



Submission on the Independent review of the impact of liquor law reforms

Submitted April 2016

About the Committee for Sydney

The Committee for Sydney is an independent champion and think tank for Greater Sydney, developing innovative evidence-based policy beyond the electoral cycle. Helping Australia's leading global city to play its key role for the state and nation, it plays an advocacy role in promoting Greater Sydney's interests and future prosperity. The Committee has members from across the private, public and not for profit sectors and engages with business leaders, politicians, government and other stakeholders in policy discussions that affect the global competitiveness of Sydney as a business centre and as a place to live. We challenge the city to be great.

Liquor Amendment Act 2014 and this review

The Liquor Amendment Act 2014 was introduced in direct response to a number of alcohol-related violent incidents (including two deaths) in and around the Sydney CBD and Kings Cross precincts. The Committee for Sydney commends the Government's review of these laws and particularly the appointment of a collaborative expert advisory group to consult on this review. As a member of the advisory group, we look forward to contributing our expertise and perspectives.

The Committee for Sydney believes antisocial, alcohol-related behavior and violence are not the hallmark of a great, global city like Sydney, and understands the context in which these laws were enacted, under significant community and media pressure. However, we have an opportunity now to shape Sydney's night-time economy and need to consider the best combination of initiatives to create a safe and vibrant night-time. We believe this can be done without persisting with the lock out laws in their current form – through leadership from the public and private sectors, and coordination amongst government agencies – and we would like to assist the Government in this process.

Sydney's Night-Time Economy

The night-time economy is a fundamental economic, social and cultural contributor to metropolitan Sydney. Indeed, a thriving night-time economy supports and reinforces the productivity of Sydney's "day-time" economy – an economy of major significance to the nation, contributing 23.3% of the nation's GDP in 2014/15, and growing at 3% (compared to 2.7% across Australia)¹. Furthermore, in the global race for the best talent to support our economic growth, a successful night-time offering is an indicator of a city's vitality, diversity and attractiveness, and underpins a city's reputation as a productive, open, lively, creative and innovative place. The Committee for Sydney believes safety is a key requirement of a vibrant night-time economy – and incidents of violence, and perceived threats to safety, can damage the entirety of the city's reputation as a place to live, work and visit.

¹ SGS Economics & Planning, *Australian Cities Accounts 2014-15*, released Feb 2016, http://www.sgsep.com.au/application/files/3014/5542/2965/Australian_Cities_Accounts_2014_15_FINAL.pdf

The Committee's research – a work in progress

In parallel to this review, the Committee is currently undertaking its own research into Sydney's night-time economy, as it relates to the city's liveability and loveability. Supported by our Liveability and Loveability Taskforce², we look forward to sharing this work with the NSW Government to contribute to this important conversation. Our initial hypotheses that we seek to validate are:

1. The demographics of Sydney are changing:

- a. There are more residents living in the inner city and dense centres across Sydney; the demographics of these residents is increasingly more 'empty nesters', young families and 'dual income, no kids' households
- b. The ethnic mix of residents, workers and visitors across Sydney is changing (increasingly Asian, plus global talent from Europe and US) with a higher proportion of individuals accustomed to sophisticated night-time drinking and dining habits
- c. The growth of the internationalised knowledge economy in Sydney has resulted in more people working outside of traditional office hours (in addition to shift workers), which has resulted in a broader mix of people in the city at times throughout the night, and therefore a greater demand for retail, services, entertainment and transport.

