

31st March 2016

Liquor Law Review

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Robert Richards and I am the owner of The Strand Hotel [REDACTED] [REDACTED] which falls under the Lock Out Restrictions. I have been a hotelier for 35 years and have witnessed the detrimental impact the restrictions have had on my business, its patrons, the hotel industry and myself personally.

The Strand Hotel had been leased out to the same tenant for 16 years (July 1999 – October 2015). In February 2014 Lock Out came into affect and in turn the Strand Hotel's taking's began to decrease month by month. Two years on from the Lock Out, a significant drop in foot traffic has lead to a significant drop in turnover.

Twelve months after the lock out was implemented, the leaseholder decided to walk away from the lease as he believed it was no longer a viable business. I am a 72-year-old retiree and going back to work at this age was not something I had planned. Therefore, after being told the lease would not be renewed I attempted re-lease or sell the hotel. However, leasing/selling a licenced venue in the Lock Out Zone is an extremely difficult task. Unsurprisingly, I was unsuccessful. On the 1st October 2015, I went back to work as this was the only way to satisfy the banks. It is not just me that has been affected but also my staff, having to cut back on their hours, resulting in a significant decrease in incomes. This has made it difficult to employ staff as well as to retain good staff.

The Lock Out Laws aimed to solve the problem of violence and in my opinion have failed to do so. The problem has simply been relocated to other areas, like Double Bay, Newtown and the Star City Casino (which is the number one most violent venue in Sydney). As a result, violence and injuries have increased across all these areas. All Lock Out has proven to do is kill small businesses within the zone. I fear that my business will follow this trend and have to close it's doors.

I fail to understand the fairness behind the harsh Liquor Laws. My hotel has never had a problem with violence. However, because of the location of my business I am treated the same as violent venues in the Lock Out Zone. My hotel is neither in the heart of the City or Kings Cross, rather in between the two. I believe this is a case of postcode discrimination. If this law is to be kept in place it should be state wide.

The Lock Out Restrictions are unfair and unjust. However, I do believe that there is a problem with violence in society and that action should be taken to address the issue. I believe that implementing the following will minimise violence without unfairly punishing all of society.

1. Better Policing: An increased Police presence on the streets especially in problem areas. This has been proven when Police have had a blitz on the Kings Cross area and Sydney CBD resulting in a drop in violence on the night.

2. Laws to protect Police: There should be sufficient laws in place to protect the Police as no respect is shown for authority. For example, harsher penalties/mandatory sentencing for assaulting Police.
3. 24Hr public transport: This will enable people get home safely and discourage loitering on the streets. This has proven to be successful in Victoria.
4. Education programs: Teaching society to be safe and responsible for their actions while shaming violence. I thought the Danny Green campaign was a step in the right direction.
5. Tougher sentencing: Introducing harsher and mandatory sentencing should act as a major deterrent for violent behaviour.

I do not entirely disagree with the Liquor Amendment Act 2014. I feel that the 10pm closure of bottle shops state-wide should be kept in place. The reasoning for this is that persons refused entry into licensed venues for intoxication go to bottle shops to “pre-fuel”, creating alcohol related problems on the streets.

Why does the government believe that Lock Out is the only contributing factor that has worked, when the government brought in five measures at the same time?

1. 10pm take-away liquor shop closure state-wide
2. 3am cease of alcohol sales in Sydney CBD Entertainment and Kings Cross precincts
3. 1:30 am Lock Out in Sydney CBD Entertainment and Kings Cross precincts
4. Advertising campaign using Danny Green on the “coward punch”
5. Mandatory sentencing for alcohol-fuelled Coward Punch resulting in Death

There are no Lock Out restrictions in major cities around the world including New York, London and Paris, so why Sydney? Yet, they have been successful in minimising violence and alcohol related issues. Perhaps a study of these cities, their policing and conditions would provide insights into how we can make Sydney nightlife safer.

Your Honour, I hope that the law review will prompt the government to look into more innovative ways to minimise violence without destroying the city’s night time entertainment and economy.

Robert Richards

The Strand Hotel

