

**Submission
No 745**

SYDNEY'S NIGHT TIME ECONOMY

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As a resident of nearly 20 years in the 2011 postcode I consider myself a very reliable witness regarding the issues which have defined Kings Cross and its place in the "nighttime economy" narrative both before and since the Lockout Laws. The difference in amenity and safety for both residents and visitors alike since that suite of measures began has been as stark as night versus day.

One of the many ad nauseum narratives by the anti-Lockouts brigade is that these were a "knee-jerk" reaction when nothing could be further from the truth. Local residents worked for years prior with the LAC (our only allies!), appealing to Sydney City Council and state government for something to be done and warning about the potential dangers inherent in the 'when-too-many-licensed-premises-are-never-enough' mindset which prevailed for too long in Kings Cross. However, it all fell on deaf ears. It was an out of control train careening down a steep descent and it finally reached tipping point. So the oft-repeated "knee-jerk" is laughable. In particular as a fully trained and very experienced nurse I can tell you that if it took that long for any patient's patella to respond to a deliberately applied stimulus, s/he would have long since been dead; in fact, in a state of rigor mortis!

One of the other reoccurring retorts is that Lockout Laws punish all for the behaviour of a few. How is that any different than any other law; think gun laws, speed limits - any laws.

There is also much talk about the decreased foot traffic in Kings Cross. Well, that all depends on what one regards as normal. In my opinion, having in excess of 20,000 patrons on any weekend night in a postage stamp-sized district which has an overall population of less than that is a recipe for disaster and that is exactly what it was shown to be. So naturally those with a vested interest in reversing the Lockout Laws will retail this discrepancy as something abnormal when it is anything but.

The other running narrative is that Kings Cross is a "ghost town". As a local resident I go to Kings Cross almost every day and view what would be regarded as an above average number of beings, none of which are ghostly but real people. I suppose if one or even a group such as some of the committee members visited the area on some weekday night and have been used to the totally unmanageable crowds of pre-Lockout days then it might appear that way when it is all a result of having been "civilised" as opposed to the high valency term "gentrified" which some prefer to apply.

The main issue seems to be the unfortunate nexus or arranged marriage between "live music" and licensed premises and that is something which I have never understood. That is particularly so since music has been a lifelong passion of my own. However, whether performing /engaging in it myself or as an audience member or listener I have never required alcohol to appreciate or enjoy it. Which is most certainly not to say that I am a wowser because I am definitely not. However, I do not need alcohol to enhance my appreciation of music. And that is just the alcohol issue. What about the added problem of other illicit drugs which also seem a mandatory component too often of "live music"?

Furthermore, I have never enforced my musical tastes on anyone else by way of excess volume and presuming that anyone around me must simply endure my musical tastes any more than I would think it appropriate to force someone to eat food which I preferred.

One of the ironies in the issue of "live music" is that the demographic who are most likely to attend such spend the rest of their days and nights wired to electronic devices for the rest of the time. I do not think that I have heard of any "silent discos" in Sydney such as occur as opposed to other cities.

All of which brings me to the point of planning which really seems to be the root of the problem with boosting the nighttime economy. If City of Sydney and the state of NSW are so keen to support live music then why is not more funding allocated for soundproofing venues to allow for the music as well as protect local residents from having to endure it? It is too easy to talk of the principles of “agent of change” or “good neighbour”, both of which would seem to translate to residents simply putting up with the noise and shutting up. Most importantly that means living with no fresh air and being forced to use air conditioners when some can simply not have those (as in older buildings) or prefer not to use them. I thought we were all so concerned about the environment!

But the issues surrounding the lockout laws are about more than live music. The reality is that no residential area should have to withstand an excess of licensed premises and all the masses of patrons and anti-social, if not frankly dangerous, behaviour which that brings. It is nothing short of folly to presume that there has been some seismic attitudinal shift in disposition and behaviour of those who would set out to spend an entire evening, night and early morning hours drinking alcohol and all the rest. And it is almost laughable when people talk about the decrease in crime as a justification for, and indeed proof that, reversing the Lockout laws is a good idea. Is that not like ceasing one’s blood pressure medication because the blood pressure readings are within normal limits? Hello!

Others argue that the crime figures were down before the Lockout laws were initiated. It would be hard to argue against the reality that many would-be patrons were even being put off by the inherent dangers of a night out in deadly Kings Cross after people began to die there.

Regarding blaming the Lockout Laws for the sagging nighttime economy, I hope that all of those on the Committee for review have apprised themselves well regarding this issue generally. I certainly have and I can tell you that having set up Google alerts on the topics of the “nighttime economy” as well as the very much related problem of “alcohol related crime” I receive numerous emails daily. I read about cities in places I have never even heard of all struggling to boost the nighttime economy. And they are not struggling because of lockout laws, it is simply a result of the mega-shift in the retail industry generally. And I can also tell you that I receive at least as many or more notices on a daily basis about the perils and problems of alcohol related crime surrounding the nighttime economy districts. Can’t have one without the other wherever it is.

Specifically, it is very phony to lump together or regard similarly the early nighttime economy and that of the late nighttime and early morning economy. They are completely separate. Talk of late night shopping and God know what! Are retailers who are already struggling going to employ staff for the few who might want to shop late at night? And how many people want to get a haircut or buy a pair of shoes at 1 a.m. in the morning. You are dreaming!

Which examples bring us to the reality of a total shift in retail via the internet. Are all of you who are so obsessed with talk of a falling nighttime economy factoring in all of the sales income via the internet such as with Uber Eats and Jimmy Brings? I wonder.

At face value this all seems to be essentially about alcohol. Why no talk about the loss of foot traffic regarding book shops or movie theatres or countless other retail businesses which can be conducted electronically and all of which have had to consequently adjust their business models and adapt?

Finally and back to planning issues why do these “nighttime economy” endeavours (read: alcohol) have to be concentrated in single areas? And if so, why not in areas which are not residential to avoid the obvious conflicts which do and will always arise? For example, there

are places in the CBD which have no residential blocks and so late night economy businesses would ideally be placed there.

In any case, I do hope that if the Lockout laws are reversed that some “equality” prevails and the “vibrancy” can be shared. We here in 2011 have truly done our time and it would be selfish not to share it with all those who favour and have worked so hard for the reversal of the Lockout laws. I can tell you that being awakened every weekend night between 1 and 4 a.m. by log-jammed traffic with horns honking and taxis unable to move through it to get patrons is very vibrant indeed. Speaking of which, I have lost count of the number of taxi drivers who tell me that they always did and even now still do avoid Kings Cross on weekend night.

Finally, I could not help but wonder about the section which requires personal details and the allowance for submissions, seemingly, from other states and even other countries. How does /will the Committee decide who is a valid submitter? Surely, people who do not live in NSW or especially those who live in other countries have a voice in this matter. However, I can see no way on that form how that can be determined whether such individuals are even Australians. It is curious.

Thank you for reading my submission.

