

**Submission
No 136**

SYDNEY'S NIGHT TIME ECONOMY

Name: Mr Nicholas Berry

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Dear Gladys Berejiklian and The Liberal Party,

My name is Nicholas Berry, I am an Advertising student at UNSW and a DJ who has frequently played in Sydney and experienced regular nights out since 2014. I am writing this submission in strong opposition of the lockout laws.

For some time now culture after dark in the city of Sydney has been at an all time low. Throughout the city there is a general lack of vibrancy in the music scene as well as a lack of dance culture. There is a clear deficiency of variation in nightlife experiences, perpetuated by a freeze in the creation of new music venues and crippling policies. The amount of music venues in Sydney have decreased exponentially, with figures showing “418 licensed premises closing in the Sydney CBD since 2014 (Taylor, 2018). Events have thus become predictable, forcing promoters to recycle between the 30 available venues in the CBD. There is a general sense of over restriction and lack of trust throughout the city, with reports of “incomprehensible red tape rules imposed in establishments across the city ranging from ‘no dancing’ to ‘no ukuleles’ and ‘no mirror balls’” (Haydar, 2018). Regular noise complaints from residents surrounding existing venues and entertainment precincts have influenced the success of events and have contributed to Sydneys dwindling music culture. This is a problem that began with the NSW’s governments implementation of the lockout laws which required 1:30am lockouts and 3am last drinks at bars, pubs and clubs throughout the central business district (Gerathy, 2018). The lockout laws also included an ongoing freeze on the granting of new liquor licences which disallowed the granting of licences for any new music venues or cultural spaces throughout the city. It is this multitude of factors that facilitated the overall stagnancy in Sydneys music scene, debilitated Sydneys once fruitful nightlife and destroyed the culture of dancing and clubbing in the city.

There are a number of stakeholders whom are both effected by and affecting Sydneys lack of vibrancy and dance culture.

Stakeholder 1:

Business owners and event organisers are key stakeholders to the issue as they have suffered as a result of a lack of vibrancy. This stakeholder is imperative to Sydneys vibrancy and clubbing culture problem as the night time economy generates more than 3.64 billion in revenue each year (City of Sydney, 2018).

Stakeholder 2:

Music lovers and patrons throughout Sydney have been affected by the issue, with their overall nightlife experience being hindered by a lack of vibrancy. This is evident through the 19 per cent decrease in attendance figures across Sydney dance venues since 2014 (Amcos, 2016). This stakeholder has the capacity to be resourceful in finding a solution to the problem as their collective disillusionment can lead to overall change.

Stakeholder 3:

Musicians have been largely effected by Sydneys current night life environment as their ability to tour, develop as artists and make money for their skills have been majorly diminished (The Music, 2018). The impact on musicians can be seen through the Preatures vocalist, Isabella Manfredi’s speech at the governments music enquiry, when she states

“Noise complaints, lockout laws and more are making it harder and harder for musicians to not only break out but also make a living” (The Music, 2018). They are imperative in the facilitation of change as they have the ability to advocate for change through their fame and following.

Stakeholder 4:

The City of Sydney is a key stakeholder as it's economy and overall reputation has been impacted negatively as a result of Sydneys degrading culture after dark. As stated by the City of Sydney “The lockout laws have had a serious impact on Sydney's night time economy... however we need government, business and industry to work together to find ways to boost our night-time culture” (Moyle, 2018). This stakeholder has the ability to advocate for change, as it is a problem occurring in this councils district.

Stakeholder 5:

The next stakeholder is the NSW Government. This stakeholder is one that has facilitated the negative change to the night time economy in Sydney and also holds the power to improve Sydney's vibrancy.

WHY IS IT NOT SOLVED YET?

The issue of Sydneys lack of vibrancy and dance culture is one that is hotly debated and not easily solved. From the beginning Sydneys lack of vibrancy has been perpetuated through bad policy making and planning, that has failed to ‘emulate’ or draw ‘inspiration’ from other states of Australia or other global cities such as London or Berlin. In 2018, The Lord Mayor of Sydney, Clover Moore, took it upon herself to remedy this failure by creating the “Nightlife & Creative Sector Advisory Panel” (City Of Sydney, 2018). Whilst the panel is a step in the right direction, it was the NSW's Governments initial failure to consider models created by other Australian states or international cities, that majorly influenced the creation of this problem. It is the policy makers that failed to identify the value of the night time market and economy, which has resulted in a said lack of vibrancy and dance culture.

CRITICAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE MESS THAT SYDNEY IS IN!

In Sydney, there are several critical factors that are contributing to the lack of vibrancy and dance culture.

Critical Factor 1: Ongoing freeze of liquor licence applications

The most critical factor contributing to this social problem is the Liquor and Gaming NSW's freeze “On new liquor licences and related development applications in entertainment precincts in the City of Sydney” (Souris, Liquor & Gaming 2012). In 2018, the NSW Government announced that it would lift the freeze on new liquor licences for venues with a focus on live music, arts and culture” (Toole, Liquor & Gaming, 2018). However, the amendment to this policy does not apply to “many public entertainment venues (for example, traditional nightclubs that have a regular focus on providing pre-recorded music and a range of DJ entertainment)” (Liquor & Gaming, 2018). This is an essential factor contributing to

Sydney's lack of vibrancy as it ensures a lack of diversity in venue spaces and is assisting in the creation of stagnancy in the industry.

Critical Factor 2: Lack of Imagination and resources to transform spaces

Another critical factor contributing to lack of variation in the city is a lack of money, resources and in some cases a lack of imagination amongst promoters and club owners to transform spaces on an event basis. This is evident through the predicament of Sydney music venue, Hudson Ballroom, who were unable to renovate and upgrade their space due to several restrictions (Norris, 2018). Additionally, In Sydney, venues seem clinical, and each night incorporates the same blank canvas, with music venues not placing an emphasis on stage design change at each event.

Critical Factor 3: Sound restrictions and noise complaints

The next factor contributing to the issue is the large amount of noise complaints from new residents surrounding established venues, causing events to be shutdown and heavy restrictions placed on music venues. This can be seen in 2015 when The Sydney Opera House was been fined \$15,000 for exceeding noise limits during a concert by English band Florence and the Machine (Boland, 2017). This factor contributes heavily to the issue as it means existing venues are effected and promoters are limited with the locations which they can choose to host events at.

Critical Factor 4: The view that nightlife and music don't benefit Sydney culture

Unlike other major cities, there is a view held by policy makers that nightlife culture and music holds no benefit to Sydney society, and is instead considered a subversive counter culture. According to the NSW premier, Gladys Berejiklian, The lockout laws should be kept in place to "keep us safe" because "mums and dads in the suburbs are worried about what their young kids are doing when they're having a good time" (Mack, 2017). It is this view that is held amongst policy makers that is a large contributor to Sydney's stagnant music scene.

CONCLUSION

Over the past 5 years, I have witnessed the affect that the laws have had on our city. People only go out if there is a ridiculously expensive international artist playing. On top of this, no one frequents venues to watch local performers or DJ's. So essentially the scene has dwindled, to the point that there barely is one. I wish I lived in a city as beautiful as Sydney, which had an inspirational night time economy. It is possible, we just need politicians to wake up and realise the value that can be created!

The venues are lack lustre, and I often feel embarrassed when performers from overseas come and play in some of our remaining venues. Many of Sydney's best late night venues such as Club 77 have been targeted by police and OLGR, forcing them to massively decrease their opening hours from being able to operate until 12pm to only being able to operate until 3am. Moreover, popular venues such as SLYFOX in Newtown, even though they have a 24 hour licence and the venue is completely soundproofed, they have to turn the music off at

3am and switch to silent disco headphones, due to frequent police visits. No where else in the world experiences laws even slightly similar to what Sydney experiences.

SO WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE!

Lockout Laws have to be wound back if we are to ever become the city that so many young people yearn for it to be! On top of this, OLGR needs to grant new liquor licences for nightclubs, so that existing venues can be renovated and new venues can be created! it's the only way our music scene can begin to thrive again. Finally, the remaining nightclubs in Sydney need to stop being targeted and should be allowed to play music until at least 6 or 7am, just like every other major city in the world, including Melbourne.

Thank you for your time, I really hope the government starts to consider music as an imperative part of culture. I know many young people in Sydney feel the same as myself. I have faith in Sydney and hope these issues begin to be resolved in September!

Regards
Nicholas Berry.

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