

The Hon. Ian Callinan QC AC

Independent Review of Liquor Amendment Act 2014

PO Box 7060 SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr Callinan,

I am writing to you as the licensee of Cheers Bar, a once thriving venue that has been severely affected by the lockout and last drink laws brought in by the NSW government in 2014.

These laws have unfairly punished us financially, forced us to reduce staff and staff hours and, probably most notably, have destroyed what was a great social, sporting and community atmosphere based around English Premier League and other late night sport.

On our our logo we have the line: "Where Good Sports Meet" and the late night sporting crowd was a key part of our business and our community. But if these laws continue in their current form I fear they will effectively kill both.

The following points are based on comments from several of my managers who have had to deal with the changes since February 2014 and have seen first-hand the damage they have done.

Cheers Bar has been running as the main sports bar in Sydney since 1988. We used to show every sport under the sun and cater for everyone's sporting needs.

The sporting culture and the community that grew up around late night sport, with a particular passion for the English Premier League, was so alive and vibrant within our venue.

It is hard to describe the great nights that we once had, with people from all over the world- from all walks of life- enjoying games that, because of the time difference, were on in the early hours of the morning.

Footage of the atmosphere and passion of fans in Cheers Bar has gone worldwide on YouTube and a clip of our venue from three years ago had over 200,000 hits on the website.

You simply can't buy that kind of experience and the fans talk about them for days, months, even years after.

Our venue was home to some of the biggest sporting supporters clubs in Australia. Our central CBD location has good transport options and no residential issues so it's a great site for late night sports viewing.

LFCNSW (Liverpool) and SCCSC (Celtic) were based here and both have won supporters clubs of the year in Australia and New Zealand.

We have won best sports bar in the FFDU awards (footy fans down under) in Australia and New Zealand for 2 years running, 2012-2013, 2013-2014 and we came runner up in 2014-2015.

Our pub was home to many official and unofficial supporter clubs from the English Premier League, Skybet Championship, Scottish Premiership, and the Bundesliga.

They included Liverpool, the LFC NSW, the Southampton mad Saints Supporters Club Sydney, Manchester City Sydney Supporters, Everton Supporters Club Australia, Newcastle United Supporters Sydney, the AFCB Bournemouth Sydney Supporters, the Norwich-following Canaries Down Under, the Leeds United RMC of NSW, the Australian Middlesbrough Supporters, fans of Celtic the SSCSC, the Bayern Munchen group the Red Kangaroos Australia, and Borussia Dortmund Australia.

All the above groups, whether they are an official recognised supporters club or not, used to use various sources of social media to advertise us as the home for their supporters in Sydney.

We used to show every European sport televised in Australia, and if any supporter wanted to find where to watch their favourite team play in a great atmosphere the above groups had chosen us as their home.

But how things have changed.

The difference in time zone in the UK and Europe ranges from 9hrs - 11hrs, meaning many games begin after the 1.30am lockout or later.

We upset sports fans and turn them away week in, week out, and it's not our fault.

Tourists arriving into our once happening city are not informed about the lockout laws and just want to enjoy our venue's experience and watch their team.

They arrive at our door at 1.30am or after and are told no entry and they don't understand why.

It paints a very bad picture for us as people just don't understand.

It breaks my managers heart's but during tournaments like the Football World Cup 2014, the Six Nations, and the Rugby World Cup 2015, especially the final, people have nowhere to go except the casino.

We have to direct people to the casino as it's the only place people can watch their team after 1.30am.

Sporting fans don't want to go to the casino, they want to enjoy the collegiate and community atmosphere of a venue like ours.

In the past few months we had the Rugby World Cup final, Scottish final & Capital One Cup final and the Six Nations.

Three years ago during these events we would be reaching capacity on all 3 levels and directing fans to other venues.

Now we are luckily to reach capacity on 1 floor. Games that would normally attract 400 plus people only have a handful watching.

Euro 2016 starts in June and most games kick off at 4am. Once again we will let down our patrons.

The lockouts have changed the sporting culture and it's sad to see.

Our review rating was 4.6 on Facebook and now has dropped to 4.1 due to reviews about not getting in after lockout and the bar closing for alcohol service.

Many of my managers ask the question: What have these fans and tourists done to deserve this treatment from the NSW government?

They have done nothing wrong; they just want to watch their team play.

Apart from the sporting fans, the lock out laws have created tension between our staff and patrons.

We are always rushing to get customers inside of the building around 1:25am. There is always an argument between customers and staff around the time we start preparing for lockout.

The complaints are mainly due to the fact we close 1-2mins earlier than 1:30am because everyone's watch or phone is a little different.

There are also clashes with smokers and other people who want to briefly go outside.

Some people wish to grab some fresh air and some want to have a cigarette, but we are unable to let them.

We have also had problems with customers smoking in the gaming room because they are not permitted outside the venue after 1:30am, and disturbing the gaming customers who play a vital role in our financial viability.

And others have begun trying to smoke in the toilets, which as you can imagine causes problems for our staff and customers.

Finally, the loss of staffing hours inside and outside of our business has been dramatic.

We are unable to employ as many people as before, like many other businesses in the area, and the ones we continue to employ have less hours and less opportunity to earn money and gain promotion.

The laws have affected our staff, and all hospitality staff in the area's, private and social lives as well.

Staff from other venues used to come to our venue after they finished work, now they go home, and when our staff finish work there is nowhere nearby for them to go and enjoy a drink to wind down from a long shift and talk with their colleagues.

It is even hard for our staff to get something to eat when they finish work.

Most late night restaurants close earlier now, Subway which was 24/7 on weekends is now shut earlier and after more than 30 years on the corner of George and Liverpool Streets, Hungry Jacks, at one time I believe their busiest store in Australia, has closed.

We are just one among many venues in the area that are hurting from the lockouts.

At Cheers Bar we have lost something much more than just income, we have lost a great community that would come together in the late night, have a few drinks and enjoy a shared passion for sport.

I hope you will keep this in mind when you complete your review.

Tim Dowman
Licensee
Cheers Bar

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tim Dowman', with a stylized, cursive script.