

Agreement in Principle

Mr KEVIN GREENE (Oatley—Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister for Sport and Recreation) [11.24 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

The Government is determined to tackle the continuing problem of alcohol-related violence. Late last year the Government introduced a range of measures including a freeze on new 24-hour liquor licences, new powers for police and council rangers to confiscate and tip out alcohol in alcohol-free zones, and new penalties for minors who use fake identification to enter licensed premises or obtain alcohol. The Government also imposed new standard licensing conditions on the 48 venues across the State with the highest recorded numbers of assault incidents. The introduction of these conditions was complemented by high visibility policing in alcohol-related violence hot spots. However, alcohol-related violence and antisocial behaviour are complex problems and there is no single solution available.

The city of Sydney requires a special focus due to a concentration of entertainment venues and continuing high levels of alcohol-related assault. Following representations from the Lord Mayor in regard to concerns about alcohol-related violence in the city of Sydney a freeze on new liquor licences in certain parts of the Sydney central business district was announced on 25 June 2009. The bill implements this commitment. The bill will assist in stabilising the number of persons who enter designated freeze precincts principally to consume alcohol, restrict the expansion of trading hours by certain existing licensed premises in the freeze precincts and maintain the patron capacity of those existing venues. Most importantly, the bill provides that no new liquor licences for new pubs, bars, clubs, nightclubs or liquor stores will be granted for premises situated in the identified freeze precincts for a 12-month period. It will also not be possible to transfer certain liquor licences into a freeze precinct.

A common sense approach has been taken to the bill, and low-risk venues, including licensed restaurants, cafes, cinemas, theatres and special events, are generally exempt from the licence freeze. However, it is recognised that even in relation to these outlets there must be prudence. Consequently, the bill also provides that existing venues are not able to extend their trading hours or generally to increase the patron capacity of the venue. The 12-month freeze applies to liquor licence applications received from the date of the announcement—25 June 2009—and not determined or granted. To ensure consistency between liquor licensing laws and planning laws the bill also provides a freeze on consent authorities granting development consent if the development requires a licence, approval or other authorisation that cannot be granted because of the liquor licence freeze. It should be noted that restaurants are exempt from the freeze on development applications. The development application freeze will only apply to applications lodged after the day that the bill is introduced in the Legislative Assembly.

The boundaries of the licence freeze precincts are focused on areas with a concentration of licensed premises, particularly those with late night trading, and identified trouble spots for alcohol-related antisocial behaviour and violence. In accordance with the announcement of 25 June 2009, the areas include Kings Cross, the Oxford Street precinct and parts of the southern central business district. The Kings Cross precinct includes Darlinghurst Road from William Street to Macleay Street and Bayswater Road from Darlinghurst Road to Ward Avenue. The Oxford Street precinct includes Oxford Street—and Oxford Square—from its commencement to its intersection with Flinders Street, and Flinders Street to Short Street. It also includes an area bordered by Oxford Street, Crown Street, Campbell Street, Bourke Street and Patterson Lane, which incorporates Taylor Square. The southern CBD precinct is George Street from its intersection with Park Street to its intersection with Hay Street. It also includes Goulburn Street and Liverpool Street from George Street to Castlereagh Street. The freeze on new liquor licences may be extended and applied to other areas should the need arise.

The specifics of the liquor licence freeze were developed in consultation with relevant government agencies, the City of Sydney Council, the Australian Hotels Association, Clubs New South Wales, the Liquor Stores Association and Restaurant and Catering New South Wales-ACT through the Sydney Liquor Task Force, reporting to the Premier and Lord Mayor. During the period of the licence freeze the TASK FORCE will develop longer-term strategies to tackle alcohol-related violence, which will involve issues such as public transport options, individual responsibility and strategies relevant to managing public spaces.

The Government and the Lord Mayor of the City of Sydney are committed to working together on appropriate strategies to address alcohol-related crime and antisocial behaviour while maintaining the vibrancy of Sydney and its night-time economy, and enhancing the safety of visitors and amenity of residents. The Government will closely monitor the effects of the freeze on both licences and development applications in the prescribed areas. The Government will implement further restrictions by regulation, should it prove necessary. I acknowledge the contribution of the Lord Mayor and the City of Sydney, which have worked with the New South Wales Government to develop this legislation. I commend the bill to the House.