

(Via online enquiries form)

6th February, 2016

Dear Mr. Baird,

I would like to add my voice to those calling for the repeal of the lock-out laws.

Despite my position, I am supportive of the public face of the intention behind these laws. I have lived in Sydney for ten years, during which I have avoided Kings Cross at all costs. I do not feel safe there, and would love for that to change. I do not, however, believe that the lock out laws are the way to do this.

It is no secret that the laws have negatively impacted bars and clubs in the Inner City. Since coming into effect widespread venue closures have been well publicised, and the associated economic impact argued in many directions - very few positive. As a soon-to-graduate MBA student I do have my concerns about the economics of this policy, but my overarching concern is Sydney's future.

Sydney has a wonderful international reputation. In my experience, it is perceived as accepting, beautiful, cultured, and fun. These laws rip an entire layer of its identity away, however, and I believe that the image people have of Sydney can no longer be exceeded or even met by their experience of a visit. Failing these expectations impedes tourism and migration - crucial to a workforce with an aging population (whether a popular fact or otherwise).

Looking at this from another perspective, I don't even see that the lockout laws are working in the manner intended. I have seen the compelling statistics (although the social scientist within me would like to see the base data), but still don't feel safe going to Kings Cross. The places that I used to go, specifically because I did feel safe, are now closed or so empty there's no longer much point. Further, the people who are out to cause trouble have moved onto Newtown, undoing in months all the gains made in its safety and diversity over the past few years.

These troublemakers will exist irrespective of these laws. They will continue to try and make their own 'entertainment' at the expense of others, and cannot be subdued by brute force laws. If they want to drink they will anyway, it doesn't matter if they can't do it in a venue. Indeed, the absence of venues could easily lead to their driving too. Increasing RBT's is certainly an option, but at the expense of further changing our culture and the perception thereof by others - police on every corner is not how people imagine Australia, nor how they should.

The current laws serve only to make it harder to police the aggressors and thereby reduce community safety, and they weaken our economy. Furthermore, however, the exclusion of Barangaroo and pokies from the laws sends a dangerous signal of government support of an industry which causes substantial social harm, both fiscal and otherwise.

If these laws are truly to respond to public safety concerns they must be focussed on the real problem, not the symptoms. Certainly alcohol is involved in many a bad decision, but the decisions people make are based on foundations over which alcohol has no control. If you really do want to curb alcohol fuelled violence then affecting cultural change is the way to go.

Of the many options available to this end, one such could be to change venue culture through a review of security guard regulations. Presently, security guards are selected to do a job of force, which is not the same thing as ensuring safety. Their easy power and near anonymity is rife with abuse, and all too often it is the guards themselves that become the cause of violence, whether directly or as a result of their attitudes being 'paid forward'.

Reviewing the security licensing to incorporate measures which both improve selection characteristics of new license holders, and instill a culture of safety management and personal responsibility, instead of near-anonymous power and control, will do wonders to changing attitudes of patrons.

Improving patron attitudes is only one step, I acknowledge, but a societally advantageous one. The lock out laws, however, are obvious in their destructiveness. An outright alternative is clearly necessary.

Even though I have described my own wanting experiences of going out for a drink since the lock-out laws came into effect, I would like to emphasise I write this not as a clubber or party-goer; certainly, I used to go out relatively regularly, but those days were behind me before the laws changed and venues began to close. I write instead as a constituent saddened by the flat-lining of a once great city, now sapped of its *je ne sais quoi*, largely for reasons indirectly but nonetheless intrinsically a consequence of the lock-out-laws.

I have considered also that the lock-out laws may be intended as a form of 'hard-reset'; maybe the hope is that the venues which are causing trouble will close, and the troublemakers move away. The reality, though, is that the venues which survive will only do so because they have enough capital to sustain them, and a stubborn spirit, and the individuals won't likely have the means.

Instead, surviving venues will be desperate to make money any way they can, and people will increasingly drink in public and on the roads. Under the current configuration, costs of welfare and health services will also skyrocket due to gambling related disorders. Concurrently the exodus this policy may intend will occur, but I doubt by the people intended.

Mortgagees like myself, for example, face capital erosion in the face of a decrease in Sydney's reputation. Mortgagee's should consider selling, but may no longer feel sufficiently connected to Sydney to necessarily stay. The resultant supply/demand effect would only further damage an already waning economy.

An exodus of people also removes skills. In my case, I have dedicated my career to community services, acquired and applied social science and business management tertiary and post-graduate qualifications. I have contributed to the community and economy, and will continue to do so, but I can no longer be sure that Sydney is the place I want to do so. I am not alone in this.

The lock out laws do nothing to enhance our city, or our State, and serve only to damage our long-term interests. In your role of responsibility to these ends, I beseech you to reconsider these destructive policies, and replace them with something more constructive.

Yours Sincerely,

Chris Walker

████████████████████

████████████████████