

## **Submission to the Independent Review of the Impact of Liquor Law Reform**

**Peter Thomas**

I write as a director of The Foundation for Alcohol Research & Education.

My submission is that the laws introduced by the NSW Government in 2014 in relation to the CBD and King's Cross entertainment precincts should be retained. There is no question that all relevant data shows these laws have achieved their aims. They have reduced violence on the streets of these crowded areas, have, as a result, improved the safety and general amenity of these areas and have reinforced the view that alcohol fuelled violence is not tolerated. These laws have worked; they should be retained.

The responsibility of government includes ensuring, as far as possible, the safety of its people. These laws have provided greater safety to people who frequent these areas; they have, by doing so, reduced the levels, both in number and severity, of injuries suffered which finish up in hospital emergency wards. The laws have, in a general sense, added to the productivity of the Sydney economy.

Hospital and police data record the dreadful injuries which are suffered as a result of alcohol fuelled violence. The reduction in both the number and severity of such injuries which has accompanied the period of the operation of these laws is convincing evidence that the laws and the reduction in violence are linked and that the reduction in violence is a result of these laws. It follows that nothing should be done which could reverse this positive trend.

Of particular interest is that increased levels of violence have not been recorded in other locations close to the affected areas. The result is that Sydney (at least the areas close to the CBD) is a safer place. Given that many close to the city night spots/restaurant precincts (Newtown, Pyrmont and the Eastern Suburbs) not directly impacted by the laws provide late night entertainment, the overall amenity of Sydney is in no way diminished. The arguments that Sydney standing as an international city is reduced because of these laws does not stand up to any level of scrutiny or interrogation. It is rather like saying that Sydney's standing as an international city was reduced when smoking was banned at indoor venues.

The laws are, moreover, sensibly drafted to provide the opportunity to apply for and be granted exemption from the law, and there are various establishments, in the affected areas, which are not covered by the laws, including small bars and restaurants. The laws are not draconian; they sensibly address a major problem in a way which should not affect the vast majority of people who enjoy late night entertainment. Indeed their experience will be enhanced, because of the greater safety they have, as they enjoy themselves.

Arguments to the effect that small businesses have been adversely affected are unconvincing. Many laws in the past have affected different businesses – the RBT laws, coupled with the taxation law denying tax deductibility for meal entertainment are a prime example. At the time, these laws were introduced, they were seen as spelling the end of restaurants. While there may have been some relatively short-term impact, businesses adapted and proved resilient and today's restaurant scene in Sydney is proof of that resilience. I see no reason why there should not be widespread adaptation to the effect of these laws.

Limiting the sale of packaged alcohol after 10.00pm, applies throughout NSW. Retention of this law makes good sense and, although I am unaware of any studies on the effect of these laws on the level of violence, I can confidently state that I believe they would have had a positive effect on the level of domestic violence.

Those who work on the front-line, facing up night after night to the effects of alcohol related violence, are in no doubt that alcohol is the drug which causes most harm – far greater harm than some of the so-called party drugs, which parents worry so much about. Laws which result in less over-indulgence of alcohol and lessen the concentration of people in areas where over-indulgence has been rife over the years, promote good public policy.

I wish your review well and look forward to your report. I trust your report will support the retention of the laws introduced in 2014 which have delivered such positive outcomes.

If any matter I have raised in this submission warrants further explanation, please let me know.

**Peter Thomas**

Director – Foundation for Alcohol Research & Education

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