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Submission to the liquor law review.

DC Dan Conway 




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To: Liquor Law Review; 

Sun 3/04

Inbox

To the Honourable Mike Baird and Honourable Ian Callinan AC QC,

I am a middle-aged federal data scientist who has lived in Sydney for 39 of my 45 years (with periods in New Zealand, Switzerland, Germany, and the US). I live in , not too far from the beach, and have been keenly engaged with various cultural aspects of Sydney for my entire adult life. I should also mention, at this point, that I like a drink on occasion but have never thrown a punch in my life.

I am writing to you in response to, specifically, the 'lock out laws' but also in relation to a wider set of phenomena, and indeed philosophical issues around policing, the use of authority and the delicate balance between acceptable risk and the public good and the value of un-quantifiable cultural expression.

And I should also state, that I abhor violence in any form, and am heartbroken by incidences of young lives lost or damaged via street violence. And yes, heartbroken, for although kids such as Thomas Kelly may have been young, they are my people. They are revelers. They are party people. They are my brethren.

So let me begin with a vignette.

Correct me if I am wrong... but I am guessing:

You will never know the feeling, of leaving the club, as the sky is beginning to lighten, ears slightly ringing, lightly sheened with sweat, legs and arms tired, exhausted but euphoric, system flooded with endorphins and the glorious feeling of well-being of having danced all night to a pounding sound system. Danced with your friends, your community, new people, strangers - a chance to connect, to celebrate, to be joyous.

This is an experience that is of huge, profound, even self-definitional value to those who partake in dancefloor culture. It is a repeatable, rich, varied phenomenon and can be found taking place in countless clubs, warehouses and other dance venues in all almost all major industrialised cities all over the world.

There are communities are built around this experience. And now, in my 40s, I still reconnect with 'my people' at these events. It is a ritual that we often refer to as 'going to church'. The dancefloor is the place where we come together, glimpse the ineffable in losing ourselves to the 'now' of the rhythm, and receive affirmation in our values and beliefs.

But even if you don't know this experience – that is ok. It's not for everyone. Some people are attracted to this, and others aren't. Similarly - I don't play golf – and am therefore ignorant of the pleasures and cultural norms, the experiential gains this past-time offers. And I have no desire to condemn this pursuit.

But the thing is – the experience that I describe above – is just that. It is an experience. And as such – it essentially unquantifiable. The personal satisfaction, joy, wellbeing and social good that is enabled through these experiences cannot be measured. They cannot be entered into a spreadsheet and compared across geographies with well-designed statistical tests applied to ascertain as to their variance or indeed, end worth. And therefore – any talk of an ‘evidence-based’ approach to the lock out laws misses the point entirely and is effectively a feint. You could attempt to regulate these things into oblivion (which seems to be increasingly the approach of both state and local governments) with attendant drops in all manner of incidental negative outcomes – but the other side of the balance sheet – what we have lost – remains incomplete.

As such any talk of empirical, ‘evidence-based’ decision making on this subject is specious. Indeed it is willfully blind, and strategically renders invisible the countless ephemeral, personal but nonetheless deeply profound positives that these activities offer.

Mr Baird, you may not go to dance-clubs. You may not have experienced the joy of a long night of spontaneously flitting from bar to bar, engaging with people, experiencing the wonderment of Kairos – where every moment is special – and time seems to stand still for each encounter and conversation, but many of us do. And while there may indeed be violent degenerates who are enabled by night-time culture – you govern, ostensibly, for all.

And without an appreciation of the value of such activities – I cannot trust your judgement. You don’t value them – therefore you assert that they are value-less.

And without an appreciation of the value of such activities, or at least a discussion of their value –with weight correspondingly added to the arguments against increasingly prohibitive and authoritarian legislation, any assertion you make on the subject is ultimately one-sided – and indeed your actions can only be seen as driven by ideology, and one that denies the value of something that is of immense value to me personally, and indeed, many, many of my fellow citizens.

There are a large number of alternative possible policy measures that have been shown to address the problem of night-time violence ranging from improved transport, increasing the diversity of night-time venues so that fine-diners mix with skate-kids and club goers, to alcohol serving limitations that don’t impact on people’s ability to move freely throughout the night.

I would therefore ask that, when considering the issue of ‘lock-outs’ and night time culture generally, you adjust policy so that my culture, my experiences, my engagement in a part of the culture of this city that means so much to me, is allowed to thrive.

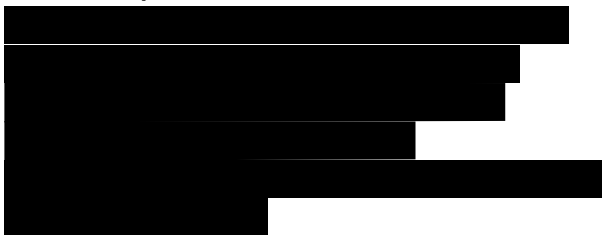
Regards,



Dan Conway,


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