

Sydney's Lockout Laws

T

Tony [REDACTED]

To: Liquor Law Review; [REDACTED]



↻ Reply all | v

9:02 AM

Inbox

Dear Judge Callinan,

As part of your review into Sydney's Lockout Laws, you will be considering submissions from the public - I'm grateful for this opportunity to give you my opinion of the impact they have had on this city.

I am a British national working at Concord Repatriation General Hospital and training to be a specialist in Emergency Medicine. I will shortly be applying for residency and I hope one day to be an Australian citizen.

This is the second time I have lived in Sydney; I first moved here in January 2014 after living in Perth for 6 months. I enjoyed living in Perth but I fell in love with Australia after I came here. Sydney was such an open, welcoming, vibrant city! To me it seemed to embrace all cultures and catered for every taste. A genuinely cosmopolitan city in which everyone seemed to get along. The friends I made during that time are still some of my closest and it is partly because of them that I have returned.

However Sydney has changed. It is no longer the warm, friendly city that I fell in love with. Walking through the city at night used to be a real eye-opener and I never once felt unsafe. Now for many areas it's an exercise in solitude.


The alcohol lock-out laws have forced the closure of countless restaurants, bars and clubs and made hundreds, if not thousands, unemployed. The effect on the economy must be huge - Melbourne's experience suggests this is the case but we may never know because the NSW government have chosen not to measure it.

It is my belief that these laws disproportionately affect the gay community. As a gay man I have been on the receiving end of homophobic abuse while on a night out. Venues catering to the LGBT community provide safe spaces for us to associate and express ourselves without fear of attack. Despite the growth in Sydney's population, there are fewer gay venues in the city now compared to 10 years ago.

These laws also discriminates against shift workers, such as myself, who are now denied the opportunity to share a drink with colleagues or join friends for a night out after a late finish. I have never committed a violent act against another person since I finished school. Why am I being punished for the crimes of others?

And now we are seeing 'mission creep' of these laws - examples of new restrictions include limiting the number of DJs it is legal to have on a harbour cruise and forcing take-away food outlets to close after midnight. What specific problem are these new restriction aiming to address? It isn't clear but they will certainly have the effect of further destroying the night-time economy, making more people unemployed and reducing the attractiveness of Sydney as a destination for travellers.

In my work as a doctor I strive to provide the best evidence-based care I can to my patients, so I'm no stranger to statistics. These laws were sold to the public on the basis that they would reduce alcohol-related violence and the State government has produced several reports that claim to show their effectiveness in this respect. However this evidence is of questionable methodology, particularly around the linking of violent acts to venues at which alcohol is

ies - it would not meet the criteria for publication in a medical journal. One could mount a convincing argument that this has been done intentionally to skew the results in a particular way but despite this it is still apparent that despite reducing the number of violent incidents, the lockout laws have not made the streets statistically safer - a 40-60% reduction in violence on the back of an 84% fall in footfall through Kings Cross represents a proportionate increase in violent acts.

And despite this professed basis for these laws, one of the most violent venues in the State, Star Casino, is exempt from these laws. I'm sure it is just a coincidence that so many members of the State government have ties with the Casino's executive.

There is one piece of research on this topic published in the medical literature - a single centre cohort study authored by Professor Gordian Fulde of St Vincent's Hospital. I don't doubt Professor Fulde's commitment to his patients but his evidence is not able to prove causality, only association, and it fails to take into account the fact that St Vincent's Hospital does not exist in a vacuum. What is the effect on other nearby Emergency Departments such as Royal Prince Alfred Hospital? We don't know, because no-one is looking.

International criticism of the lock-out laws and associated restrictions is mounting and undoubtedly Sydney is becoming less attractive to international visitors, particularly young adults. I'm sure it hasn't escaped your notice that Sydney has fallen from 2nd to 7th place in the Economist's Global Liveability Index in the last 4 years. Anecdotally, people already here are choosing to leave for other Australian cities, with Melbourne being the principal beneficiary of Sydney's misfortune. I returned to Sydney because I wanted to spend the rest of my life here but it is not the place I left 10 years ago. And while I can't yet influence the running of this city through elections I can certainly vote with my feet.

It's time to start having a truly evidence-based discussion around alcohol-related violence in Sydney. We need to understand truly where the violence is happening; we need to understand the impact these laws are having on the nighttime economy and those whose livelihood is based in it; we need to understand the impact these laws are having on the whole emergency care system; and we need to understand the effect these laws are having on Sydney's reputation as a world city.

I look forward to reading you report.

Your sincerely,

Dr Tony Bolton
Registrar in Emergency Medicine

--

Kind regards,

Tony Bolton

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]