

## **Surfers Paradise Licensed Venues Association (SPLVA) submission to the Queensland Government Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee.**

### **History of SPLVA**

The Surfers Paradise Licensed Venues Association was formed in the early 1990's after several Surfers Paradise Nightclub owners felt there was a need for a united industry group to address issues relating to Liquor Licensing, patron safety, public transport and promotion of Surfers Paradise.

In the initial stages of the formation of the SPLVA, several members of the executive of the "West End Forum" which was a similar Industry association in Melbourne formed to address issues in and around the King Street entertainment precinct, were brought to Surfers Paradise to provide help and guidance in the setting up of the Association.

It was decided to not limit the association to Nightclubs but to make the Association available to all licensees as well as other interested parties such as Gold Coast City Council, Police, Liquor Licensing, Ambulance, Fire and public safety groups and groups promoting Surfers Paradise.

### **SPLVA Projects**

Several projects have been instituted by the SPLVA in the Surfers Paradise area.

These include the Chill Out Zone, Inter-venue Radio Network & Taxi marshals.

The Chill Out Zone was created to serve as a "safe haven – recovery zone" for patrons in Surfers Paradise who may have been unduly affected by alcohol or drugs, require first aid, care for intoxication or are in need of guidance or counselling.

The Inter-Venue Radio network was created to provide a direct means of communication between venues to identify potential trouble makers in the precinct – i.e. where a patron is refused entry or evicted from a licensed venue that venue notifies other venues so the same person cannot walk to another venue and gain entry. The Gold Coast City Council CCTV Monitoring room is also notified so they can watch the particular individuals and they also have direct communication to the police if further action needs to be taken.

The Taxi Marshall Service was instigated by the SPLVA as it was identified that with the long queues at taxi ranks in Surfers Paradise there were people who "queue-jumped" which created confrontations with people who had been waiting in the queue and the possibility of further escalations. The Taxi Marshalls maintain the queue in an orderly fashion and are they to quell any potential problems if they occur. Following several years of direct funding by the venues themselves, the funding of these marshalls was taken over by the Queensland Government, and the strategy replicated in other precincts.

## Changes To Licensing

Since the introduction of trading to 5.00am it has been proposed on several occasions to reduce licensed hours. On each occasion that this has occurred it has been decided that changing the licensed hours will have no effect on the total amount of alcohol consumed or have any effect on the amount of alcohol related violence. This can be referenced from the following extracts from Queensland Government Reports.

Available data has not shown a recent increase in alcohol related violence, and anecdotally it would seem that there have been reductions. While 3am to 5am are not prime trading times for most licensed venues, current operational hours do facilitate the more orderly dispersal of patrons, and can cater to those patrons who do wish to stay later, rather than sending them to the Casino or to house parties.

Extract from Alcohol Related Violence Final Report, Queensland Government, March 2010:

"Many of the submissions to the inquiry made the point that the law-abiding majority should not have to suffer for the actions of the few. Many urged that an emphasis be placed on individuals accepting responsibility for their own actions and the consequences. The Committee strongly agrees that there needs to be a greater emphasis on responsibility. This approach informs this report and the Committee's recommendations, including calls for greater enforcement and sanctions on violent offenders".

Extract from Qld Government Response to "Alcohol Related Violence Final Report", August 2010:

"Research indicates assaults can occur on any day at any time and are most likely to occur whenever the venue is busiest, not just during very late trading hours. It is appropriate to implement more direct harm minimisation initiatives rather than simply relying on reductions to trading hours".

## Proposed Hours change

The proposed changes to a 1.00am lockout and 3.00am cessation of drink service in the Surfers Paradise precinct will have far reaching Economic and Social impacts as well as impacts on public transport and public safety.

- Economic impacts – Research has shown that due to the shorter trading hours over 2,000 jobs will be lost as well as a loss of over \$60,000,000 to the Surfers Paradise economy
- Social impacts – The earlier lockout and closing there will be a proliferation of house and unit parties where people can consume large amounts of alcohol in an uncontrolled and often unsafe environment (for example intoxicated people falling to their deaths from high rise balconies). This is already in evidence from the 3 nights where late trading venues have to close at midnight (before Christmas Day, Good Friday & Anzac Day) there are copious amounts of unit parties and "after parties" at houses in the suburbs.
- Precinct impacts – With large amounts of people exiting venues at 3.00am severe strain will be placed on public transport particularly taxis where there are already long queues

on Saturday nights. With large numbers of people particularly tourists wandering the streets of Surfers Paradise it is obvious that this will have an adverse effect on public safety.

### **Evidence to support changes**

Evidence to support the proposed changes has not been properly researched or does not exist. Much has been said about the 35% reduction in violent incidents in Kings Cross since the introduction of the lockout but with an 84% reduction in foot traffic in the area the rate of violent incidents has actually dramatically increased. This reduction in patronage will not occur in tourist areas as people are already there on holidays so on the Kings Cross evidence we can expect an increase in the number of violent incidents. Evidence from Melbourne has shown that lockouts and reduced operating hours did not reduce violent incidents with the result that lockouts have been repealed and trading hours increased.

### **Casino exemption**

With the Casino being exempt from the earlier lockout and closing provisions patrons who have left venues in Surfers Paradise or Broadbeach will travel to the Casino to continue drinking- therefore there will be no difference to the amount of alcohol consumed but put a strain on resources at the Casino where there are already major patron safety problems particularly at the huge queues at the taxi rank on Saturday nights. Evidence of this patron movement was clearly shown when 10.00pm closing on Sunday nights was in force and the bars at the Casino particularly Fortunes Nightclub were open later and had their busiest trading nights of the week.

### **Previous Government Projects**

After the introduction of the “Drink Safe Precinct” strategy there was a major reduction in the number of violent incidents in Surfers Paradise with no change to trading hours. It is too early to assess the impact of the “Safe Night Out” strategy as many of the proposals have not been implemented as yet – for example ID Scanners and banned persons database to keep undesirable persons out of the area.

### **Summary**

Late trading venues provide a safe and highly controlled environment for persons wishing to engage in alcohol consumption. Many of the persons attending late night venues are from the Hospitality and Entertainment Industries enjoying a night out after work. Late night venue operators wish to maintain a safe and friendly environment in Surfers Paradise and have been part of a joint effort from Council, Police and Public Safety groups in achieving this goal.

If earlier lockouts and closing times were introduced this would have the effect of driving large numbers of people on the streets of Surfers Paradise all at the one time with its associated problems and creating a situation where there is uncontrolled alcohol consumption in units and suburban houses with the associated problems.

The SPLVA has demonstrated historically that not only is the Association happy to contribute and to collaborate on strategies implemented by the Government, but also willing to develop local level strategies. The lack of meaningful consultation, and rapidly changing government policies has already had an effect on stakeholders in the precinct. It is very important that licensees be recognised as willing participants in safety strategies, and consulted for their local level knowledge and access to patrons.