

**Submission
No 732**

SYDNEY'S NIGHT TIME ECONOMY

Name: Ms Iz Connell

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To the Joint Select Committee,

Re: Sydney's night time economy.

I'd like to make comments regarding your terms of reference, considering what I have seen and experienced in the lead-up to, and after the introduction of the Lockout Laws in February 2014.

To give you some background on my perspective- I was born in the Hunter Valley, and lived in Newcastle, New South Wales, from age 10 to age 19. I witnessed the introduction and changes brought about by the trial of lockout laws in Newcastle from 2008 onwards. As a lesbian, I rarely felt comfortable socializing at night in Newcastle, and as such I cannot comment on the efficacy of those laws compared to the safety of the area beforehand. However, regarding Sydney:

Terms of reference

(a) maintain and enhance community safety;

The lockout laws have not improved or enhanced community safety, if anything they have simply redistributed violence and antisocial behaviour from the Cross towards Oxford Street and Newtown. The two 'gay ghettos' of Sydney, especially King Street Newtown, are increasingly frequented by people who prior to the lockout laws would not have attended our venues, nor would they have been particularly welcomed (due to their behaviour rather than identity). After midnight on Oxford Street I have experienced greater amounts of intimidation and harassment since these laws were introduced. I feel unsafe and avoid moving to different venues even before lockout.

In addition to this, the NSW Police Force seem hell-bent on enforcing move-on notices to homeless and mentally unwell people, frequently intimidate gay people on the strip, and are rarely available or interested when genuine assistance is required. A more culturally competent police force would be beneficial to all patrons and residents.

(b) maintain and enhance individual and community health outcomes;

I see no clear evidence regarding how the lockouts meet this outcome. Enhancing and expanding funding to public health, including drug and alcohol services, funding for late night outreach/drug rover harm minimization activities similar to that run by ACON, and less intimidation by police with or without drug dogs would improve the area, as would improving amenities such as public transport that runs frequently and late at night.

Ultimately decriminalising and regulating illicit drugs is paramount to improving the health outcomes of all Australians who go out at night, regardless of whether they consume alcohol and other drugs, or which ones they consume. Criminalising a normal human behaviour – people have been getting intoxicated or high since time immemorial – does none of us any favours, worsens health outcomes and disallows people who need help controlling or stopping their substance use from being able to

do so through a loss of tax revenue on drugs, and stigma attached to substance use. This is typically seen as a 'pie in the sky' suggestion, however drug laws such as those in Portugal have many benefits.

Increasing the availability of late night food and non-alcoholic beverage options is also important. I'm aware that a kebab shop in Newtown, which used to be open until late at night, has been forced to shut at midnight due to draconian planning laws. This shop offered intoxicated patrons the ability to purchase food in a well-lit environment, and now patrons are likely to simply drink more instead.

(c) ensure existing regulatory arrangements in relation to individuals, businesses and other stakeholders, including Sydney's lockout laws, remain appropriately balanced;

I lived in Potts Point, less than 300m from the main strip, for over 7 months in 2018-2019. During that time I experienced minimal late night disruptions due to noise, if anything the tourists drinking at local backpackers because they couldn't afford alcohol in pubs and clubs was a bigger problem. I've been told that residents of the new Omnia building in that area started putting in noise complaints about the Potts Point Hotel within weeks of moving in, and these complaints were taken seriously. To me, it's obvious that the balance of power is too much in favour of residential landlords and tenants. If people want a perfectly quiet and clean place to live, they can move out to the 98% of the Australian continent which is unoccupied, they cannot expect it in inner city Sydney.

I have witnessed Sydney's gay bars, which have traditionally been safer places for us to gather as communities, decimated by these lockouts. I want regulations brought in which allow them to thrive, which in turn improves my community's ability to connect, celebrate and run our own businesses.

I want to see the powers of the NSW Police Force, and Liquid & Gaming NSW, to be moderated and not increased.

(d) enhance Sydney's night time economy;

Suggestions I have seen made or believe have merit include: introducing a 'night-time' mayor similar to that in London, compulsory mediation between venues and complainants who have issues due to noise etc similar to those suggested by Darcy Byrne, 24/7 public transport, support for artists, promoters and businesses who work or provide entertainment predominantly with groups such as LGBTI people and people of diverse cultural backgrounds, more arts grants for night time activities, and increased funding to services to support these.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Regards,

Iz Connell