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Anti lockout letter

AK Aleksandra Klimova 



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To: Liquor Law Review; 

Sun 3/04

Inbox

Dear Review Panel,

I am a 29 year old resident of Chippendale, just outside of the "lockout" zone. With a PhD in neuroscience and a research career at the Westmead Millennium Institute. As a long-time resident and patron of venues, I feel it is important I share my viewpoint with you, to be added to by the no-doubt voluminous submissions.

The lockout laws have been extremely effective at "closing" Kings Cross. I had not personally ventured to Kings Cross since my early twenties. It had its problems; it was expensive, it was almost impossible to get a taxi home, it was full of people more interested in drugs and alcohol than the music which was playing. Despite my complete lack of desire to patronise "The Cross" I mourn its' death. I mourn for the rest of Sydney, which now collects the dispersed detritus which was previously so easily contained within Kings Cross. While crime statistics may (or may not) show increases in other areas (notably, the casino), I can personally attest to a significant shift in the nightlife of Chippendale/Newtown. These areas, once quite peaceful places to have a drink, have been inundated with those wishing simply to over indulge in drugs or alcohol. This has been a gradual, but pervasive shift, as those looking for somewhere to "kick on" are moved away from traditional late-night venues to newer pastures, just outside of the lock-out zone.

Is this a bad thing? Personally, I would rather the prevalence of late night venues in Newtown, Chippendale, Erskineville, and Marrickville did not shift their service towards this inebriated crowd. Adults will remain adults, and will find ways to enjoy themselves at hours of their choosing despite regulations. What I have noticed is that my local streets are increasingly full of drunks, rubbish, urine and vomit than ever before. Is this a win for Sydney? No. Is it a win for Chippendale? No. Is it a win for me, my family, friends and neighbours? No. Is it a win for those owning property in Kings Cross? Likely.

And if this happens to cause massive turnover of large venues (such as Goldfish, Hugos, World Bar, etc) to developers, who in turn convert them to apartments and sell them to individuals, what impact on the bottom line of the state government? All this turnover incurs approximately 3% stamp duty. On millions upon millions of dollars of property, this is one very large windfall gain for the state government. Even if, in the future, this policy is reversed, the windfall gains to the state budget will not be lost. Unfortunately, the vibrancy of the city may well be.

Further, there have been some very high-profile and disturbing images of renewed violence in Pyrmont. Curiously positioned just outside of the lockout laws. Do we honestly believe it is "better" to funnel young individuals who would like to drink after 1:30am to a casino where they can find new and inventive ways to empty their pockets? Hardly. This does not seem to be

in anyone's interest, except for Crown Casino. The choice to exempt the casino itself poses a raft of questions. Is it simply to enhance economic value? Or are there more nefarious agendas at play? NSW government has not been a stranger to corruption, and this unusual choice, without any pretext of justification apart from casino profits, smacks if not of pork-barrelling, of overt corruption. My main disappointment here is that I failed to identify the impact funnelling drunk youngsters to the casino after 2am would have on the profitability of Crown, thereby missing a great buying opportunity.

What of the problems in the Cross? Isn't it getting better? Well, if you reduce foot traffic by 80% but only reduce violence by 40%, this does not seem to be effective regulation. If you do so at the expense of the enjoyment of the vast masses of individuals who do no wrong, this would seem to be, as we say in economics, Pareto inefficient. That is, it makes more people worse off without causing an improvement for others.

A final question (which can also be examined empirically) is thus: How do global cities such as London, Rio, Amsterdam, Madrid, Berlin, New York, Melbourne, and Canberra deal with this problem? What is so different from our cities fabric that it cannot allow its consenting adults the freedom to drink, dance and be merry anywhere but the comfort of their own homes (and then, only if they had the foresight to buy alcohol prior to 10pm)? From my experience in these places, I have several suggestions for tangible differences in our cities which could significantly improve safety without compromising individual choice:

24 hour transport. One of the amazing things about Melbourne, Berlin, London is that you can go home (or out) at any hour. There is constant public transport. We lack this, and it is an easy problem to fix. We do not want drunks driving home. This is lethal to society. Neither, however, do we provide them a safe, affordable option. To compound matters, taxi's openly refused to return me to Chippendale from the Cross around 2-3am (the rare times I went) simply because it was a \$15 fare. (I know this is illegal, but what can I do?). This refusal has to do with a 3am changeover – likely the worst time to be undertaking a mass exodus of the only transit system for late-night Sydney. Fixing public transport will go a long way to getting drunks home, safely. Friendly policing. If we have police on corners to assist travellers and the inebriated return home, it acts as a major deterrent to crime, and provides an effective mechanism to assist those needing a small hand on their way. This will be costly, however the costs may be offset against reduced hospital bills and property damage.

Target problem venues. Some venues are more prone to violence and misconduct than others. Perhaps these venues can have more stringent regulations placed upon them (such as the current lockouts/drink restrictions), but selectively. This will help prevent "hotspots" of crime and violence developing.

I hope my concerns are heard, that my data point is counted. I am STRONGLY against the lockout laws, and the 10pm liquor laws. Personally, I think no lockout would be preferable, but if we must have one, 3am seems like a reasonable hour (it will have little effect on the majority of people). If we must curb individuals ability to buy take home alcohol, midnight seems like a sound time. I often have dinner after 10pm, and to have to remember in advance to buy a bottle of wine seems simply draconian. I have done nothing wrong, and am unlikely to.

Finally, as an educated, highly paid individual, if Sydney retains its current course, I will be moving to Melbourne. If Melbourne were to invade, I would welcome them with open arms. They are culturally so similar to us – why not look to them to see what differences we have, and how these differences may account for the (limited) violence our city experienced.

Sincerely,
Dr Aleksandra Klimova

