

## **Submission – Newcastle CBD Liquor Licence Conditions Review**

I make this submission as a concerned local citizen. Through the mid to late 1990s and up to 2008, Newcastle became a fearful place in which to go out at night. There were few restrictions on the sale of alcohol, and violence was frequent in licensed venues and on the streets. Throughout those years, alcohol-related violence worsened when licencing restrictions were reduced. It was not until the 2008 liquor licensing laws in Newcastle were implemented that the alcohol-related violence and anti-social behaviour started to reduce.

The connection between alcohol consumption and domestic violence is very troubling. If the government is serious about wanting to reduce and to prevent domestic violence, it needs to restrict the sale of alcohol, and strengthen the Newcastle liquor laws, not relax them.

The differing results of the restrictions in Newcastle as opposed to those in Geelong point to the key success of the Newcastle restrictions being limiting the sale of alcohol late at night.

It is imperative for the sake of public health and safety, that these laws which are part of the 'Newcastle Solution' are extended and strengthened and not weakened in any aspect. The public expects the government to be responsible for its safety, and not to place the profits of licenced venues above the health and safety of the community. Relaxing of the restrictions is completely unwarranted and would be irresponsible of the government. This would be taken by the community as a sign that the government is caving in to big donors like the liquor lobby. The government should not 'go soft' on the liquor industry in this state. The community expect their government to act as more than just an arm of the AHA, registered clubs and liquor industries.

Irrespective of whether venues offer live music, the whole point of the Newcastle Solution is to reduce the sale of alcohol at night. All venues should be shut to new patrons by 1am. Alcohol sales should end one hour before this. There should be no relaxing of laws relating to late night liquor sales. The restrictions need to be strengthened. Take-aways of alcohol should be ceased and bottle shops closed by 9.30pm at night. Between 10pm and midnight there should be no sales of shots, and no sales of doubles for mixed drinks. There should be only a single drink sold to each patron after 10 pm. There should be no dispensation given for sales of cocktails. The sale of alcohol must cease 1 hour prior to closing. There should be no exemption for live venues. The whole point is to restrict the sale of alcohol to reduce violence and anti-social behaviour.

Alcohol-fuelled violence and alcohol related anti-social incidents should also be prevented in nearby suburbs. The Newcastle CBD liquor licence conditions should also be extended to cover neighbouring suburbs, including Hamilton, Cooks Hill, Bar Beach, Merewether and The Junction. The local citizens and other businesses in those nearby areas, and patrons of licensed establishments in those nearby areas should also be afforded the same health and safety considerations as those right in the centre of the Newcastle CBD by way of coverage of the Newcastle CBD late night liquor laws.

The review of the Newcastle liquor laws must critically consider the anti-social disturbances, violence, public urination, ambulance and police call outs, and hospitalisations that arise when the sale of alcohol is not severely restricted late at night. Those who do not profit from the sale of alcohol often have to bear the burden. Premises where alcohol is sold late at night whose patron/s are responsible for any alcohol-related incidents should be liable to pay to each the police, the ambulance service, hospitals, and affected individuals or other affected businesses an amount of \$400,000 each for every incident per 5% of its patrons. There could be an accelerating scale of increased penalties for a higher rate of alcohol-related incidents. The penalty should also be indexed to the CPI.

The review of the laws must pay full attention to evidence from the law enforcement and health representatives of the relationship between alcohol consumption and both violence and anti-social

behaviour. The advice from police, ambulance and health representatives, and anti-domestic violence advocates must not be discounted or considered subservient to the profits of licenced venues.

Exempting some licenced venues, such as live music venues or small niche establishments from the late night alcohol sale restrictions and the associated closing times would just make a mockery of the Newcastle CBD alcohol restrictions, of which the whole point is to restrict the sale of liquor late at night to reduce alcohol-fuelled violence. More alcohol equates to more violence. As we have seen before, when restrictions are only imposed on some venues and not on others, then the violence moves to venues that do not have the restrictions imposed. The logic of allowing more sales of alcohol is fundamentally flawed. A business model that relies on ever-increasing sales of alcohol for extended periods of time is not sustainable and imposes unreasonable and unconscionable costs on the community. This must not be allowed to happen. The public should not have to bear the social and health costs of late night sales of alcohol. Public health and safety must always trump the profits of licenced venues. Otherwise, the government is not acting for the good of the public, but in the interests of the Australian Hotels Association (AHA), licensed venues and large donors. The government must demonstrate to the community that it cares about the health and safety of community more than the profits of hotels and liquor-related industries. If the government rejects the advice of its police and health representatives, then what use is the government for it has lost the confidence of the public.

The community should not have to be fearful on the streets due to licenced venues opening late at late with alcohol sales causing these problems. The watering down of Newcastle's late night liquor laws would be negligent of the government, and would be seen by the community, police and health authorities as a retrograde step. The Newcastle Solution is already acclaimed internationally for its success in reducing alcohol-related incidents including violence. The Newcastle Solution should be extended and promoted extensively as a way for other localities and jurisdictions to reduce alcohol-fuelled violence including domestic violence.

If the government does not abide by the recommendations provided by representatives from health and law enforcement, the Newcastle public will hold the government responsible for every late night alcohol-related incident that occurs. The community will not sleep soundly in the knowledge that the government is happy to put profits of hoteliers and other licensed venues ahead of the health and safety of its citizens. If the government waters down the internationally acclaimed laws in the Newcastle Solution, this may warrant an ICAC investigation as to how advice from police and health authorities was not heeded.