern Ireland legislation opposed by 98% of sex workers has now been enacted by the Christian-fundamentalist DUP (with the odd collusion of Sinn Fein, despite initial resistance). Even though we don't yet have such a law in place here in England, the mindset that accompanies it is already in place, as was shown recently in the infamous "Soho clearances": foreign sex workers were baselessly labelled "trafficking victims" (despite a failure to find any actual traffickers) and thrown out onto the streets so that property developers could seize their apartments. Eventually a celebrity campaigner found an honest judge who put a stop to it, but no formal corruption charges were made against the police and judges involved in the scandal.

...Whereas the main complaints against the New Zealand model are that it would lead to a massive increase in prostitution (except that it didn't) and "human trafficking" (that vague term again, and an unsupported claim). But surely it wouldn't be unreasonable to suppose that a safe and successful industry MIGHT attract more people to join it? By presenting this scenario as "A Bad Thing" without explaining why, the opponents of the New Zealand model expose their agenda: they are ideologically opposed to prostitution, regardless of the welfare or wishes of those involved.

By the way, I sincerely hope that Brooke Magnanti's "The Sex Myth" (available on Kindle) is required reading for everyone on this committee. As both a former sex worker and a genuine research scientist, she is the most authoritative source there is (and worth contrasting with Rachel Moran, against whom allegations of fraud and plagiarism have been made, along with connections with some extremely unsavoury people - though at least the woman she's accused of stealing her story from did NOT blame her clients for her predicament and is NOT a supporter of the Nordic model). The usual claims of the abolitionists are that women such as Brooke are "unrepresentative", and that slaves chained to radiators are more typical of the profession: but my own experience as a client is that the "happy hooker" is the norm, not the exception.

When MEP Mary Honeyball rallied support for the Nordic model in the European parliament (using the bogus statistics of Farley and others, plus false claims of the effectiveness of the policy in Sweden), the rest of the British contingent voted against by a two-thirds majority - among those who voted, which frankly wasn't many. The motion passed anyhow, due to the support of a minority of MEP's across Europe, outvoting the smaller minority who voted against. Multiple attempts to introduce this dangerous crackpottery here have been shot down, but its supporters are presumably gambling that they only have to get lucky once, relying on the disinterest of the majority: as the saying goes, "the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing". Sex workers are already marginalised, and their clients even more so: the supporters of the Nordic model are determined to ignore and suppress them further.
Of course there are a few women (and some men, but mostly women) who have had horrific experiences with prostitution, only a fool would deny that. Not everyone has what it takes to thrive in this trade (actually enjoying casual sex with strangers is a sexual preference that a minority of people have), and some enter it for the wrong reasons: crippling financial problems, or coercion. But the Nordic model does nothing to address these problems, it won’t suddenly solve whatever is driving these people into the industry - you don’t have to introduce this legislation to provide help to those who actually want to quit, and coercion is of course illegal already (and will remain so under the New Zealand model). And any effect on demand would be minimal - according to a recent poll, 16% of clients would consider giving up, which makes me one of the 84% who will ensure that demand continues. But despite what its advocates claim, the Nordic model isn’t aimed at those women. It is aimed squarely at the perceived problem of the "happy hooker" and her clients, engaged in harmless and mutually-rewarding but "immoral" fun. There are no suggested exemptions for having sex with consenting, non-"trafficked" prostitutes... and you really need to ask yourselves why that is.

- Simon Penhaligon