



Surfers Paradise Licensed Venues Association Inc.

Submission to

Law Justice and Safety Committee

Enquiry Into Alcohol-Related Violence in Queensland

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Submitting Organisation: The Surfers Paradise Licensed Venues Association (SPLVA) is an Industry Accord Group comprising of licensees in the Surfers Paradise precinct, with an emphasis on late night traders. The Association aims to work in collaboration with other stakeholders to address issues and improve safety and amenity in the precinct.

The SPLVA acknowledges that alcohol-related violence and other harms are an issue in Queensland, as in other parts of the world. Licensees, and the Associations and Accords that represent them, are a valuable resource in addressing these issues.

Alcohol Related Violence

Although much attention is paid to alcohol related violence, particularly in the media, this is often sensationalized, and restricts meaningful debate around the issue. While the Terms of Reference look specifically at Licensed Venues, alcohol related violence occurs in many other settings, and is a wide ranging social issue. As an industry body, the SPLVA will confine itself to comment on Licensed Venues, but would like to emphasise that this may be seen as a symptom of a wider problem.

Additionally, a significant percentage of alcohol related violence is unreported, and a number of agencies collect data that is not necessarily compiled in a way to give an accurate picture of the issue.

Other regions, including NSW, collect detailed data for analysis to: measure the problem, plan effective strategies and measure their impact. The SPLVA believes that compilation of baseline data in regions is an important aspect of measuring and addressing alcohol related violence and other forms of harm. Uniform data collection also ensures that incidents and issues are less open to sensationalism, and allows more planned and effective responses.

Areas with a high concentration of Licensed premises would be ideal environments to collect data from a range of sources. In Surfers Paradise, this could include CCTV recorded incidents, Police data, Ambulance Service data, Hospital data and data from the Chill Out Zone.

Incidents and events in Licensed Premises also form a significant part of both reported and unreported violence, and should be included in such data collection. They are a constant, grass roots presence, with resources and willingness to assist in addressing alcohol related issues.

Unfortunately, historic and recent developments in regulation of Licensed Venues have tended to place the role of Licensee and Venue firmly as the source of the issue, with no capacity for assisting with solutions. While research shows that particular conditions in Licensed Venues may contribute to the prevalence of violence, even the best and most highly monitored Management Practices have not been shown to eradicate violence within venues, or address specific factors within individuals that contribute to aggression and violence.

In Surfers Paradise, for example, the SPLVA meets on a monthly basis with Police, Liquor Licensing and other stakeholders to address emerging issues that may impact on community safety and precinct amenity. We believe Surfers Paradise enjoys one of the best collaborative relationships between stakeholders anywhere in Australia. Through the SPLVA, a number of significant community safety and violence prevention initiatives have been implemented over the last eleven years, including the Chill Out Zone, Taxi Rank Marshalls and the recent Intervene Radio Communication Project, linking venues and the CCTV monitoring room to act as an early intervention tool for violence and other issues.

The industry and many stakeholders across the State have indicated their willingness to be involved in effecting change. Recent announcements in relation to Glass Related Assaults and high risk premises have come through the Government via the media, rather than through a number of available, legislatively supported forums designed to encourage collaboration between industry and other stakeholders.

Licensed Venues are business entities, and therefore often in competition with each other. The fact that business competitors are able to sit at a table with each other and their regulatory bodies, as well as other stakeholders, indicates a willingness to work in partnership. The SPLVA believes this is the best way to effect positive change.

Core Points:

- **Alcohol Related Violence is not restricted to Licensed Venues and their surrounds**
- **It is important to see the industry as a resource to assist in addressing the issue**

- **Communication with industry must come through Accord groups and other forums, not via the media.**
- **Baseline, detailed data on reported and unreported crime is essential to measure progress. If something can be measured, it can be improved.**

Best Practice Harm Minimisation

SPLVA expertise in this area relates to areas with a high concentration of licensed premises, as well as individual premises.

Management Practices designed to prevent alcohol related harm and violence are implemented in all member venues of the SPLVA, these include: Security training and professional development; dress regulations, handing out of water throughout the venue, detailed incident mapping to address hot spots and identify trends as well as legal requirements relating to RSA and intoxication. Management policies have a significant effect on the culture and behavior of the patron group.

The SPLVA is also proud to have been involved in a number of precinct based strategies to address alcohol related issues, including:

Taxi Marshalls: The Marshalls offer security provision at taxi ranks during peak periods to address aggression and other behaviours. The SPLVA initiated taxi marshalls for Surfers Paradise in the mid 90s, and this initiative has been replicated in other regions.

