

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES - INQUIRY INTO STRATEGIES TO REDUCE ALCOHOL ABUSE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN NSW

Supplementary questions: Cr Julie Hegarty, Local Government NSW

Answers are to be returned to the Committee secretariat by Monday 3 June 2013.

Does local government have a strong enough voice in the system at the moment?

No.

Would you like to see that strengthened?

Yes

Is it possible for you to take on notice and come back to the Committee with specific recommendations as to how that could happen right down to a provision in the legislation that is a big hurdle so that the Committee can come back with specific recommendations?

Yes, the response is provided below.

The role and voice of Local Government in the liquor licensing process needs to be strengthened within the context and under the provision that appropriate resources are provided and partnerships can be encouraged with any increased role by Local Government.

Councils need to have a stronger voice in circumstances where a new liquor license has been applied for in an area that has a high number of existing liquor outlets and a high incidence of alcohol related antisocial behaviour. It has been reported that following an application for a liquor license, if councils reject the application the applicant is able to *re-apply/appeal* through the Land & Environment court. If the application is overturned on the basis of economic and competitive advantage over the potential detrimental social and health impacts of opening another liquor outlet.

Councils are continuously placed with the challenge of the economic and social impact debate, as "alcohol" is considered a commercial **product** and therefore the retail and supply of this product is placed in the same category as other business/retail products, for example – shoes/clothing. The negative impact of the oversupply of this product is far reaching, particularly the negative social outcomes that stems from the over consumption. From the health perspective, alcohol is defined by NSW Health as *a drug that slows down the brain and nervous system. It is the most widely used and abused drug in Australia*, and supply and consumption should be given due restrictions through the Liquor Act and/or other relevant NSW legislation.

Amending legislation to become more stringent under the objects of the Act would assist in the general health and wellbeing of the communities and enable Local Government to better respond to their communities.

The following **recommendations** are aimed at strengthening the role of Local Government in the liquor licencing process:

1. That the Independent Liquor and Gaming Authority (ILGA) implement improved communication processes with Local Government during a liquor licencing process. This would include:
 - a) recognition of receipt to receiving a submission by a council (or other stakeholder), and
 - b) informing a council of the outcome of all liquor licencing applications situated in that Local Government Area.
2. That ILGA undergo a review of their current processes with appropriate feedback from key stakeholders including Local Government,

3. That the social profile data and information (including the density and number of liquor outlets) on local government areas provided by ILGA be updated regularly and be assessable to councils and communities to enable better informed decisions to be made.
4. The NSW Government develop guidelines to assist councils in providing relevant evidence that demonstrates potential negative impacts on the surrounding social and physical environment. This evidence is to be used for consideration by ILGA during the licensing application process. The current trial of the Environment and Venue Assessment Tool (EVAT) could form the basis of developing guidelines and an accompanying (flexible) risk assessment tool to be adaptable to different communities.
5. The NSW Government develop guidelines for liquor licence applicants to assist them in identifying potential negative impacts on the surrounding social and physical environment and further identify harm minimisation strategies to address these (including alcohol related violence and binge-drinking). This content should be included in the consultation notice to stakeholders including councils and local police for their feedback.
6. That the Community Impact Statement prepared by a liquor licence applicant prior to an application being made, require the applicant to:
 - a) identify potential negative impacts on the surrounding social and physical environment and
 - b) further identify harm minimisation strategies to address these (including alcohol related violence and binge-drinking).
7. Increase the number of days for councils, police and other stakeholders to provide input into a Community Impact Statement.
8. That the NSW Government conduct a review of current resources available for Local Government and develop evidence based resources that are easily accessible and regularly updated for council and community to address this issue.
9. That Local Government's evidence from its harm minimisation and crime prevention approaches and the related financial costs of these approaches be considered and used to address the increasing social and economic burden on communities for further action at the State and Federal Government levels.

Can you advise if the LGA (LGNSW) was involved, engaged or consulted by the OLGR in the development of a planning tool (EVAT) it has developed to support local government in addressing alcohol related issues at a local level?

LGNSW were not involved, engaged nor consulted by the Office for Liquor, Gaming and Racing in the development of the planning tool to support local government. LGNSW were made aware of the existence of the planning tool and the piloted trial of the tool due to the regular monitoring practice conducted by the Senior Policy Officer, Public Health who identified the trial as per details outlined in a media item and press release. Given the trial is only in the City of Sydney and the City of Newcastle, LGNSW has determined to await the outcome of the trial. Should an evaluation or evidence show that this tool is effective and be considered for a state-wide approach, LGNSW would be best suited to enable state wide usage with appropriate capacity building and further evaluation resources provided by NSW Government.