

Man found guilty of raping sex worker in Blenheim motel

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A man has been found guilty of the "brutal" rape of a sex worker in a Blenheim motel in 2013, sending a "clear message" that consent is as important in sex work as it is in personal relationships, police say.

The verdict, delivered in the Nelson District Court to Jason Brent Ecclestone on Friday, has been applauded by police and the New Zealand Prostitutes' Collective.

Ecclestone has been convicted and remanded in custody, to be sentenced in the High Court. The Crown indicated it would ask for a preventative detention sentence.

Ecclestone was found guilty of all seven charges put to him: rape, abduction for sexual connection, threatening to kill and four charges of sexual violation by unlawful sexual connection.

During the trial the court heard taped interviews from both the complainant - a sex worker from Thailand who has name suppression, and the accused, who had prior convictions the Crown argued were of a similar nature.

When the jury delivered its verdict Judge Allan Roberts told them he "wholeheartedly" agreed with their finding.

The jury had to decide if the sex between the two was consensual or not, and whether Ecclestone held a belief at the time that it was. They deliberated for three and a half hours.

The prostitute said that Ecclestone paid to have sex with her and, for the first hour, it was consensual, but he continued to have "rough" sex with her in various positions against her will for another three hours in the early hours of May 17, 2013, and that Ecclestone told her he would kill her if she told police about the rape.

Ecclestone had told police he called a phone number listed in a personal advertisement in a newspaper and asked to meet the woman at a Blenheim park to see what she looked like. They met in the afternoon and arranged to meet at Raynar Motor Inn later that night, he said. He claimed the sex was consensual, and the woman went to police when he underpaid her.

Marlborough detective constable Wayne Fransen said the pair had entered a contractual arrangement but Ecclestone's behaviour went well beyond that, and it was a prolonged series of abuse, threats and violence.

"This woman was engaged in a legitimate business and she has the same rights with regard to her personal safety as any other person.

"When it comes to sexual relationships the message 'no means no' is as relevant with a sex workers as it is with any other person."

He commended the woman for her bravery in coming forward to police. He said as a result of this, he believed she had prevented other women from becoming victims to Ecclestone.

"I hope other women in her situation will see that these matters are taken seriously by police," he said.

"Any man who thinks he can take advantage of women working in the sex industry can expect to be held accountable for their actions."

New Zealand Prostitutes' Collective regional co-ordinator Anna Reed said she applauded the woman for going to the police.

"We always encourage people to report violence against them to police. When people are brave enough to do it and know their rights - that's to be applauded."

She said the collective heard about the attack at the time and tried to make contact with the woman, but did not hear from her.

She said they were willing to offer support to her.

Reed said it was important cases like this were made public.

"The more publicity and people hear about them, the more likely they are to report violence, and the less likely, hopefully, they are to perpetuate it."

A sentence date is yet to be decided.

- Stuff

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/nelson-mail/68020778/man-found-guilty-of-raping-sex-worker-in-blenheim-motel>