The Chill Out Zone: Operating Thursday to Saturday nights since 1998, to offer First Aid, immediate care and welfare support for patrons in the precinct. The SPLVA secured initial funding for this service, and was instrumental in its development to enhance community safety and the perception of safety in the precinct. The Chill Out Zone was the first of its kind in the world, and continues to be a unique service.

Intervene Radio Communication Network: The network, implemented this year, sees fourteen venues and other stakeholders connected via a secure digital radio network to each other and the Gold Coast City Council CCTV Monitoring Room. Direct communication has assisted in prevention of incidents, detention of offenders as well as alerts on undesirable patrons and potential aggressive incidents. The CCTV Room alerts the Queensland Police Service as required. This project is the first industry lead strategy of its type in Australia.

We believe these measures represent best practice internationally, and all stakeholders have worked hard to ensure they are successful.

Our response to strategies mentioned specifically in the information paper follows:

Serving alcohol in plastic containers rather than glass: A number of venues in Surfers Paradise already use alternatives to glass as a safety measure. Recent legislative amendments to allow this to be regulated in high risk venues would appear to be an under-researched reaction to intense media coverage. International experience suggests that the removal of glassware itself may not have a significant effect on violence. It does, however, reduce the severity of injuries when glass is used as a weapon in an assault. This form of assault is rare, but can be very serious. The removal of glassware may be seen as treating a symptom of a much wider issue of violence and aggression. Acceptable alternatives also appear not to have taken practical considerations into account, such as the likelihood of further minor injuries from shattering glass, or the outcome of a vicious assault when the glass initially used is not an effective weapon. Many Licensed venues have changed to alternatives to minimize risk to their patrons. Glass related assaults on premises in Surfers Paradise have been investigated by regulatory bodies, and in many cases Management Practices or the environment were not seen as contributing factors to the assault.

Security Measures:

Security Guards/Crowd Controllers: The increasing professionalization of the security industry through Legislative and Regulatory changes has seen positive developments in terms of the caliber of security guards and a decrease in incidents involving security guards.

Public Spaces: In an environment like Surfers Paradise, with a high concentration of Licensed Venues, the issue of safety and security in public spaces is much more complex. By law, guards are only able to address issues in the immediate vicinity of their premises. Their under-utilisation as a prevention resource was one of the reasons for the establishment of the Intervene Radio Network, to allow the Police to have additional eyes and ears to assist in prevention of incidents.

ID Scanning: The SPLVA has discussed the use of scanners on a number of occasions. In a highly concentrated precinct like Surfers Paradise, implementation of scanning devices, integrated across venues, would seem to be an effective tool to identify persistent trouble makers, deter possible incidents and assist in the tracking of offenders. Major barriers to this include Privacy concerns regarding use of the devices, limited availability in Australia of appropriate systems, and displacement of anti-social issues to outlying areas that do not have the infrastructure to address the problems. For venues particularly, customer perceptions and responses to this strategy, as well as the additional time it takes to admit persons to the venue are both major

concerns. The SPLVA believes this strategy is worth further investigation, involving all stakeholders working collaboratively.

Closed Circuit Television: In-venue systems are an excellent tool to assist in preventing incidents as well as identifying problem patrons. The Surfers Paradise precinct has an extensive CCTV network (part of the Gold Coast City Council) for public spaces that is constantly monitored. The SPLVA believes this system is invaluable in preventing and detecting violence and criminal activity in the precinct.

Irresponsible Promotions: The Liquor Act, as well as the SPLVA Code of Conduct, prohibits these activities in Licensed Venues.

Enhanced Liquor Licensing Enforcement, Inspection and Regulation: The Surfers Paradise precinct works closely with the Liquor Licensing Division to enhance compliance with the Liquor Act and Code of Conduct. Regular inspections and regulatory checks are carried out on Licensed Venues. A future emphasis on collaborative projects would be more valuable in addressing alcohol related issues than an enhanced enforcement strategy. The current framework is adequate to address compliance issues. Additional resources generated through the fee increases for Licenses should be applied to collaborative projects and opportunities for all stakeholders to address issues.

The current framework of risk based assessments is a disincentive for Licensees to disclose issues to regulatory bodies who may assist them in addressing these issues.

