

 Reply all |   Delete Junk |  ... 

Independent Review: Liquor law reforms

PB Philippa Bateman 

  Reply all | 


To: Liquor Law Review; 

Sun 3/04

Inbox

ATTENTION: Independent review of the impact of liquor law reforms.

Re: Impacts of the 1.30am lock out and 3am cessation of liquor sales requirements.

I write as a resident of  and a business owner (although a business owner whose business has been impacted by the lock out laws).

1. a. Alcohol related violence and anti-social behaviour in Kings Cross Precinct

The lock outs have had a profoundly **positive impact** on the neighbourhood and community of Kings Cross. Of course, like anyone interested in this issue, I am aware of the radical drop in assaults (**40% across all time periods**) and petty theft (around 60%).

I assume the review is consulting with Commander Mike Fitzgerald, Kings Cross Police, on those statistics, and Professor Gordian Fulde, the Director of Emergency at St Vincents Hospital—the professionals who deal directly with the consequences of alcohol-related violence and anti-social behaviour in Kings Cross so I won't focus on that.

Beyond the statistics, I wanted to share some observations about the pre-lock out culture: the 24-hour access to alcohol, combined with an overly high concentration of licensed premises (**around 300 pre lock outs**) in one of the mostly densely populated residential areas in **Australia (Kings Cross/Potts Point)**.

If you live here, you were aware, pre-lock outs, that 20,000+ people on the main drag of the Cross (Darlinghurst road) spilling into surrounding streets (e.g. Bayswater Road, Victoria Street), was a significant problem: people drunk and out of control, as well as sober bystanders, are vulnerable to random violence.

It was obvious that most of the 20,000+ who turned up on a Friday and Saturday night, didn't live or work in this area but traveled here (many by train or by taxi from other venues that had closed) to party after midnight and into the early hours. They were mostly young people in their teens, 20s and early 30s wanting to have fun, often already drunk and vulnerable—because of the environment and culture—the moment they arrived.

There are/were some well run clubs and small bars, but many of the establishments were serving very drunk people more and more alcohol. Despite requests and the law that people not be served who have had too much to drink, it seems that this isn't possible to monitor nor control. It is, however, possible to control trading hours and the concentration of licensed venues. The statistics show that there is a direct relationship in Australia between the number of licensed premises and alcohol-fueled violence.

Dr. Don Weatherburn, Director of the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, Sydney. "Whenever you increase the number of liquor licenses or venues you, generally speaking, increase the level of violence, it's just how things tend to play out".

Source: http://mpegmedia.abc.net.au/rn/podcast/2016/03/lms_20160315_0905.mp3

b. safety and general amenity in the Sydney CBD Entertainment Precinct, Kings Cross Precinct, and potential displacement areas;

Legitimate businesses have a right to prosper but not at the cost of public health and safety.

The two young men—Daniel Christie and Thomas Kelly—who lost their lives in Kings Cross, as a result of single punches from people who were drunk and/or violent, were victims of the pre lock-out culture. People quote the time they were killed, 6pm in Kelly's case, and 9pm in Christie's case, as "evidence" that these vicious and random attacks had nothing to do with closing hours. Pre-lock outs, the culture of drinking and violence in Kings Cross was around the clock.

Kiernan Loveridge, charged with manslaughter over the death of Thomas Kelly, had been drinking for hours in Kings Cross, and hitting people on Darlinghurst Road, prior to the random attack on Kelly. His aggressive anti-social behaviour, and also by the killer of Daniel Christie, was familiar on the streets of Kings Cross prior to the lock outs. It didn't always end in tragic circumstances but the potential was there because the street culture attracted it. There were also rapes, a lot of theft and more vandalism—it wasn't from the people who lived here, it was the people attracted to a place where the opportunities were there to exploit. And it happened in the morning, the early evening, and the dawn hours.

Pre-lock outs, it was common to see people walking around drinking out of wine or beer bottles in the middle of the day, often with a Red Bull (energy drink) in a plastic bag. It was a regular event to step over piles of vomit and be greeted by urine soaked front entrances (or worse) on your way to work in the morning. Not to forget the shouting and screaming all hours on the back streets and in the lanes of Kings Cross.

It's a nice idea that people will drink responsibly and everyone will behave but put 20,000+ people in a few streets in Sydney every weekend and provide 24 hour access to alcohol creates conditions where violence on the street and in venues can easily erupt, and it will happen. It did happen.

