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Independent Review of the impacts of Liquor Law Reforms

My personal story in support of the retention of the 1.30am lock out and 3.00am cease alcohol sales measures.

I moved to Potts Point in 2006 and got to know the local and understand the area. I purchased a unit on Macleay Street mid 2007 a considerable distance from the centre of Kings Cross. The area appealed because of the diversity of people, the village atmosphere, and proximity to the city where I work. I worked with residents in my building to oppose the DA's and FA's submitted to Council by restaurants in Challis Avenue and Macleay Streets which sought to increase the number of patrons and trading hours and threatened the amenity of me and other residents in the same building. I joined the 2011 Residents Association in 2012 and was appointed Convenor in 2013.

Pre 'Lockout Laws' 2007 – 2014

I frequently walked through the centre of Kings Cross known as 'the strip' during the day on my way to or from work or on walks through to Paddington. I recall being stunned at the increase in number of nightclubs and bars that occurred during this time, particularly the aggregation of nightclubs and bars at the nexus of Bayswater Road, Darlinghurst Road, and Victoria Street. I noticed too that a favourite restaurant in Bayswater Road had closed after trading successfully for many years.

At first there did not appear to be any real consequences other than more noise at night on the weekends. However, this noise grew rapidly to a point where it was difficult to hear the TV and then to a level where it sounded like I was in the middle of a formula 1 race track but with a difference; cars on Macleay Street were gridlocked, and going nowhere. There was also the accompanying noise of loud music, screams and yells from occupants of cars, and sounding of horns. This was intolerable and it was not until 2009 when a group of residents banded together and forced Council to re-route traffic, install speed humps and close Cowper Warf Road that the noise subsided to a degree. The five-week trial closure and spend humps cost around \$60,000. The interventions helped but did not return us to the days when I first moved in. The road closure remains in place today so over the years, this represents a substantial cost. I do not believe that this could be relaxed, without significant impacts to residents in Macleay Street and those in living in Streets that young drivers use to loop 'the strip'.

The noise late at night from revellers, motor traffic, and then clean up vehicles in the early hours of the morning from Thursday night through to Monday morning meant that there was little hope of getting 8 hours sleep. During the worst times, I have been in the invidious position of having to go to work having only been able to sleep for four or five hours. Undertaking complex tasks such as report writing, chairing meetings, tracking conversations becomes all the more difficult when sleep deprived. When I first moved in, the noise was not a problem; it only became a problem as a consequence of the clustering of licensed premises in the bid by City of Sydney to create a night time economy.

What was created instead was a violent nightlife.

I was informed by residents living in Kings Cross that they felt under siege every weekend; that they felt afraid to walk out their doors in the morning and at night; and that they were tired of having to clean up urine, vomit, broken glass and rubbish from their doorsteps. They were visibly under stress from inability to sleep at night and also from the frustration of not being able to do anything to change their circumstances.

The full impact of the changes that had occurred in Kings Cross were brought home when I had to go into the the CBD at 2:00 am to the office alarm going off. I chose to drive my car into the city for speed and safety. To my surprise I had difficulty negotiating crowds of drunk revellers running out onto the road or simply standing in the roadway. Many people that I saw could hardly stand and there were young women and men lying on the footpath or bent over in the gutter retching. I was shocked by what I saw. This was not a vibrant night life it was more tragic, dangerous and out-of-control.

During these years there were many meetings held by City of Sydney to hear from interest groups due to the problems with noise, violence, and congestion. They were set up as consultations, but the agenda was always to keep pushing ahead with their night-time economy and hang the expense to residents, rate payers, and taxpayers. I attended a number of these meeting and at most of these meetings the alcohol lobbyists and club owners took over. Residents' views were ignored or derided; we were told that if we did not like it, to go live somewhere else. Many of those most impacted by the noise had lived in and around Kings Cross for many years – long before City of Sydney thought it a great idea to approve liquor licences with zero concern for the cumulative impacts and the chaos that it created.

Malcolm Turnbull, the MP for Wentworth when making a presentation at Sydney Town Hall in July 2012, described Kings Cross as a war zone. Police struggled to deal with the violence, the brawls, and in proving support to ambulance crew called out to deal with those harmed or as a consequence of self-inflicted harm. Noise disturbances beyond the Cross could not be dealt with by Police, whose role it is; they were just too busy trying to quell fights. There were scant controls over the way venues operated and many breached their DA's. Residents joined our association desperate to gain support to have their grievances heard and responded to. They were unable to live in their apartments due to noise. The litany of complaints with regard to some premises went well beyond 'three strikes' but they continued to trade.