Community Involvement in the Licensing Process: The current legislation requires community input, but this may be haphazard. A more consistent framework of agencies to contact would make this a more valuable strategy.

Built Design Initiatives: Research demonstrates that factors in the physical environment of Licensed premises may impact on alcohol related violence. It therefore makes sense to apply built design principles where possible. An area like Surfers Paradise is not amenable to built design strategies, as existing spaces are limited. One possible collaborative project would be to raise awareness of the impacts of the physical environment on violence and aggression, and assist Licensees to address areas and conditions within their venues which may be impacting on the issue.

Safe and Adequate Transport Options: The SPLVA believes this is a key area for attention to reduce alcohol related violence. Many well known incidents of violence in Queensland have occurred at transport points. This was a key factor in the SPLVA's initial funding of the Taxi Marshalls. The SPLVA also initiated a Safe Transport Forum in 2008 to look at local

opportunities and issues around transport, resulting in the publication of a "Getting Home Safely" brochure for Surfers Paradise. Particularly in a highly concentrated area like Surfers Paradise, the movement of large numbers of patrons out of the precinct at specific times (lockout and closing, in particular) is especially problematic. Several initiatives, including shared flat fare taxis (implemented by the Gold Coast City Council) have assisted in addressing this issue, but a great deal more needs to be done to reduce the risk.

Better Planning of Entertainment Districts: Where possible, ie for new districts, this would be ideal. Established areas, however, have generally developed over a period of time, and are not as amenable to planning. One solution may be the sharing of information around successful and unsuccessful strategies utilized in these precincts to allow best practice to develop. Again, this is a collaborative project that would benefit all stakeholders, and enhance public safety.

Establishment of Accords: Accords have been given legislative support through the Liquor Act Amendment. Most regions already have accords. SPLVA is an Accord group (although was established well before this initiative), and many members are also members of the regional Accord Group (Gold Coast Liquor Industry Consultative Authority). As demands for compliance activities increase, time available to Licensees away from their businesses is at a premium. Accord groups are not generally financially supported or resourced, which can make growth and development difficult. Additional income generated from License fees could be applied to Accord groups for administration or strategy implementation.

Accords are an excellent strategy for bringing together stakeholders, but are only effective when all stakeholders utilize them to share information and address problems.

Better Venue Management Practices: Many venues employ a range of strategies that effectively address anti-social behavior in venues. Assistance in raising awareness of these strategies, and encouraging co-operation between venues to develop and implement successful strategies would enhance their effectiveness enormously.

Creation of an Enhanced Offence and Penalty Framework: The SPLVA believes that this is a vital component to address alcohol related violence. Particularly in relation to serious assaults, mandatory custodial sentencing should be considered. The defense of intoxication should also be precluded, as a high percentage of violence follows consumption of alcohol, not only in Licensed premises, and there is rising community awareness that for some individuals this is a likely outcome of consumption.

Core Points:

- **A range of effective measures are already in place in a number of venues and regions. These should be acknowledged, collated and shared to encourage other venues and regions to think about effective strategies.**
- **Any intended strategy should be thoroughly researched using all available evidence, as well as feedback on practical considerations. Any implementation should be evidence based and rigorously evaluated**
- **The current penalty based framework of risk based assessments is a disincentive for Licensees to disclose issues to regulatory bodies who may assist them in addressing these issues.**
- **Many collaborative opportunities exist to enhance public safety. In particular the sharing of information, and addressing issues in venues, public spaces and movement between the two.**

The impact of late opening hours

As many late opening venues are concentrated in precincts, there is usually a larger crowd of patrons associated with late opening venues. Many venues in Surfers Paradise offer a 5am closure.

Within venues, and anecdotally on the street, violence and aggression appears to peak between midnight and 3am. A number of Government funded studies have identified this peak period. Regardless, 3am to 5am traders are still the focus of interventions to address high risk. While certainly not without risk, the evidence points to an earlier peak, and an evidence base is most appropriate for interventions.

Given that aggression appears to peak before 3am, the lockout has had negligible effects on incidents of violence.

Initially the 3am lockout had a negative effect on patrons, particularly in high tourism periods where interstate or overseas visitors did not realize the area was subject to lockout provisions. This lead initially to increased incidence of confrontation with security staff attempting to enforce the strategy, with no guidance as to how this should be managed. It would seem a strategic evaluation of the lockout and its effects would be timely, with information coming from a number of stakeholders as outlined in section 1.

