

**Submission
No 551**

SYDNEY'S NIGHT TIME ECONOMY

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Hello NSW Parliament

Let me open with this: I am 53 years old, late night drinking and nightlife is no longer about ME. I submit this as a citizen of a once-vibrant city, who is genuinely concerned about the over-bearing legislation which the lock-out laws represent and I submit this because the collateral damage to the city of Sydney, which the lock-out laws have brought is almost beyond reversal, if steps are not taken immediately to restore the reputation of Sydney as a global, vibrant, progressive, open and welcoming city.

Let's start with the change in the way that society and cities eat, sleep, work and play. Long gone are the days when the vast majority of people worked Mon - Fri and were home by 6pm. In so many professions and industries, workers finish between 9pm and 2am. Not occasionally, but regularly.

Let's look at hospitality - as an easy case study. I know many people who work in hospitality, so I speak from a base of knowledge here. A bartender, or manager, who works in a bar that shuts at midnight will often spend an hour or two after close to clean up and prep the bar for the next day. So for them, going out for an after work drink at 2am is not late night drinking, it's after work drinks. Same applies for the thousands upon thousands of restaurant, bar, hotel, event, catering and other hospitality workers across Sydney and across NSW - so often, they don't clock off until everybody else is thinking about going home, or most probably, already at home. For them, drinking between midnight Saturday and 4am on a Sunday morning is just the same as an investment banker drinking between 6pm and 10pm on a Friday night.

So many of us now work on a 24 hour roster, yet restrictions on how we should socialise are assuming that we are all able to head out for dinner and/or a drink at 7pm and be home before midnight. That is not the way society, industry and business is in 2019. The lock-out laws are not only failing to recognise the change in the way that we eat, sleep, work and play, but they are essentially removing the freedom to socialise when desired for people who work in the 24 hour economy.

The collateral damage of the lock-out laws is significant and widespread. The most notable and most destructive is probably the closure of so many quality bars and restaurants in the lock-out zone. Quality businesses that have provided a great service to the neighbourhood in which they existed for years. Businesses that have added to the fabric of that neighbourhood, but are now closed because the lock-out laws reduced late night patronage so severely that their business was rendered non-viable. Possibly one of the best examples is Jimmy Liks in Victoria Street, Potts Point. It truly was an institution in the once-vibrant Kings Cross/Potts Point precinct. After the introduction of the lock-out laws and subsequent abandonment of Kings Cross and Potts Point, their restaurant was down 50% in revenue on a Friday night and 30% on a Saturday night. It was a travesty reading in 2015 that this restaurant/bar closed it's doors. The owners of a quality business that does nothing but add to the neighbourhood were punished, after having done nothing but good. And subsequently the locals (and visitors to the area) were punished, because one of their favourite restaurants had to close it's doors.

Jimmy Liks is just one case of the collateral damage which the lock-out laws have created. Hundreds of venues have closed their doors, staff laid off, business owners lives disrupted in both an emotional and financial way, and then the businesses who have (somehow) managed to remain open, are also collateral damage, because there is not the same amount of foot traffic in the neighbourhood, and therefore their takings are down too.

The collateral damage on a local level is fairly easy to quantify: businesses close, staff are laid off, and those living and working in precincts like Kings Cross/Potts Point, and those visiting those neighbourhoods have less options when it comes to eating and drinking out, and less options in the time of night that they may want to eat/drink out. But a very, very significant part of the collateral damage equation is the reputation of Sydney as a truly global city. Repeatedly, for years, we see articles from local media outlets and from overseas media outlets ridiculing Sydney's lock-out laws. Money cannot buy this sort of publicity. Yes, it's publicity, negative publicity, which has a greater impact than positive publicity. People in London talk about this. Not just Aussie ex-pats living there, but London locals, who no longer think that Sydney is 'the place to be' because of the lock-out laws, and the negative press (publicity) which the laws have bought. It's impossible to quantify the economic effect that the lock-out laws have on people who live overseas and once thought that Sydney was 'the place to be' because of it's vibrancy, culture, relaxed nature - yet

now have the lock-out laws and the negativity associated with that in their conscience when thinking of travelling 24 hours to get to Sydney. And what of the reputation we now have among the global gay community? As we all know, Sydney has always been on the map as a destination for the gay community living in other countries, but now not so much. Oxford Street has been decimated by the lock-out laws and the once-thriving strip is now a collection of empty stores, cheap take-away shops, and closed bars and nightclubs. The life has been drained from the once-iconic street because of the lock-out laws and the collateral damage which that legislation has inflicted upon a precinct which once was the most fun neighbourhood of Sydney. The gay community are good natured and good fun, yet they too have been punished for two crimes that took place in Potts Point.

Finally, let's address the two crimes in Potts point which were the incidents that provoked the government to introduce such destructive legislation. Both took place relatively early in the evening. Neither were the result of excessive drinking after 3am in the morning. But the media seized on these incidents and the media demanded action. From memory it wasn't the citizens of Potts Point or Kings Cross demanding action, it was the media. The media are ruthless. The media, of all types, will grab hold of an event like this until they bleed it dry because it sells papers, it sells online advertising and it provides sensational click-bait. And the media like nothing more than taunting a government with the hope that they can make enough noise to make the government react to the headlines which they print. It's the holy grail - a media outlet which can influence a government. There is nothing more that a media boss likes than having his/her publication, story or article making so much noise that a government must respond in order to quell the negative publicity which the media have created. It's damage control and ultimately that is more important to the government than carefully considering a solution that is in the best interest of the people. How do I know this? I have worked deep within media organisations for 25 years - I know how they operate and I know the agenda which they like to set. Fact.

In summary, the lock-out laws should be repealed immediately, because they were introduced because of the pressure which the media brought. The collateral damage of these lock-out laws is beyond calculation, but significant on so many levels and in so many socioeconomic ways. Again, this is not about me. I don't go out drinking in Kings Cross late at night, but people should have that choice. People should be allowed to freely drink when they want, on the proviso they are well behaved. Businesses should be allowed to contribute to the night time economy, knowing they will be viable and will remain viable and that they won't be punished for an event that happened years ago, to which they contributed zero to that event. Zero.

Thank you.