Personal safety was a major issue for residents. They felt unsafe at night and during the morning when crowds of drunks leaving nightclubs still hung around the area. I seldom ventured into Kings Cross, because it was so desolate during the day, and the type of entertainment on offer at night; nightclubs and tacky bars had zero appeal. Drunk people used to walk down Macleay Street screaming and yelling in the early hours of the morning; they were either on their way to parked cars or had left the centre of Kings Cross in search of taxis. They would often engage in full on arguments yelling abuse at each other or passers by. The issue of personal safety spread out of Kings Cross and contaminated surrounding residential areas.

I also avoided Victoria Street in the evening or late at night as it felt unsafe. On occasions when I did walk down the street to get to my car, there were often people of questionable intentions loitering around. Other streets that led off the Cross also were questionable in terms of safety. One Sunday morning I was walking to the train station along Springfield Ave around 10:00 am when I was propositioned by a man in his late 20's. I suddenly realised that apart from him I was alone on the street. This occurred not long after the rape of a young woman who was walking in Victoria Street. I reported the incident to police.

My car, which was parked on the street in residents only zone, was broken into and vandalised on a more regular basis than in most suburbs in which I have lived.

The violence and chaos increased each year as the number of licenced premises grew and reached a crescendo in 2013. The senseless deaths of Thomas Kelly in July 2013 and Daniel Christie on New Year's eve 2013 are an indictment on our culture. Hardly the stamp of a modern international city or a sophisticated society.

The Trial Period 2014 - 2016

What is of concern is in the two years since the changes in legislation were made, powerful businesses with vested interests in the sale and excessive consumption of alcohol have worked the media, particularly social media with lies and misinformation to create hysteria among those same revellers who see it as their right to drink themselves into a stupor. They have talked about 'acting like grown-ups', their personal rights and liberties. Unfortunately, at no time have they ever considered the rights of residents – some 18,000 of which I am one - to enjoy the neighbourhood in which they and I live. To be able to walk the streets in safety and to have adequate sleep to be able to perform my job and enjoy my leisure time.

The live music industry has joined in to bemoan the lockout laws, claiming to have lost jobs and opportunities due to the lockout laws. There were very few if any live music venues in Kings Cross prior to the lockouts. Most of the music was pre-recorded and played at volumes that were in breach of acceptable decibel levels. Again the loss of amenity for residents and the costs associated with harms to people from excessive alcohol consumption seem to have little currency. I don't understand the lack of response to the \$3.8 billion that the excessive consumption of alcohol costs the state of NSW.

The Positive Outcomes from ‘Lockout Laws’ 2016

The introduction of the ‘lockout laws’ had an immediate, positive, and profound impact on Kings Cross. The noise ceased; calm and a sense of safety returned. Without the crowds of intoxicated people, the threat of fights, the screaming, and chaos evaporated.

Not long after the legislation was implemented, I can recall walking through Kings Cross one evening after finishing work late and being amazed at the changes that had taken place. There were fewer people on the streets and no longer queues of motor vehicles or the din. It took a few months for new life to begin and begin it did. New shops of all kinds have opened; a health food shop, and a menswear shop on the strip and then new cafés and coffee shops, hairdressers et. 2011 Residents Association completed a survey which shows that more than 70 new businesses have opened and are thriving. Business owners are obviously confident that Kings Cross is a viable site to set up a business. The types of businesses that have opened are those that can draw on the patronage of local residents as well as attracting people in from other suburbs.

These changes have occurred because the area is safe and people can walk the streets without fear of harm, or of having to witness harm being done to others. The diversity of people that once characterised Kings Cross is back; we no longer have hordes of drunk people in the 20’s and mid 30’s who frightened other people away. It is important that the legislation is kept in place, that the powerful alcohol lobby and the few big ASX listed companies who essentially own Kings Cross cannot sway the government with their false claims. It’s time to take a stand against the excessive consumption of alcohol that costs our community and state so much.

Preserve the Existing Legislation