



Legislative Council

Liquor Amendment (Special Events Hotel Trading) Bill Hansard - Extract

12/06/2002

Second Reading

The Hon. MICHAEL COSTA (Minister for Police) [8.45 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I seek leave to have the second reading speech incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Last year the Government amended the liquor laws so that rugby league fans throughout New South Wales could watch the telecast of the Grand Final match on Sunday evening in their local hotel.

That amendment was made, with the assistance of the Opposition, because the Government recognises that hotels are popular venues for viewing telecasts of sport and other significant events.

The Government also recognises that hotels are a traditional Australian social environment for sporting fans.

The amendment was necessary because standard hotel trading hours under the Liquor Act cause problems for many hotels wishing to televise significant events on a Sunday evening.

Standard trading for most hotels finishes at 10 pm on a Sunday—sometimes forcing patrons to vacate the premises during, or immediately after, the event.

It can be difficult for hotel licensees and police to enforce such a closing time, and the forced exit of thousands of hotel patrons who have been watching an event onto the street at 10pm can place a significant strain on local transport and security. This is made worse where patrons are disgruntled at having to leave hotel premises at what they consider an unreasonable hour.

The Government believes it is reasonable that patrons viewing a significant State, national or international event at their local hotel on a Sunday evening should be able to watch the entire event, and spend some time celebrating afterwards.

It also assists local authorities and transport operators if patrons are able to leave hotels at staggered times, rather than all at once.

It is also reasonable that hotels should be able to offer their services for patrons to watch the telecast of a significant event before midnight on a Sunday. Hotels should be able to take advantage of the increased market associated with an event of State, national or international significance.

That is why the Government amended the liquor laws for the 2001 NRL Grand Final match—which was held on Sunday 30 September 2001. Those amendments allowed hotels to trade until midnight so that patrons could view the entire match and celebrate afterwards.

The hotel industry has now approached the Government asking that standard hotel trading be extended to midnight during the forthcoming World Cup soccer final which will be telecast on the evening of Sunday 30 June 2002.

Given last year's NRL Grand Final amendments to the liquor laws and this latest request, the Government believes that more permanent measures need to be put in place.

Therefore, the bill now before the House amends the Liquor Act to allow hotels to trade until midnight on a Sunday during significant events.

The date for these events will be prescribed in the Liquor Regulation where the event is considered by the responsible Minister to be one of State, national or international significance. Obviously there will only be a handful of events that are held on a Sunday evening that qualify under this criteria.

Allowing events to be prescribed, rather than amending the liquor laws each time for a specific event—as was done last year for the NRL Grand Final—will allow extended Sunday trading to be provided to hotels for future events without the need to again amend the Liquor Act.

The extension in this bill will allow hotels to sell liquor for an additional two hours—from 10pm until

midnight—for consumption on the licensed premises only.

It will not permit take away sales, and it will not overrule any previously imposed trading restrictions that apply to an individual hotel licence, such as restrictions resulting from a complaint about disturbance to the neighbourhood.

Around 25% of hotels in New South Wales already have extended trading approved until midnight or beyond under the existing law. These amendments will not affect the trading rights of those hotels.

And the amendments apply to hotels only. While registered clubs are also a popular venue to view sporting telecasts, clubs generally have no restrictions on their trading hours, and are therefore able to trade during and after these events.

The Government does not consider it necessary or desirable that the trading hours for licensed restaurants or other licensed venues be automatically extended. Those venues are generally not used by the public for viewing the telecast of significant events such as sporting matches. Of course, many of those venues already have midnight trading on a Sunday, or can apply for midnight trading under the existing law.

I would also point out that special provisions are not required for events that are held on a Monday to Saturday, as most hotels are already able to trade until midnight on those days under the existing law.

To ensure that special arrangements are in place for the World Cup final match, the bill also contains separate amendments to the Liquor Act to specifically allow hotels to trade until midnight on Sunday 30 June 2002.

This separate amendment is included in the bill because of the short amount of time available before the World Cup final is held. Rather than having that event prescribed—something that time may prohibit—these amendments will ensure that hotel trading is extended until midnight for that 2002 World Cup match.

Finally, although this bill relates to the trading hours applying to the sale of liquor by hotels, I would like to take this opportunity to place on record the Government's commitment to amend the gaming machine laws at a future time to facilitate early morning trading by clubs and hotels on ANZAC Day.

As honourable members would be aware, the new Gaming Machines Act includes a requirement that all clubs and hotels close down their gaming machine operations for a three hour period, which is generally between 6 am to 9 am each day. From 1 May 2003, this shutdown period is due to be extended to 6 hours—from 4 am to 10 am.

The new shutdown arrangements created some inconvenience on the morning of this year's ANZAC Day, for returned services clubs in particular. An argument has been made that these clubs should not be forced to close down their gaming machines on the morning of ANZAC Day, when people who have been participating in dawn services may wish to return to their club and access its full facilities.

In some communities that do not have an RSL Club, another club or hotel may become the main meeting point for people following ANZAC Day dawn services.

The issue has been raised by a number of Members of Parliament, including the Leader of the National Party in the other place, who has already indicated his support for an amendment to address this problem.

I am pleased to advise the House today that the Government will be bringing forward legislation in the next session of Parliament to amend the Gaming Machines Act to allow gaming machine venues to continue to operate their gaming machines on the morning of ANZAC Day in future.

In the meantime, I commend this bill dealing with hotel trading during significant events on Sunday evenings to the House.