



Sydney's Night-Time Economy Youth Consultation Forum

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Contents

1	INTRODUCTION	1
1.1	Participation in the Forum	1
1.2	Format of the discussion	1
2	OUTCOMES OF THE FORUM: WHAT WE HEARD	2
2.1	Discussion 1: Young people’s experiences of Sydney’s NTE	2
2.2	Discussion 2: A safe night-time economy	5
2.3	Discussion 3: A vibrant night-time economy	8
2.4	Closing comments	10
3	NEXT STEPS	11
APPENDICES		
A	Forum agenda & background paper	13

1 Introduction

This report documents the outcomes a Youth Consultation Forum held on 10 May 2016 to support the Night-Time Economy Roundtable convened by the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing within the Department of Justice. The purpose of the Forum was to explore young people's perspectives on developing a safe, strong and vibrant night-time economy for Sydney. The Forum took place between 6.00-7.30pm at the Sydney Opera House (Utzon Room) and was facilitated by Elton Consulting. The Forum agenda and background paper are attached in Appendix A.

1.1 Participation in the Forum

As part of Roundtable meeting two, Roundtable members were invited to provide assistance with participant recruitment for the Youth Forum. The Youth Forum involved 15 young people aged 18-30 identified with the assistance of Roundtable members from the following organisations, through their respective networks:

- » Committee for Sydney
- » Music NSW
- » Keep Sydney Open.

Feedback from the Youth Forum provides a snapshot of the views of those young people who took part in the session. It is important to note that feedback from this session does not attempt to be in any way representative of the views of young people more broadly.

Participants included a mix of young men and women with a wide range of experiences and interests. Many lived or worked in the city centre / Kings Cross. Several had current or previous experience working in the night-time economy – in bars, clubs, hospitality, music and culture. Many described themselves as users of Sydney's night-time economy. The session was also attended by Roundtable participants Tyson Koh (Keep Sydney Open), Emily Collins (Music NSW) and Carlita Warren (Restaurant and Catering Association).

1.2 Format of the discussion

The lead facilitator, Brian Elton, welcomed all participants to the Forum and introduced Samantha Torres, Deputy Secretary Arts and Culture, NSW Justice. Samantha Torres provided an overview of the broader Roundtable process and context for the Forum – specifically to hear the perspectives of young people in relation to a safe and vibrant night-time economy for Sydney's city centre and Kings Cross. She shared her recent experiences at the Night Mayor's Summit in Amsterdam and commented on the importance of the arts and culture as part of a diverse offering in Sydney's night-time economy.

Young people were involved in small group discussions, facilitated by three young consultants. They were invited to provide feedback on:

- » Their experiences of Sydney's night-time economy
- » A safe night-time economy
- » A vibrant night-time economy.

The Forum outcomes are summarised in section 2 of this report.

2 Outcomes of the Forum: What we heard

2.1 Discussion 1: Young people's experiences of Sydney's NTE

"The notion of a pedestrian-friendly city is really important...because... pedestrian-wise, you can immerse yourself in the city. You can go here and here. It's so charming when there are people on the street... My fondest memories of going out are meeting people in the street. That's literally how I met most of my friends."

"The attitude of 'you should have planned more' is frustrating...Sydney's a difficult place to live. It's so expensive. We're all about 30 [so we know better], but people who are 18 just think that Sydney has just always been boring."

"What happened to the joy of life? We've lost the beauty of discovery. There's not really an opportunity for things to unfold in a way that they used to...for that spontaneity [when going out in Sydney after dark]."

"Nothing attracts me to Kings Cross because there's nothing left to be attracted to... There were some excellent venues there, but I haven't been there since I was 18...Kings Cross is in decline."

