

# Submission to Liquor Law Review

PN Pat Norman [REDACTED]

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to whom it may concern,

I am writing as both a resident of inner city Sydney, and an observer of public policy development more broadly.

It is my view that the suite of laws introduced to further regulate alcohol consumption in the city are inappropriate.

Following the high profile media campaigns regarding violence in entertainment precincts, the changes that were made – which are the subject of this review – were rushed into existence without proper considerations of alternatives, or the impact on the cultural, economic and social life of Sydney. I note that the initial response of the then-premier, Barry O’Farrell, was to argue against ‘rushing in’, that the settings of the state at the time were about right. This is correct.

As has been well-documented in the media and elsewhere, rates of violence and assault across the CBD had been declining in the five years leading to implementation of these laws. While there is anecdotal reports of increasingly serious presentations at Emergency Rooms, there has been little publicly available statistical data to back this up.

Since the introduction of the laws, there has been a push to rationalise them *a posteriori*, with prominent political figures pointing to the 45% decline in incidents in the Kings Cross precinct. This, however, should be weighed against the reported 80%+ decline in foot traffic in these areas.

Public policy necessarily involves weighing the benefits of a variety of courses of action. In this instance, the ‘lockout laws’ have been presented as a tension between ‘public safety’ and ‘fun nights out’ or ‘all night drinking’. This is a false dichotomy.

The fact is, many of the measures introduced disproportionately target people and business activities that had nothing to do with violence in the city (violence which was declining already).

[The 10pm restriction on the sale of takeaway alcohol, for example, affects people who want to go to dinner later in the evening.](#) This situation has affected many people I know who live in the inner-south of Sydney, where restaurants can be open later. This also impacts people who want to pick up alcohol – such as bottles of wine – on their way home from work or an event that might be held earlier in the evening.

The lockouts themselves seem to be an excessive restriction, given that no alternative measures were tried first. I’ve seen first-hand the impact that the 1:30 curfew and 3:00 last drinks has had on the culture and vibrancy of Oxford Street. This precinct, which was not as controversial as Kings Cross, has seen a massive decline in activity, and venues have been closing (many which have traded for a very long time).

The area itself no longer has a vitality to it that extends *beyond* licenced premises – the lack of people is dampening the spirit of the area.

It is hard to make an argument for a ‘cultural’ or ‘social’ good, particularly when themes of safety and economics dominate media discussion of public policy. However while I contend that there has been a serious economic impact as a result of the lockout laws, I would argue that the cultural and social impact deserves just as serious consideration. In short, accelerating the already-existing decline in violence is not worth smashing the vibrancy of Sydney’s night life.

I believe that these laws need to be wound back to some degree, allowing trade of takeaway to continue to midnight or 1am, and removing the restrictions on entry to premises and service of last drinks (contingent on compliance with RSA and Licencing conditions).

Instead, the state should implement proper transport solutions including 24 hour public transport (as is the case in Melbourne), more effective use of police resources, and increasing public amenity and cultural vibrancy by promoting music and lighting in entertainment precincts (reducing the probability of aggressive behaviour in these areas).

Sydney is not a city with some unique cultural tendency towards violence – there is simply no evidence to support that idea. If similar cities, such as Melbourne, are able to establish a successful and safe night time culture, it is possible to do it here as well. All that needs to happen is a proper, intelligent, and positive approach to public policy in these precincts.

Thank you for taking this submission into consideration.

Sincerely,

Pat Norman

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