Like all businesses, Licensed premises operate on supply and demand. Current youth culture appears to embrace staying out until 5am, and this would not be something that could be changed quickly. Any evaluation of decreasing opening hours would need to take this into account, as the overflow to suburban areas may make this an untenable solution.

When thinking of strategies to change serving practices inside venues, it is important to examine the impacts of implementing these at ground level. Some practices initiated in New South Wales, particularly the ten minute ceasing of service in high risk venues, has lead to greater levels of aggression towards staff and higher levels of risky and rapid consumption.

Again, a strong evidence base should be used to determine the most effective strategies, involving all stakeholders to ensure the initiatives are sustainable.

Core Points:

- **Late opening hours do not necessarily present the highest risk for aggression**
- **Any strategy to address violence should be evidence based, and planned in consultation with the industry that will implement it.**

Flow on issues for Emergency Service workers.

Given that emergency services are generally called upon to address situations of crisis, the impact on them is huge.

The SPLVA acknowledges the professionalism of the individuals and services who serve the Surfers Paradise area.

Emergency workers should be afforded the highest level of judicial protection, including the introduction of legislation designed to guarantee custodial sentences for those who assault them.

The SPLVA is unaware of measures organizations may have in place to support these workers, but believes this should be part of the recruitment, training and ongoing support of them.

The impact on workers in the Hospitality industry should also not be ignored, as they are also likely to be victims of alcohol related violence, particularly when enforcing no service policies or ejections from the premises.

The role of substances other than alcohol in violence should also not be ignored, as this is often a factor in the most serious of assaults.

We believe a system like the Chill Out Zone assists in addressing strain on emergency services through dealing with lower level issues and deciding which individuals require Police or Ambulance assistance. As the Chill Out Zone is community based, staff are able to offer a range of services and support not available through more traditional settings. The Chill out Zone also offers respite for Police and Ambulance personnel to deal with more serious issues.

Core points:

- **The SPLVA highly regards the emergency service workers who work in our precinct**
- **The SPLVA would like to assist in any way to address issues relating to emergency service workers.**

Education Campaigns

A number of venues in the SPLVA are interested in becoming involved in education, either personally or through the provision of anecdotal evidence to inform the education strategy. In the past, licensees from the Surfers Paradise area have been involved in education strategies, particularly in relation to Schoolies. We believe that if our involvement is shown to assist in the education process, we are very happy to be involved.

In particular, we believe an emphasis should be placed on underage drinking, as the incidence of minors attempting to gain entry to premises is increasing, and research shows the age of initiation to drinking has lowered significantly. Unlike twenty years ago, many young people who turn 18 already have significant drinking histories, and this has an effect on their behaviours and attitudes.

The SPLVA does not feel qualified to comment on the success of education campaigns currently in place, however does believe that any education programs should be evidence based, and utilize real life experiences.

Core Points:

- **The SPLVA would be pleased to be involved in education campaigns around alcohol related violence, either through in venue activities or the provision of information to inform the programs.**

In relation to the economic costs and parenting practices, the SPLVA does not feel qualified to comment.

Conclusion:

The SPLVA represents venue owners and managers in a particularly concentrated precinct. Many steps have been taken to address alcohol related violence within the precinct, and an exceptional collaborative framework exists. The SPLVA is committed to working with other stakeholders to address any alcohol related issues, both in venues and in public spaces.

At present, the industry is under significant financial pressure through an increase in a range of fees associated with Licensed premises. These pressures may force some operators to ignore or de-emphasise strategies that may contribute to a reduction in alcohol related harm. Venues under significant financial pressure may have little to lose in not co-operating with proposed strategies or safety practices.

In an environment like Surfers Paradise, the high concentration of venues contributes to venue amenity through increased competition for patrons, making venues very aware of commercial benefits of venues perceived to be more safe and better kept than others.

The current contribution of licensees to preventative strategies should not be ignored, and their potential for further contribution should be recognized. In particular, industry would like to be seen as a partner in the developing strategies to combat alcohol related violence, rather than as the core of the problem, which seems to be the current case.

Alcohol related violence, like any form of interpersonal violence, is the outcome of a complex array of individual and situational factors. We believe that as an industry we would be able to affect a number of the situational factors, if we were to be provided with evidence based strategies and the opportunity to assist.

We very strongly believe that the framework for effective communication already exists, and that to work outside this framework, particularly through the media, is detrimental to addressing alcohol related harm in any of its forms.