Alcohol related crime was out of control. With the lock outs, that is no longer the case. It is also a safer and better place to live.

c. **government, industry and community stakeholders, including business, financial and social impacts, and the impacts on patrons and residents (including whether venues continue to trade after 3am when alcohol service ceases).**

I am a supporter of the lock outs but **I am not a supporter of the onerous demands, expenses and regulations (not matched by the city venues) put on the small bars or venues in Kings Cross** (which most of us residents support and would like to see more of).

There is not the alcohol-related violence inside the venues or outside on the street that happen in the bigger badly-run venues. It's also the case that there are clearly well-run clubs and bars (since the lock outs) that continue to attract patrons in large numbers. That said, I don't see why the cessation of sale of alcohol shouldn't remain at 3am.

It is also obvious to anyone who lives here that the alcohol-fuelled violence culture wasn't helped by **Kings Cross being identified as an "entertainment precinct"**. The problems (not deaths) were often tolerated by local and state governments because it was seen as part of living in such a precinct. How many times have residents heard when expressing concerns: "What do you expect, you live in an entertainment precinct?". Kings Cross has always been a highly populated residential area but that seems to have not mattered since it became an "entertainment precinct".

My husband and I choose to live in a vibrant, diverse, inner city neighbourhood. There is a great mix of single people, families, travellers, young, elderly and the middle aged who live here harmoniously and happily. It's a great place to live. Macleay Street (although the affluent end of Potts Point) is full of people all nights of the week eating at great restaurant and shopping. Lankelly place, Kings Cross, has become a wonderfully vibrant pedestrian walkway where there are a lot of restaurants, cafes and small bars. Days and nights, it's packed with people enjoying themselves and businesses doing well.

The Kings Cross strip clubs, a left over of the Vietnam era, are on the wane because they don't hold much interest to visitors or young people, and it shouldn't be this way. **We want our urban neighbourhood to offer visitors an experience they don't have elsewhere but a culture that is only about alcohol and drugs, is not much of a culture.** We need young people, all people, to come to Kings Cross—enjoy themselves and be safe. In addition to shops, bars, restaurants, cafes, we need a cinema, stand up comedy venues, music venues... Our neighbourhood has a rich cultural and bohemian history but it is barely evident anymore. In that regard, there need to be more options available to people, and new and existing businesses to be given support and opportunities that make them viable.

It's clear that the Cross, or Darlinghurst Road, is in a state of transition but going backwards (i.e. returning to a pre-lock out Kings Cross) isn't viable for the community or the businesses of the present and future Kings Cross.

More licensed clubs, big hotels and unlicensed, unmanaged backpackers (a significant source of anti-social behaviour and alcohol pre-fueling) in Kings Cross are not the solution.

2. The positive and negative impacts of the 10pm takeaway liquor restriction across NSW, with particular

regard to be had to the needs of rural and remote communities, and the social and economic impacts of the restriction on those communities.

While I would like the option to buy a bottle of wine at a bottle shop after 10pm, given the **positive impact** that the 10pm takeaway liquor restriction across NSW has had on the drop in reported domestic violence incidents, it's a convenience I can live without.

In Kings Cross, a lot of people who cannot afford to frequent the bars and hotels, go to the takeaway liquor venues, and drink in the streets and parks in the area. This is also one of the main "entertainment" options for the backpackers who stay in the hostels here. As they cannot continue drinking in the courtyards and on the rooftops after 10pm, they hit the streets in large groups with slabs of cheap beer. This is a significant source of noise and anti-social behaviour in the area, and is much worse when takeaway liquor is accessible after 10pm.

3. The review will consider the impact of the periodic licensing system on business viability and vibrancy.

I'm in support of the periodic licensing system that encourages responsible trading and care for patrons and is not prohibitively expensive for operators. It should continue. The idea that operators pay a low cost for a license and it exists in perpetuity was one of the main problems that contributed to the over concentration of licensed venues in a 1.04 km radius and venues that continued to operate without regard for their patrons or the community.

The good operators and businesses who are responsible and comply should be rewarded; those who are not good operators and don't comply, should be penalised and risk losing their licenses. It's a no brainer.

Sincerely,

Philippa Bateman



This email, and any attachment, is confidential. If you are not the intended recipient, please delete it from your system, do not use or disclose the information in any way, and notify the sender immediately.

