

Liquor Law Review

I've been a resident in Potts Point for 15 years, prior to the lockouts I witnessed the increasing violence and anti social behaviour among large crowds of young people on weekends. With up to 20,000 people, many intoxicated, descending on the neighbourhood on the weekends (City of Sydney figures 2010 -2011) I did not feel safe to go out beyond 9pm. I could not invite friends who lived outside the area to my home on Friday and Saturday nights for fear of their safety. It was an extremely intimidating and aggressive environment fuelled by the mix of alcohol and drugs.

I observed many young people arrive in the area by train or minibuses already intoxicated and lacking any self control, a particularly vulnerable situation for young women. A significant number of these young people were underage and could not get into venues, but they came to the Cross knowing there would be lots of other young people to meet partying on the streets. Their supply of alcohol was easy to access via the bottle shops.

The mornings after, early rising residents would have to wade through mountains of rubbish and human excrement, the City Council was spending over a million dollars a year to clean the area.

The introduction of the lockout laws was a circuit breaker, assaults and injuries have significantly reduced and residents' amenity has greatly improved. Some businesses have closed, but new ones have opened, the area is beginning to recover with renewed daytime and evening trading.

I support the continuation of the 10pm bottle shop closures and the 3am cease of alcohol service. I would recommend trialling the removal of the 1.30am lockouts in the CBD, but retain them in Kings Cross given the residential density, at least until further research is available on the effectiveness or otherwise of these measures.

Sydney's night life - an opportunity for greater vision

With the review of the lockout laws about to get underway, I believe it's an opportunity for the NSW Government, local councils and communities to take a holistic approach to Sydney's night entertainment. It's an opportunity to consider more diverse and varied entertainment options for all and to plan the infrastructure required in the CBD and the growing population hubs beyond, for a safe and enjoyable night out.

As greater Sydney develops so does the demand for varied night entertainment options across the city, for example small live music venues, comedy, cabaret, live performance and theatre. There are numerous hubs in addition to the CBD that could cater to the local population's night entertainment needs, provided there is local consultation and consent.

There is now an opportunity for authorities to consider significant reviews particularly in relation to the cumulative impact of too many liquor licences in an area, the liquor licence approval process, transport availability and the required support for live music and performance based entertainment to be offered.

The majority of global cities do not limit their night entertainment options to a few streets in the CBD and nearby area, instead there are small evening entertainment quarters scattered across the broader city, each with its unique identity and offerings dependent on local needs and support. There could also be options to locate late night dance clubs (in addition to those operating in the CBD) in industrial zones minimising impact on residents which Paris and other European cities do while using regular shuttle buses for transport in and out.

Support for varied entertainment options in the city and suburbs

Since the introduction of the lockout laws anecdotal evidence suggests that there has been a revival of suburban pubs and new small bars opening up in suburban high streets catering to locals. Managed development and support of a diverse range of night entertainment options in both the CBD and suitable suburban locations will result in a safer night life, more options for all in the community and will support the growth of local businesses and artists.

There will always be the attraction to the CBD lights, but not everyone wants to commute into the city. So what's on offer for those who don't mind a night out to listen to live music or enjoy cabaret, comedy or performances with friends whether it's close to the city or further out? It's extremely tough for these kinds of businesses to be viable with a myriad of compliance requirements across several authorities, hence the need for a review of the processes.

Not all night time entertainment has to revolve around the approval of a liquor licence. The NSW Government promotes its support of cultural experiences, it could further this with financial support for more late night openings of the major galleries and museums and more flexibility around late night trading.

Manage the development of night entertainment

Local communities might support evening entertainment options if they can be assured of a rigorous process in place to manage appropriate development, to ensure that the problems of the pre lockout laws in Kings Cross are not repeated. The evidence base shows limiting access to alcohol through reduced hours and outlet density are key. The 3am alcohol cessation also allows areas to 'reset' for the daytime economy

The critical issues that authorities need to consider are the cumulative impact of the number of licenced venues in a small area especially when it's a very dense residential area. Cumulative impact assessments need to be carried out before the granting of liquor licences along with the geocoding all existing licenced premises. Councils have very little ability to refuse new DAs on cumulative impact grounds and they are often overturned in the Land & Environment Court when they do.

The process of granting liquor licences must be reviewed, there is virtually no opportunity for local community input, an independent licencing panel that includes local council and community input should be established. Currently licences are granted in perpetuity, this needs to change to defined periods of time.

Public transport options need to be improved on the weekend to ensure people have access to frequent and reliable services to get home safely.

Finally both Federal and State governments should further support responsible alcohol consumption education. As cited in the recently released paper by the Royal Australasian College of Physicians the estimated social cost of alcohol misuse in Australia was between \$15 billion and \$36 billion, accruing largely from healthcare costs, road accidents and lost productivity. Each year, 5000 deaths were attributable to alcohol misuse, along with 150,000 hospitalisations.

Jenny Green, resident Potts Point, April 2016