

**Submission
No 216**

SYDNEY'S NIGHT TIME ECONOMY

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Partially
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It's no secret that when you go looking for a fun night out in certain areas of NSW, you are more than likely going to see a ghost town where it was once busy.

I've worked in the past six months alone at venues across NSW including Kings Cross, Bondi Beach, Cronulla, Newtown, Western Sydney, Central Coast as well as my hometown of Wollongong.

Areas such as Kings Cross, Bondi Beach, CBD & Cronulla were hit hard, first by the bad news reports, then by law makers, then finished off by licensing agencies ... walk around these areas at 11pm now and you might be shocked to see just how deserted the streets are.

It wasn't always like this. I started DJing in Sydney CBD in 2001 when I came to Australia and NSW was busy. Since then, I've worked as a RSA agent, Security guard, Bartender and currently still work as a DJ, and I've seen first hand huge changes in the night scene.

The late night crowds have left the Cross & the CBD, they've moved to other areas such as the Star Casino & Newtown not subject to the new rules. The effects on Kings Cross and CBD venues has been devastating. While there other contributing causes, statistics suggest there has been a loss of 418 venues in Kings Cross and the CBD since the passage of the lockout law and a net loss of 176 venues in 2018.

Working in Bondi earlier this year, tourists asked me all the time, why is everything shut and is it always this quiet? They quickly work out that Sydney is not what they thought it was and make plans to detour to other destinations.

So what happened?

1) All Lockout laws have achieved is move Patrons to other areas not subject to lockouts - it spelt the beginning of the end for a vibrant nightlife in that area and a downturn in that economy for even day time businesses.

2) Over zealous licensing officers then snuff out any remaining signs of entertainment in those areas. I've heard some horrendous stories about officers with points to prove & personal vendettas and have seen them in action.

Licensing officers need to have a mandate to protect the livelihood of the businesses in their municipality whilst ensuring compliance, not lauding their "power" over them for vendettas or personal gain.

3) Then there are the people that move across the road from a venue, and complain when they hear music from a venue or people talking. Nearly every venue I know that is in or near a residential venue has suffered from complaints.

Yet, in Melbourne, which has a thriving nightlife/arts/cultural scene, venues don't deal with over-the-top complaints from residents because of recent by-laws that protect the venues.

Has it discouraged realty development or residents from moving into these areas in Melbourne?
No!

What type of people move next to an airport and then complain to council because of the noisy planes or move to the country and complain about the smell from farm stock? NSW - take note of how Melbourne deals with these types.

4) With many venues electing to choose DJs over live musicians and the demise in numbers of venues, musicians have few options. This has decimated our Music scene and taken the soul out of NSW. As a DJ who worked in the 80s, the era of "Live Acts", I find this unacceptable that NSW would allow the death of its live music scene by allowing so much pressure to be put on events and venues.

SUMMARY:

1) The ripple effect - what councils and law makers are only starting to understand is that nightlife is a heart beat of an city. When it is affected, day & night time businesses suffer as well. Cronulla

and Kings Cross are perfect examples of this - spending is down since the down turn in nightlife. When an area's nightlife is bustling - people tend to spend more during the day ... simple economics.

2) Protect & invest in our Nightlife - When governments focus on fostering a healthy nightlife including the arts, culture & restaurant scene, this invigorates a community & the economy. I worked Melbourne's diverse entertainment scene from 2005 to 2009 and stayed with in laws that were heavily involved in the theatre scene there. Nightlife is enjoyed by people of all ages, backgrounds & interests. Melbourne protects its venues/events and spends money on fostering the Nightlife, Events, Arts & Cultural scene.

3) Effective Crowd control vs A Dead Economy - Whenever you get a large gathering of people, you're bound to have a small element who have the potential to cause trouble. So do you put in place strict laws which threaten to kill businesses in the area because of the actions of the few or do you put into place preventative measures to stop or minimise the effect of that minority?

a) Ensuring the security companies have quality guards is a good start. Too many companies are throwing guards into venues/events with little or no training/.

b) There are venues that still not allow bar staff to serve drinks without properly assessing patrons. Should bars have a breathalser to help bar staff with their assessment?

c) Getting high risk venues/events to use an i.d. scanning system to filter troublemakers has been a good thing for NSW but the system needs to state wide and the database universally accessible regardless of the software using it.

d) Here's the kicker - When I worked security, I saw that the worst trouble makers are not the ones in the venue, its the ones loitering on the street!!! Its the loiterers that do the one punches that end up in the newspapers or deal drugs or are up to no good.

Crowd control is the key to reducing loitering:

Look at ways to encourage people into venues and off the street?

Why not have councils and venue owners combine to hire police and crowd controllers to direct people and identify known trouble makers in busy, potentially high risk areas?

Perhaps even close off the street and require i.d. to get access to the street like they do in some hotspots around the world?

Ensure there is plenty of junctions where people can get public transport and privately run transport services, especially in busy areas - ensure they are manned.

Crowd control practices are key to ensuring a reduction in loitering and the unwanted element.

4) Rent-a-cop - I worked this year at events where venues paid Police to attend and assist security. Now, some security companies get nervous at this prospect but the crew I worked with got on well with Police and the Police in turn worked hard to help us out. This worked out amazingly well with our New Years day event that had, just last year, resulted in fights and brawls ending up being trouble free. I can see this arrangement being implemented in more situations & events in the future by smart venues. I would rather work alongside law enforcement than have an over the top licensing policeman with too much power killing off our event.

FINAL NOTE

There are plenty of things that could be done to deal with trouble before it comes rather than reducing areas to ghost towns because of badly thought out laws.

I see a few councils have started think tank sessions/meetings and involving local businesses and groups is a step in the right direction.

Working together with stakeholders (Venues - Restaurants, Bars Clubs etc, Musicians, Police, Businesses) - creating a set of by-laws that take into account the interests of all is always going to work out better in the long run.

Taking a hard look at other cities, both in Australia and abroad, and how they handle nightlife and hotspots is also a great start. Inviting business owners and lawmakers from those areas to speak and share information is so important to understanding how to successfully handle things.

I encourage NSW to get its act together and reverse the damage done. The damage has been done in Kings Cross, the CBD & Cronulla but hopefully the powers that be can work to roll out changes to a system that may end up killing NSW.