Participants were invited to provide feedback on the following questions:

- » **What attracts you to the city centre and Kings Cross at night?**
- » **How often do you visit the city centre and Kings Cross at night?**
- » **How do you get there / get home?**

Table 2:

- » Attractions include the mix of cultural opportunities like music but also food, small bars, places that offer vibrancy, diversity, choice and are easily accessed – so you can go out for a meal, drink, entertainment, etc all in the one area.
- » Live music found at venues such as Plan B (city centre), The Standard Bowl (Darlinghurst) and Oxford Art Factory (Darlinghurst) is a big drawcard for most of the young people in this group. However, it was noted that young people only usually attend when a specific artist is showing, rather than on a regular basis (as it once was).
- » It was unanimous that Kings Cross is 'dying' and therefore no one in the group currently visits Kings Cross after 6pm.
- » Most young people in this group spend time in the city centre with friends and colleagues after dark about five times a week. Some go out at night during the week, while others only go out at night on the weekend.

- » Most spend time in the city after work – which could be anything from 6pm-11pm (ie during the evening or later at night). Those who work in the city during the week are less likely to go out in the city at night on the weekend.
- » Young people in this group use Uber, public transport and walking to get around the city centre – whichever mode is the cheapest and most time efficient.
- » Ideas for how people might use the city are changing. There is an inability to find food after a certain time of night, which reflects the changing night-time economy. Young people want to have more choice / options, particularly after 10pm (for those who finish work later).

Table 3:

- » Going to Kings Cross was like a 'rite of passage' for us as young people coming in from the suburbs – it was how you'd experience your city for the first time. "I met a lot of my friends on the street, not necessarily in a venue. I always felt pretty safe...Our group talked about how those options are not available any more. You could go from club to club, go to a café or get a slice of pizza [but you can't do that anymore because of the lockout laws]."
- » Most young people in this group do not spend time in the city or Kings Cross at night during the week or at weekends. One participant who works in the city goes out there on a Friday night, but would not make the effort to go out there on the weekend.
- » Participants thought that the range of options that would attract them to these places – such as dining, small bars, street food, live music and events – are not available. "The CBD is just a CBD – there's no culture."
- » Young people in this group commented that Sydney does big events really well, such as Vivid Festival and night noodle markets (in Hyde Park), and that these events attract them to the city. Participants particularly liked how these events "open" streets and generate "street life," something that was thought to be missing from the regular night time economy.
- » There are lots more brekky places opening up around the city centre and Kings Cross. Unused spaces in Kings Cross and the CBD could work as a platform for events and activities, such as markets and live music. It was thought that these unused spaces might be a hangover from the lockout with people reluctant to start new things up.

Table 1:

- » It was noted that many of the points raised by the first two groups were also discussed by this group. Feedback was provided on further issues raised, as follows.
- » In trying to take the focus away from Kings Cross – individual villages like Surry Hills and Woolloomooloo have lost their soul – both for the people who live there and for people who visit those areas.
- » For young people under 21 years of age, that sense of "finding one's identity through a sense of playfulness" has been removed. Young people going out at night have to "watch the clock" and have limited choice about what they can do. "The city is not just sad, it's embarrassing. We're a great city, but that's being squashed."
- » Participants in this group use the city and Kings Cross in different ways and at different times of the evening and night. As well as going to Kings Cross night clubs, young people want to go to a coffee shop at 2am. They're not intoxicated or crazy – they just want to go somewhere and chill out.
- » Participants noted that the city and Kings Cross are more accessible by public transport than other areas, however services stop earlier than when people want to go home.

- » The sun goes down late in Sydney in summer, and people going out at night want to be able to start their night later. “You feel you have to plan your night from that point. You want to go home for a while, then go out at say 11pm, but you can’t do that anymore. It’s lost its spontaneity. Everything is so rigid and planned.”
- » From a dollar perspective – the NTE has not suffered because Chinese tourism is still big here, but we’re embarrassed to take international visitors out at night here, because there’s nothing happening.



2.2 Discussion 2: A safe night-time economy

"I'll catch public transport if there's a lot of people around, but I've started catching Ubers much more because of a safety issue."

