

DR. CAROLINE LUCAS

Green Party
for the South East of England

Anna Zaborska MEP
Chair - Womens Rights and Gender Equality Committee
European Parliament
Bât. Altiero Spinelli 09E205
Rue Wiertz 60
B1047 Brussels
Belgium

June 5th 2008

Dear Anna,

In the UK, lap dancing clubs must apply for a Premises License in order to operate. This is the same type of license required by a bar or café, so the system prevents local authorities from treating a license application for a lap dance club any differently to one from eg a coffee shop. Yet I would argue that lap dance clubs are inherently different - they are part of the commercial sex industry, not the ordinary leisure industry. The sexual objectification of women is rife in our society and lap dancing clubs contribute to this situation, undermining efforts to promote gender equality. Areas surrounding lap dance clubs can become 'no-go' areas for women, and individuals working in the clubs face extremely poor working conditions.

I am supporting a campaign run by the Fawcett Society to change the 2003 Licensing Act, so that lap dancing clubs must be licensed as Sex Encounter Establishments. Classification in this way would allow local authorities to regulate such premises effectively. This would include measures designed to better protect women working in lap dancing clubs by, for example, controlling the presence of 'private booths' in the clubs, and the required distance between performers and customers.

I hope the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality will join me in supporting efforts to challenge the ongoing commodification of women, as demonstrated by lap dancing clubs. More specifically, I would urge the Committee to investigate whether the current UK licensing laws are a breach of European legislation.

Under Council Directive 76/207/EEC, member states have a responsibility to promote equality of treatment in the work place. The loophole that allows lap dancing clubs to avoid being licensed as Sexual Encounter Establishments creates an inequality between men and women employed by the clubs. The EU directive states that men and women must be guaranteed the same working conditions yet this is not being upheld at present, because women are required to carry out specific roles without adequate protection for their safety. Men employed by lap dancing clubs as eg security or bar staff are not expected to perform the same roles, so, by implication are not exposed to the same risks. Women are effectively treated differently to men because there is no obligation to protect them from the hazards of their job.

Lap dancing clubs also perpetuate discrimination more widely in that they contribute to the sexual objectification of women. With over 300 lapdance clubs already operating in the UK under little regulation, we must seek to protect those women who work in them, given the increased risks they face in such a sexualised workplace. It is absurd that an establishment which makes its income from the 'sale' of women can be established in any town or city in the same way as a coffee shop, with no additional provisions for worker safety.

I urge the Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee to give this serious issue due consideration and look forward to hearing back from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Caroline Lucas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Caroline Lucas - Green Party MEP for South East England.