2. We have an opportunity to reinforce positive changes in Australia's drinking habits:

- a. The ABS announced last year that alcohol consumption in Australia is at a 50-year low, and this has been reflected in the volume of alcohol which alcohol producers are selling. While volumes are going down, value is going up as people are drinking better quality products but less alcohol overall³. We have the opportunity to cater to, and support this behavioral trend through regulation.
- b. The Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing household drug survey 2013⁴ shows daily drinking has declined significantly between 2010 and 2013 (from 7.2% to 6.5%) and was at the lowest level seen since 1991, with rates falling for both males and females. Data also indicates positive changes in the drinking culture of younger Australians with fewer people aged 12-17 drinking alcohol, and the proportion abstaining from alcohol increased significantly between 2010 and 2013 (from 64% to 72%). We can anticipate increased demand for more diverse, non-alcohol based forms of entertainment.
- c. There is a growth in suburban small bars and dining in Sydney (not necessarily linked to the introduction of the lock out laws) being driven by the local movement

² The *Liveability and Loveability Taskforce* is comprised of representatives from Committee member organisations working in the planning & design, property, hospitality, sporting, arts & culture, and events & entertainment industries in Sydney

³ ABS, *Media Release: Apparent alcohol consumption hits a 50 year low*, May 2015, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4307.0.55.001Media%20Release12013-14?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4307.0.55.001&issue=2013-14&num=&view=>

⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2013*, released Nov 2014, <http://www.aihw.gov.au/alcohol-and-other-drugs/ndshs/>

to dine and spend time closer to home, and the rise in food culture.

3. Our understanding of urban design and how cities work has evolved:

- a. International evidence indicates that cities work best when there is a mix of uses to create places which are vibrant and safe, by providing a diversity of reasons for being out at night to a wide range of people. Concentrations of drinking establishments (such as the Kings Cross model fashionable in the 80s and 90s), without a diversity of offer, produce unintended consequences of alcohol-fueled altercations and violence.

Recommendations

The Committee recommends the review take into account the following approaches for Sydney's night-time economy:

- Diversifying the offer, by encouraging more varied evening and night-time activities in the city, beyond drinking. This will encourage a more diverse group of people to spend time out in the city at night. Creating spaces and activities for different demographics will drive foot traffic on the street and enhance safety by keeping a mix of people in the city, and support more businesses to stay open. This could be accomplished through encouraging the 'twilight dweller' to remain in the area (generally those leaving work in the city to go home), and families to travel into the city through approaches such as:
 - Extended retail hours (beyond Thursday evenings);
 - A more diverse food offer / later restaurant openings;
 - More activation of public spaces (particularly with free events);
 - A broader offering of sports, theatre and music (including live music) performances; and
 - Extended museum and gallery opening times⁵.
- Improving the design of our streets and public spaces to increase safety (e.g. foot traffic 'eyes on the street', security surveillance, signage, lighting⁶), and therefore the use and atmosphere of public spaces in the city at night. Encouraging a 'mixed-use' approach (retail, residential, commercial, hospitality) to the design of inner city areas not only supports the night-time economy, but also enhances the safety and diversity of people using these spaces.
- Improving the accessibility to and between hubs in the city throughout evenings, including:
 - Spreading the peak of public transport services;
 - Integrating services with activities taking place to ensure people can get home safely on public transport and not resort to driving; and
 - Providing more services in the CBD and Kings Cross to outer suburbs late at night

⁵ City of Sydney, *Discussion Paper: OPEN Sydney – Future directions for Sydney at night*, October 2011, http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/131715/OpenDirectionsReportFinal.pdf

⁶ Arup, *Rethinking the Shades of Night*, March 2015, <http://www.arup.com/~media/Publications/Files/Publications/C/Cities Alive Lighting booklet.ashx>

to ease pressure on taxis and provide safe options for people to get home - a better networked public transport offer at night will also allow for a more geographically diverse night-time offer, supporting the growth of centres beyond the CBD.

- Coordinating and layering the above approaches into an integrated and collaborative approach is essential, including input and support from multiple levels of government, the private sector and members of the community. The Committee is also investigating successful models of governance introduced in other global cities.

Conclusion

The Government's interventions in 2014 were introduced within a specific context. Over the two years in which these laws have been in place, the city has evolved, and we now have the opportunity for a more comprehensive discussion of Sydney's night-time economy, beyond these laws. We encourage the review to examine the current state of Sydney's night-time economy as a whole in assessing the future of the lock out laws, and to consider a suite of approaches (as there is no silver bullet solution) through coordinated governance to address the diversity of offer, quality of the public domain, and accessibility of Sydney at night.