"Kings Cross felt safer because there were lots of people around. I was recently there at 3am and there was no one around, so I didn't feel safe."

"I can go and get pissed at 8am [when some bottle shops open], but not after 10pm, so that's just ridiculous."

Participants were invited to provide feedback on the following questions:

- » **How safe do you feel in the city centre and Kings Cross?**
- » **Are there any places / spaces that you actively avoid because of safety concerns?**
- » **Do you have any suggestions for improving night time safety in the city centre and Kings Cross / particular areas?**

Table 1:

- » The number of Police / amount of surveillance in venues and at festivals has increased, but not in the original danger zones (on the streets). This increased presence makes those places feel uncomfortable. Better allocation of police resources is required to better meet existing need.
- » The type of Police who are on the street is also an issue. Police are not seen as members of the community, as they may be in other areas like Newtown, where it is felt police exercise more discretion. "The riot squad on the street [in the city / Kings Cross] makes the street feel like a war zone. It's quite confronting."
- » The vibe you get from security guards at venues is very negative and not very welcoming.
- » We feel less safe now because there are less people around – because safety comes in numbers and with diversity. If you see couples, families and women around you tend to feel safer. The reduced number and range of people around has negatively impacted on our feelings of safety.

Table 2:

- » This group noted that they had very similar comments on safety – particularly that safety in numbers is lacking in the city centre and Kings Cross – with these areas now feeling less safe than previously.
- » There is an increased police presence in the city centre and Kings Cross. "The increased police presence feels suffocating at times, as opposed to the lack of people around. Kings Cross feels quite dead now."
- » There is a lot of animosity between police, patrons and venues. Venues work hard to minimise violence. "The 'us vs them' mentality needs to end. You feel like a police officer is there to take steps to arrest you, not help you home if you've had a few drinks."
- » There seems to be a lack of trust (of young people) by security staff at venues. For instance, they tend to assume that a young person with red eyes has been drinking, rather than being open to the idea that this might simply be from working all day.
- » Members of the group steer clear of venues such as Kit and Kaboodle and Scruffy Murphies because they regard these venues as being particularly unsafe.

- » There is competition for resources late at night – “the Hunger Games” / the “1.30am War Zone”. There seems to be a concentration of people who all want the same thing at the same time – such as food and transport – but not enough of these to go around.
- » Amsterdam has implemented 24/7 liquor licenses for bars. This positive initiative means bars have staggered closing times, so that people can get home in their own time. Sydney used to have this, with midnight, 2am and 24 hour liquor licenses. Also, people pre-load now because they think their night will end earlier. Being around people who have been pre-loading also makes you feel less safe when you go out.
- » There was some agreement among other young people in the room about pre-loading, but two commented that this practice probably has more to do with the high cost of alcohol than anything else. One commented that the cost of alcoholic drinks is only increasing due to venues doing it tough.
- » Suggestions for improving night time safety in the city centre and Kings Cross include: handing out water on the street, allowing food trucks to operate in the area, staggering the closing times of venues and ensuring sufficient availability of public transport.

Table 3:

- » Young people in this group noted that public transport feels unsafe, particularly without as many people around. It was suggested that an increased operator presence on public transport, and particularly trains, would make people feel safer using these services at night.
- » Participants in this group commented that they feel much safer using Uber rather than taxis.
- » Participants commented that security guards and police tend to make them feel intimidated, rather than safe. There should be some investigation into how security guards are operating. “Security guards sometimes actually make people misbehave – it’s antagonistic.”
- » It was also suggested that more female security guards would make young women feel safer when they are out at night. Female participants referred to negative experiences interacting with male security guards.
- » Some young people in this group commented that they feel much safer when at informal, “grassroots” events – such as warehouse parties – than when using formal venues in the city or Kings Cross precincts. It was suggested that at these informal events people are more likely to take on responsibility for their own behaviour, compared to highly controlled venues. “Where you know the promoters, everyone acts responsibly, cleans up after themselves – and that’s where we kind of feel safe.”
- » Young people in this group wanted to understand more about police processes and patrols, and the intention and logic behind these. It was thought that better communication and engagement with the community and young people around police processes would help to alleviate some of the anxieties people have, and improve the relationship between young people and police. “Why do they need to wear combat gear?”



