

**Submission
No 673**

SYDNEY'S NIGHT TIME ECONOMY

Organisation: Students for Sensible Drug Policy Australia

Date Received: 2 July 2019



Submission to the Joint Select Committee on Sydney's night time economy

Students for Sensible Drug Policy Australia (SSDP) represents young people in drug policy discussions and empowers them to advocate for evidence-based drug policies built through community engagement. As young peers, many representing attendees at festivals, venues and events, and their wider networks, we have a unique and significant perspective on the motivations for, and effects of, nightlife and party culture.

Through our #BeHeardNotHarmed campaign we have been advocating for policies that can help improve safety and reduce harm whilst also supporting our nightlife and festival communities. We believe parties and nightlife are a powerful force for creating broader positive social changes, while bolstering local economies, and want to ensure that such spaces are safe, inclusive, and engaged with their communities.

The Liquor Amendment Act 2014 (the lockout laws) has caused immeasurable damage to Sydney's night time economy, stifled the vibrancy of a global city, and has failed in achieving the goal for which they were established. Rather than identifying the causes of alcohol-related violence and implementing evidence-based policies to enhance community safety, the lockout laws instead forced much of Sydney's night time economy under a single regulatory measure. This policy failed to address the core issues and has subsequently seen Sydney's nightlife fall by the wayside as the night time economy struggles to survive.

Furthermore, the lockout laws are a manifestation of the same heavy-handed regulation that has seen music festivals struggle to operate in New South Wales, as shown by numerous festival cancellations in the last 6 months. Such overregulation feels present in many cultural spaces throughout the state. We believe that reforming the lockout laws is one step in transitioning away from blunt-force approaches and instead developing effective policies that encourage positive cultural growth

Prior to the implementation of the lockout laws, there indeed was a genuine need for intervention in order to improve community safety and address alcohol-related violence. However, the lockout laws were far too blunt an instrument to encourage behavioural change that would enhance community safety without resulting in substantial collateral damage to the

culture and vibrancy of Sydney. The objective of reducing alcohol-related violence could have been achieved through alternative policies that encouraged proactive measures to counter alcohol-related violence and antisocial behaviours. Instead, lockout laws are restrictive for all, with no avenues for improvement.

Instead of providing incentives to improve behaviour and safety, the blanket regulation of the lockouts simply shifted the issue elsewhere without prompting any true change in culture. The displacement of violence and the decline in public amenities in proximal areas such as Newtown¹ is indicative of the lockouts failure provide an incentive for behaviour to improve. Cultural hubs have felt a subsequent loss of their unique identity and as a whole the nightlife of Sydney feels suppressed and stagnant.

We encourage the Committee to consider alternatives to the lockouts that support the self-determination of diverse communities. Whilst many justifiably identify the economic boons a prospering night-time economy may provide, we advocate for a vibrant, exciting and diverse environment in which we as young people can find our community. The potential for such experiences to inspire personal and social growth may not be as quantifiable as other metrics, but are just as important a reason to work towards achieving a better outcome for our night time economy. We hope that potential reforms acknowledge this and collaborate with a range of stakeholders including marginalised communities that have the most to benefit through participation in a safe, inclusive and accepting nightlife through which social growth can be achieved.

¹ Hughes, C.E. & Weedon-Newstead, A.S. (2018). Investigating displacement effects as a result of the Sydney, NSW alcohol lockout legislation. *Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy*, 25(5), 386-396.