

OBJECT and Fawcett Society

Press release from the Fawcett Society (1) and Object (2)
For immediate release

Victory for campaigners as Government announces reforms to lap dancing club licensing

On the eve of the Queen's speech the Government has announced changes to the way lap dancing clubs are to be licensed (3), following an intensive 9-month campaign by the Fawcett Society and Object (4).

Lap dancing clubs are currently licensed under the 2003 Licensing Act in the same way as cafes and pubs – with a Premises License. This has led to the number of lap dancing clubs in the UK doubling since 2004 to over 300 clubs. And whilst campaigners have been urging the Government to tighten licensing laws, the spread of lap dancing clubs and problems experienced by local communities have continued unabated:

- Since May 2008 a new lap dancing venue has opened every week (5)
- There have been unsuccessful challenges to lap dancing club license applications in 10 localities
- There are at least 2 ongoing challenges to lap dancing club license applications

The Government plans to reform legislation so lap dancing clubs are licensed with a Sex Encounter Establishment license – like sex shops and sex cinemas – as Fawcett and Object have been calling for. This will enable local authorities to apply greater controls and restrictions to lap dancing clubs, and will enable local people to have a greater say in whether lap dancing clubs can open in their area.

Responding to the Government's announcement, Dr Katherine Rake, Director of the Fawcett Society, said:

"This is a victory for feminist campaigners who have exposed the inherent sexism of lap dancing clubs. Women and men country-wide have rallied against the seep of the sex industry into our high-streets and challenged the notion that it is acceptable to treat women as sex objects.

"Lap dancing clubs normalise the sexual objectification of women, and areas around the clubs can become 'no-go' areas for women. All women have the right to be treated with dignity and respect and to feel safe in public spaces. We applaud the Government for heeding the public's concerns. Sex Encounter Establishment licensing will enable local authorities to control and regulate lap dancing clubs, and enable local communities to claim back their high-streets."

Dr Sasha Rakoff, Director of Object said:

"We greatly welcome the Government's announcement that lap dancing clubs are to be licensed in the same way as sex shops and sex cinemas. This is a common sense measure which will empower local communities to control lap dancing clubs in their area and close a loophole that sees such venues boxed into the same system as restaurants and cafes. The loophole has seen the number of lap dancing clubs rocket, with a new venue opening virtually every week. Yet lap dancing clubs are not just 'harmless fun'. They promote gender stereotypes and attitudes that say it is acceptable to see women as sex objects, not real people.

"The current licensing regime has not provided a framework for community and equality objectives to be considered and a string of club openings have gone against the wishes of local people. The new system will tip the balance back in the favour of local communities and allow gender equality objectives to be brought to the table in licensing hearings. It is a crucial measure which has widespread backing".

For further information and to request interviews please contact Kat Banyard (Fawcett Society) on 020 7253 2598 or 07775 855037; or contact Sandrine Leveque (Object) on 07975 897005

Notes to editors

- (1) The Fawcett Society is the UK's leading campaign for women's rights.
www.fawcettsociety.org.uk
- (2) Object is a women's rights organisation which campaigns against the objectification of women in the media and popular culture. www.object.org.uk
- (3) In the Government's 'Fair Rules for Local Communities' strategy published on the eve of the Queen's Speech they announce lap dancing clubs will be licensed as 'sex establishments':
<http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page17647>
- (4) Key moments in the campaign included the following:
 - a. 18/6/08: a 10 Minute Rule Bill was introduced by Robert Blackman-Woods MP (City of Durham) calling for lapdance clubs to be licensed as Sex Encounter Establishments. The Bill was unopposed and received cross-party support
 - b. 18/6/08: The Department for Culture, Media, and Sport began a consultation with all local authorities in England and Wales on whether they wanted greater powers to control and regulate lap dancing clubs. 75% of responding local authorities asked for such powers.
 - c. 21/9/08: The Rt. Hon. Jacqui Smith announced at the Labour Party Conference that the Government would grant local people a greater say in stopping lap dancing clubs opening: http://www.labour.org.uk/jacqui_smith_speech,2008-09-21
- (5) 'A Growing Tide Update: the Need to Reform Licensing of Lap dancing clubs', Object, December 2008