2.3 Discussion 3: A vibrant night-time economy

"Spice Alley [Central Park] is great because it has a buzz, you can sit outside. In Sydney we've got the best climate ever and you're just going to push me into some dank room...?"

"Very little would get me into the city. Maybe Vivid – that's cool – maybe night markets."

"Our CBD literally just feels like a CBD. Structured and cold."

"There needs to be room for independent providers and programs, to be able to breath and grow. People want to see it [the city] happen again. We need to have social spaces."

"I think we need a marketing campaign to sell Sydney back to itself."

Participants were invited to provide feedback on the following questions:

- » **What do you see as the best thing about Sydney after dark?**
- » **Do you think the city centre and Kings Cross offer enough diversity at night?**
- » **Do you have any suggestions for improving the night time experience / vibrancy of the city centre and Kings Cross?**
- » **How do you access information about what's on in the city centre and Kings Cross at night?**

Table 3:

- » The best things about Sydney after dark include its cultural diversity and the range of potential activities on offer. Participants wanted to see these aspects enhanced, to enable people to have an "unstructured" and "spontaneous" night out. Suggestions for improvement include: extending liquor licenses; and longer trading hours "so you can have dinner and go out to a bar without feeling it's all too structured."
- » Young people in this group thought that going out in Sydney at night is more about a drinking culture, rather than broader cultural options. "Going out and getting super drunk, for instance, in Newtown, rather than just providing more of a cultural framework to this drinking culture. If people are going out to a show, they're less likely to focus on getting wasted."
- » Participants in this group thought that there is not enough diversity in Sydney's offerings at night. People wanted to see more diversity in the night time economy, with specific suggestions including dining, live music, night-time movies, late night food and cafes. Participants thought that a greater variety of offerings would limit the current focus on drinking. "It's about staggering people's consumption of these activities – at the moment it's just about drinking and it's a sprint not a marathon."
- » Participants noted the challenges for businesses in offering more diverse or unique options, questioning how businesses could be made aware of the demand for new and different offerings – as well as how customers can be made aware of the diversity of activities and venues on offer. Participants thought there was an opportunity to improve this communication between businesses and patrons. It was also suggested that where businesses are interested in establishing new and different offerings for the night time economy, it may be necessary to provide support or subsidies to encourage these potentially risky ventures.

- » Participants in this group liked the walkability between entertainment precincts in the city and Kings Cross, and thought there was an opportunity to better connect these precincts and improve the connections between entertainment offerings. They wanted to see lively streets connecting a range of night time activities.
- » Participants also thought there is an opportunity to provide more outdoor entertainment options, such as outdoor music, arts programs, outdoor dining and street food, or buskers and street performers. This was seen as an opportunity to “get people on the streets” and improve the safety and liveliness of the connections between places, venues and activities.

Table 2:

- » Sydney needs a diverse night time offering that attracts and encourages talent, like great musicians and restaurateurs. Young people feel limited by the current offerings (or lack thereof). “It’s a beautiful city with a great climate, great venues, restaurants, bars, galleries, people. But that greatness, passion and beauty is being stifled – not encouraged. At 10pm you can’t buy a bottle of wine. Passionate people go elsewhere – to places like Melbourne and New York.”
- » Diversity is declining because of our stifling culture. However there are underground parties and warehouse parties that young people enjoy. They have no safety measures in place, but young people feel safe there because the people who go to these parties act responsibly / are self-invested.
- » Easier access to venues, licences and DA approvals, as well as more flexible opening hours and capacity caps would encourage a more vibrant and diverse night time economy in the city centre / Kings Cross – by removing the “hoops”.
- » Sydney’s night-time economy was described as lacking diversity. For instance, for people out late at night in Newtown, the only available options are drinking venues. The people who are not drinking go home – which means the only people left out at night are people who want to drink. Coffee shops and cafes close early, so you cannot go to see a film and have a hot chocolate afterwards. Maisy’s Café in Neutral Bay was identified as a great example of a popular 24/7 operation. There should be a range of night-time options, not gaps in the night-time economy. For instance, the Italian restaurant should be able to stay open all night. Places like Fox Studios do not meet demand, whereas if you use an eco-system approach you’ll have places that develop naturally (like Newtown and Kings Cross as it was).

