

**Submission  
No 742**

## **SYDNEY'S NIGHT TIME ECONOMY**

**Name:** Mr Craig Wesker

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Dear Committee Members,

SUBMISSION to review LOCK OUT LAWS & Legislation of the Sydney Entertainment Precinct & Kings Cross Precinct Laws initiated in Feb 2014.

## PROLOGUE

Please read and accept this submission as my personal views and thoughts from 30 years of working in the hotel industry. I have tried to be objective as possible despite the fact that my livelihood and this industry are tightly entwined, I have a wife, two teenage boys, a little dog and one BIG "Sydney" Mortgage!

Our industry needs things to change, the taxis owners need change, the convenience store franchisees need change, the restaurateurs need change, the Uber Drivers would thrive with a change our whole city needs real change.

Being a 30 year veteran in this industry, with 17 years working directly in the CBD, I have certainly seen changes to our entire industry but note that the Lockout Laws have certainly had the largest effect on trade restriction, revenue contraction and has generationally shift changed the going out culture to the CBD. I have two Nephews are whom are 18 & 20 and neither of them have experienced the CBD or KINGS CROSS being a busy, fun, diverse and vibrant precinct to go out and experience and enjoy the ecliptic array of venues. In fact both of them comment regularly to me that going out in the city is such a hassle with restrictions of drinks and getting into a venue before 1:30am and then you can't leave etc. This latest drinking generation haven't experienced a vibrant and alive CBD and I am not even talking about the CBD during the 2000 Olympics which was Party Central for all Sydney siders or when Martin Place use to host FREE outdoor Rock concerts on Saturday nights during summer that would attract up to 10,000 people.

In my current role as the Licensee of a busy venue in the Rocks and the Group General Manager of a Family Publican Group of hotels that has owned and operated hotels in Sydney for over 50 years, I am most certainly downhearted at this present state of affairs this once great City finds itself in.

My life is full with long hours @ work and this has always been fun and vibrant, challenging, annoying but now I find myself reflecting more and more late at night whilst working on what it would be if unrestricted trade was allowed again in the CBD & Kings Cross Precinct .

I have been compelled to write to your committee to express my opinion on the repression these laws have created in this great City and my industry.

## INTRODUCTION

The Lock-out laws have worked in such a way at ensuring that the vibrancy of the CBD & Kings Cross Precincts 5yrs ago are now distant memories. The long history of the vibrancy of these precincts is what drove the night time economy and helped promote Sydney as an international city that didn't close and you could get drink and a meal 24hrs ago.

This legislation has diminished the number of patrons visiting the precincts and certainly the drink restrictions has culturally changed the drinking landscape for a generation at the cost of looking like a "Nanny" State in the eyes of our interstate brothers and sisters, let alone international travellers; with the no neat spirits or on the rocks drinks after 12am, no shots after 12am, no cocktails after 12am, 4 drinks only @ 12am, then 2 drinks only @ 2am. All these restrictions cause friction with non-Sydney siders and even NSW patrons whom don't normally drink in the CBD.

The CBD Precinct is a little luckier than KINGS CROSS Precinct in the fact that the regulation that you have to have your ID scanned at the entrance after a certain time to enter a premises was of course a law that was never written to embarrass our City with our international visitors but has whole heartedly done just that.

What about the fact that if a Female patron needs to go to the toilet after 1:30am LOCK OUT and she has left the venue already then we cant in fact let her in to go to the toilet.

Following this introduction I will outline my thoughts of what changes are needed to our current legislation and regulations to ensure that the scaping of the lockout laws can successfully return both precincts to their former glory within a couple of years. Such changes will also require the full support of the NSW Police, City of Sydney, the Office of Liquor & Gaming and the NSW Government as each of them has a functionality to perform to ensure the success of such changes.

And whilst the repelling of these laws and restrictions will open up these precincts to once again start increasing the number of small bars & restaurants, then we must also ensure the authorities have some real restrictive control and are able to wield it in punishing rogue venues.

## **WHY the LOCK OUT LAWS need to REPELLED**

After 5 years of lock out laws & restrictions on drink trade they need to be repelled for the following main reasons;

- Both Precincts have seen long term decline in numbers of foot traffic visiting the areas on the weekends, that is outside some very expensive City of Sydney, Destination NSW or similar agency hosting events like NYE, the Sydney Festival, VIVID & Good Food Month to name a few.
- The diverse offering of small bars and hotels is restrictively contracting as revenue targets are continually not being achieved and owners are pulling on the purse strings tighter and tighter. (a large percentage of CBD venues are leasehold agreements and rents do not decrease).
- The Lock Out Laws were brought in as reaction to some terrible incidents of violence
- Kings Cross ID Scanning system was legislated to combat the movement of “Bikies” and to easily locate patrons whom have caused issues or acts of violence within a venue. What it has done is this and more – it is embarrassing for our international and interstate visitors when they go out in this precinct and are asked to produce photo ID when they go to enter a venue.
- The drink restrictions need to redressed especially the no spirits served neat or on ice – this restriction is not a display of a progressive international city.
- The Light Rail delays have caused further financial hardship for all CBD businesses as the CBD has just been a pile of rubble and dust for nearly 3 years the full length of George St.
- The CBD is a now a ghost town from around 11:30pm, after this long period lockout we have culturally shifted the time frame of patrons whom are leaving the CBD well before 12am. We know the Casino trade increases around this time period most Friday and Saturday nights whom are outside the lockout law restrictions.

There are a number of other facets which I could list but I will summarise the situation in plain language –

Less People = Less Revenue and this means the Hotels, Restaurants and Small Bars have suffered real financial hardship. This hardship isn't isolated to just the rich owners of these businesses but it knocks down all the way to the staff in these industries and all the connected workers to the night time economy.

## WHAT has to CHANGE for a SAFE NIGHT OUT

- NSW Government has to increase the Police Budget for the CBD to ensure the increase to the number of POLICE in the Precincts. Ultimately on a Friday and Saturday nights it would be idealistic if the POLICE roster included covering “Beat Police” in pairs working a set number of CBD blocks all shift – not using the cars but in real old fashioned POLICING having a big presence on the streets.
- Improving travel to and from the Precincts; keeping the City Rail Grid operating to 3am on Friday & Saturday nights.
- The Light Rail is scheduled to operate 5am – 1am, 7 days a week. This is counter-intuitive to moving people in and out of the CBD so there is less stress at push points like stations on the line etc. Again this mode of transport should be operating around the clock on Friday & Saturday nights.
- Licencing Police need to be visiting venues from Small Bars through to the largest of the city’s Venues to ensure they are being compliant.
- OLGR Officers need to visit venues from Small Bars through to the large venues to ensure compliance.
- Police presence on the street can again be re-enforced with Business Inspections and “Walk Throughs” of venues.
- The NSW Government should ensure that the RSA laws are being upheld, but at the same time scrap the Violent Venue recording. The fact that the size of the venue is not weighted at all in the number of acceptable assault charges is not working.
- Replace this Scheme with a Audit Checklist of compliance that the OLGR & Police can interview and ascertain the level of professional commitment of the owner/s and or management team.
- Develop & realise the importance of education and marketing campaign on how to treat and react to explosive situations within licensed venues.

In conclusion I implore you to recommend to remove the law and all the restrictions in the regulation.

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission.

Regards

**Craig Wesker**

**Licensee**

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