

The Hunter General Practitioners Association

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6th February, 2018

Mr Jonathan Horton QC
The NSW Independent Liquor & Gaming Authority
PO Box 8325
Parramatta,
NSW, 2150

Re: The review of the “Newcastle Conditions” by the NSW Independent Liquor & Gaming Authority

Dear Sir,

I write on behalf of the Hunter General Practitioners Association, the membership of which is formed by the majority of the general practitioners in the Hunter Valley. I write regarding the review of the license conditions pertaining to the fourteen licensed establishments in Newcastle who are affected by the “Newcastle Conditions” .

Prior to 2008 many of our members had attended patients who had been assaulted whilst having an evening out in Newcastle. The introduction of the Newcastle Conditions led to a dramatic reduction in these assaults, to the point that most of us would have seen no assaults from Newcastle since that time.

It should be noted that many of the assaulted patients seen by our members would have not have been seen in the emergency departments and many did not contact the police. This means that their numbers will not be on any statistics. It is worth considering the possibility that these patients might have represented a considerable percentage of those who were assaulted.

The victims included patrons of these establishments and also those who were passing by and included on one occasion (of which I was personally aware) a man who went to the rescue of a woman who was being attacked by a group of inebriated men. The typical scenario was, in fact, assault by a group or gang of inebriated young men, leaving little opportunity for the victim to defend himself/herself or escape unharmed.

One of the effects of these assaults was that Newcastle gained the reputation as being an unsafe place to go at night. The owners of the licensed venues who are seeking to have the Newcastle Conditions reviewed may have forgotten (or may never have been aware of) the damaging nature of this reputation to their own businesses and to the other venues/businesses in Newcastle. It was not just those assaulted who would avoid Newcastle at night but also their families and friends. Had this trend continued I expect that there would have been a compounding effect in that only those who were not afraid of a fight would attend those licensed venues. Please note that it takes many years for such a reputation to abate.

To our members, the general practitioners of the Hunter Valley, the financial aspects of this issue are of less importance than the impact on individuals and society. What is important is the safety and well being of our patients. The numbers and statistics relating to these assaults do not properly reflect the impacts these assaults have had . Someone who has been “glassed” across the face, remains physically and emotionally scarred for life. Someone with less apparent injuries can still remain scarred for life as the emotional scars remain, leaving the person anxious and fearful. Many such a person will avoid going near the place of assault because of the emotions which are revived. This avoidance could be localised to the venue of the assault or more generalised to include all similar venues or even the whole Newcastle district. These people can end up with lifelong suffering because of the act of a few inebriated individuals.

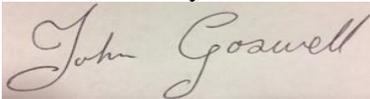
Another effect of these assaults was on the perpetrators themselves. Belonging to a social group where drunkenness and violence is seen as acceptable can have horrendous effects on the long term morality and ability to fit into a peaceful society.

Please note that the social situation has changed since 2008. There is now widespread use of the drug ICE, leading to the probability that, should the Newcastle Conditions be abolished, the situation would become significantly worse.

Newcastle, as the major city in the Hunter Valley, should be able to hold its head high as a safe place to take friends or family.

The members of the Hunter General Practitioners Association strongly believe that the Newcastle Conditions should be maintained. It is clear that the restrictions imposed in 2008 have had significant benefits in terms of protecting individuals, protecting the reputation of Newcastle and improving the economic well-being of the district.

Yours faithfully,

A rectangular area containing a handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John Goswell". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

Dr John Goswell
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Chairman of the Hunter General Practitioners Association
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