Table 1:

- » Participants in this group also focused on how to increase the diversity of Sydney’s night-time economy – particularly activities beyond drinking.
- » Opportunities to support multipurpose venues – like a book store that turns into a small bar – were suggested. Ideas included offering incentives to encourage diversity among small businesses; encouraging live music; and supporting independent venues.
- » Festivals such as Vivid are good. However, Sydney needs the ongoing cultural activities to support these events.
- » Suggestion to remove the freeze on liquor licencing to promote a free market and promote increased diversity.
- » Opportunities to communicate with young people about what’s going on include social media, in particular Facebook advertising, peer-to-peer discussions and texting.
- » Sydney’s night-time economy needs both a marketing strategy and something to market. Because we’ve seen a shift in people going out, because of reduced options – “we need a marketing campaign to ‘market Sydney back to itself’ – and to reinvigorate our appreciation of a cultural night

out rather than just sitting on the couch watching Netflix.” There was a perception that small bars are not encouraged by our current regulatory framework.

2.4 Closing comments

In closing the Forum, participants were invited to respond to two final questions.

What is the most important thing for the Roundtable to take on board from your perspective?

Table 1:

- » We need to recognise that cultural vibrancy and safety are not mutually exclusive.
- » Allow independence to flourish by making applications for venues and events easy – for smaller groups not just larger ones.
- » Look at other cities with night-time economies that are working well, like Melbourne, New York and Berlin.

Table 2:

- » Culture=economy=safety. Look at what value you want to get out of this. Without people, there will be no vibrancy.
- » We need to put as much thought into the night-time as we do into the day-time.
- » We need to attract talent – that is, people coming back to Sydney to live and visitors to Sydney.

Table 3:

- » We want to see commitment to and action for change that fosters diversity and a range of options at night. There was concern that consultation and recommendations may not lead to concrete action or change.

What are the best ways for government to engage with you?

Table 1:

- » Listen to young people – don’t just tell them what’s going on. Make it someone’s role to engage with youth around this issue. Stop listening to hospitals over other voices – the night-time economy discussion needs to include a variety of different perspectives.

Table 2:

- » Genuine and regular listening is required. We need more young people in government. It was noted that all participants in this group live within a five kilometre radius of central Sydney – and that the conversation needs to be expanded to incorporate young people from right across Sydney and beyond.

Table 3:

- » We need to engage with young people from the suburbs and from other cities – that is visitors to Sydney. We also need to engage younger people – including teenagers and university students who are the “future users” of the night time economy – to ensure we are meeting future demand.

3 Next steps

Samantha Torres, Deputy Secretary Arts and Culture, NSW Justice thanked all participants for their contributions as part of the Youth Consultation Forum. She encouraged participants to think further about the night-time economy on the basis that “this is everyone’s city” and to understand the issues from the ground up. For instance, it was noted that the lockout laws do not apply to small bars.

Feedback from the Forum is documented in this report for the Office for Liquor, Gaming and Racing. This report will be circulated to Roundtable participants for their consideration and discussion in the third Roundtable meeting. Feedback from the Forum and Roundtable will be considered by the Callinan Review and the Deputy Premier.

Participants were also invited to share their comments by taking part in a short vox pop interview. A video has been prepared that includes highlights of these interviews, to be presented to the Office for Liquor, Gaming and Racing and Roundtable participants.



Appendices

A Forum agenda & background paper

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