We are a community group who campaign to improve visibility and support for LGBTQ+ people in rural areas and we wish to make a submission to the Inquiry into the regulation of prostitution.

We are deeply worried by the terms of this inquiry, and its failure to listen to the best evidence around the regulation of prostitution. To present the options as either the criminalization of the seller or the buyer ignores that decriminalization has been shown to be the model of regulation which best protects those in the sex industry and society as a whole. This was the conclusion reached by Amnesty International (among others) after intensive research into the situation in a number of countries.

With specific reference to the groups we support, many LGBTQ+ youth end up homeless and vulnerable to sexual exploitation, the current criminalization of street prostitution exacerbates this, meaning many end up with criminal records, for simply trying to earn the money to survive. Further criminalization of the buyers hinders outreach, support, and lessens the chances of victims of exploitation reporting crimes to the police. This is an exceptionally marginalised and vulnerable group, homeless LGBTQ+ youth already have exceptionally poor health outcomes, adding further penalization will make this situation worse. Only decriminalization, or
tolerance zones as practiced in Leeds can ensure that these young people are not placed in further harm.

Secondly we object to the framing of prostitution as violence against women. People of all genders sell sexual services, it is often vulnerable trans young people who are the most at risk, we hear many stories of trans young people turning to survival sex work after family rejection. To ignore the risks they face, by framing prostitution as an issue which only affects cis women is we believe contrary to the provisions of the Equalities Act and a step back in supporting LGBTQ+ people in their access to society.

We ask that you reframe this inquiry, into an investigation of how to introduce the New Zealand model of decriminalization of sex work, as the model which best supports LGBTQ+ people, including those vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

We are happy to discuss the position of rural LGBTQ+ people, and why criminalization of clients will harm them further, and can be contacted on ruralrainbow@gmail.com