

Submission to the Independent Review of the Impact of Liquor Law Reforms

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SUBMISSION TO THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF THE IMPACT OF LIQUOR LAW REFORMS

I have lived in Kings Cross since 1979, firstly in Darlinghurst Road and later in Victoria Street.

When I moved to Kings Cross, I was fully aware of the particular nature of the area (the bohemians, the homeless, the sex workers, etc.) and I accepted it. I respected the rights of those people to live their lives and they respected the rights of people such as myself to live mine.

I have worked in the Cross for many years and I have enjoyed going out and socialising with friends and other visitors to the Cross over the years. For all those years I would feel safe doing so at any hour of the day or night.

Then in the years from 2008 through to early 2014, the nature of Kings Cross progressively changed for worse. Bigger and bigger crowds came up to visit, especially on Friday and Saturday nights but also on other nights of the week. Many of the individuals in those crowds were extremely drunk and aggressive (to use the vernacular, one could say they were "smashed"). Along Darlinghurst Road, Macleay Street and Victoria Street (and the streets and lanes running off them), there were males and females vomiting, urinating and defecating in the streets, on the footpaths, in the doorways of apartment blocks, in gardens, etc.

Getting into and out of this area by bus was a nightmare. For example, taking a bus from the CBD and up William Street to the Cross at 9pm or 11pm on a Friday or Saturday night would take an hour - and often you would be trapped on the bus with a bunch of drunken male and/or female hoons shrieking and fighting.

Sleep in my apartment bedroom in Victoria Street would be interrupted constantly throughout the night hours as groups of inebriated people pranced along our street screaming at the top of their voices. Boom boom cars would drive along the street again and again with their doof doof subwoofer music blasting its way into my bedroom and into my ears and destroying any chance of "peaceable enjoyment" and a good night's sleep.

More and more liquor establishments appeared in Kings Cross's streets. The crowds, the inebriation, the aggression, and frankly the palpable feeling of danger got worse and worse as the years went by. The NSW Police seemed swamped and if you complained to Sydney City Council, all you got was excuses, the runaround and suggestions that "you should just get used to it".

This was not the Kings Cross that I had moved into. It had radically changed for the worse. There was certainly no respect for us the residents from these new crowds of drunks and from the establishments that served them.

For those people who were not in Kings Cross in those years (2008-early 2014), it might be perhaps difficult to credit that the above-mentioned things could happen in Sydney. But those things did indeed happen - day after day, week after week, year after year. The streets of the Cross in those days were like a scene out of Dante's "Inferno" or William Hogarth's "Beer Street and Gin Lane" etchings of the squalid, boozy London back in 1751.

With the introduction of the lockouts/last drinks laws in February 2014, it was as though someone had thrown an switch to "off". Suddenly peace and quiet came back to Victoria Street, Darlinghurst Road and the rest of the Cross. The drunks, the hoons and their violent aggression, anti-social behaviour and noise mostly disappeared. Life returned to what it had been once before in Kings Cross.

Daytime business (previously languishing in the doldrums with many Vacancy signs) recovered. A survey by 2011 Residents Association this month (March 2016) which I helped conduct has found that more than 70 businesses (of many different kinds from gyms to health food stores to antique shops and ice cream parlours, cafes and restaurants) have opened in Kings Cross since the introduction of the lockouts in February 2014.

The evening economy seems to be doing well too. Now, in March 2016, if you walk along Darlinghurst Road between 6pm and 11pm, you will see the cafes and restaurants are crowded with few empty seats. Interestingly the pubs and clubs are still attracting many patrons (according to the ID scanner statistics) - with one difference: the patrons are now better behaved and not fighting and vomiting in the streets.

A feeling of confidence and safety has now returned to our neighbourhood. Kings Cross where so many residents live has returned to what it used to be before 2008.

Please retain the lockouts/last drinks laws just as they are!

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