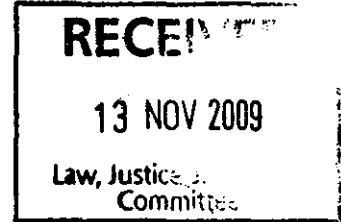


13th November 2009

Ms Barbara Stone MP
Chair
Law, Justice and Safety Committee
Queensland Government
George Street
Brisbane QLD 4000



Dear Ms Stone,

Inquiry into Alcohol Related Violence

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I have much pleasure in providing a submission to your inquiry and sincerely thank you for the late acceptance of this submission.

The city of Gold Coast has grown considerably since the early ninety's (1991) when the population of the city was 282,330 to approximately 550,000 and Surfers Paradise is one of the top ten growth suburbs on the Gold Coast. The population projections going forward indicate the city will be home to over 650,000 by 2016. # Over the next two years more than 1000 people will move into the Hilton Hotel and Towers and the 77 story Soul building on the Esplanade in Surfers Paradise.

If I add the visitors and tourists to this figure the overnight population of the city is far greater than the resident population, especially in peak tourist and event periods. Nearly half of all tourist/visitor accommodation within the city is located in the Surfers Paradise precinct.

On any given weekend the transient population of the Surfers Paradise entertainment precinct can be in excess of 5,00 to 15,000, the size of a small regional town.

The community in Surfers Paradise have for a long period of time seen their quality of life (social and environmental impacts) diminish. Many of these impacts are not a State Government responsibility however, when added to law and order issues, the Super GP, Schoolies and the perceived impact of the Rapid Transit System in Surfers Paradise the cumulative effect on the community is considerable.

To understand the level of community anger toward alcohol related violence and drunken behaviour and many other related issues, one must try to understand the complex and changing nature of Surfers Paradise.

Surfers Paradise is the centre of tourism in Queensland, and an iconic destination. It is the heart of our city.

Gold Coast Tourism and the Gold Coast City Council (GCCC) spend in excess of \$20million dollars promoting the destination each year, not to mention the millions spent by the private sector within the tourism industry. The State Government spend over \$11million dollars on the Super GP as a sporting tourism product for the state and the Gold Coast. Queensland Tourism also invests money advertising Surfers Paradise as a destination product.

This tourism expenditure is greatly diluted fighting a negative brand image and the Surfers Paradise brand reputation is diminished by ongoing negative media coverage of alcohol related street violence.

Tourists, local residents and visitors to Surfers Paradise are at times afraid to venture onto the streets in fear of their safety. This is not my opinion, it is the opinion of the majority of residents. Recently the Gold Coast Bulletin (GCB) conducted an opinion poll and over 80% of responses said, "Surfers Paradise was a dangerous place, and they would not go there at night". My partner Anne Galvin and I will not go into Surfers Paradise after 9pm on any night, and our friends would never go there because of the alcohol related violence and public drunkenness on the streets.

While the local challenges facing Surfers Paradise are not in the main the responsibility of the State Government, I mention them because as I stated earlier, it is the cumulative effect on lifestyle that is a major concern to residents in Surfers Paradise and I believe the driver behind the community feelings and heightened awareness of alcohol related violence on the streets.

There are higher level challenges facing residents in Surfers Paradise and the city and the list below will give the committee a better understanding of the micro issues residents are angry about including law and order, alcohol related violence and other situations within Surfers Paradise.

- Alcohol related street violence/crime in Surfers Paradise
- Glassing's and violent crimes
- Increasing use of Surfers Paradise as the city's playground for events (GCCC and State Government)
- Increase in licensed venues in and adjacent to Surfers Paradise (GCCC and State Government)
- Lack of community infrastructure (GCCC responsibility)
- Ageing city centre (Cavil Mall, GCCC responsibility)
- Rapid Transit System (Federal and State Government and GCCC)
- Population growth into the future without proper planning for this growth (GCCC)
- Super GP (State Government)
- Mackintosh Island Parklands (GCCC and State Government)
- Schoolies (State Government and GCCC)
- There is no ownership of the challenges facing Surfers Paradise. No single person standing up calling for 'enough is enough'

Recently, the GCB ran extensive coverage on alcohol related street violence, crime and public drunkenness in Surfers Paradise including some 26 pages of headlines as shown below:

GCB HEADLINES

- ***Suffering Paradise***
- ***Bouncer crackdown***
- ***All-night grog under attack***
- ***These men think 10 bashings a week's OK***
- ***Save our Surfers Paradise (SOS)***
- ***Your SOS solutions***
- ***Glass action 'flat out'***
- ***Paradise to a hell hole***
- ***Clubs unite to clean up strip's bad behaviour***
- ***Short fuse over taxi shortage***
- ***Surfers Reality Check, how paradise looked on Saturday night***
- ***A walk along seedy side of the street***
- ***Stem drunks with club breath tests***
- ***Second senseless bashing under the golden arch in a week***

- *Living in a state of denial*
- *Cops let down by lack of officers*
- *Father labels Coasters callous after cowardly attack*
- *Lawlor calls for ideas summit*
- *In denial Top cops see Surfers Paradise through rose coloured glasses*
- *It's time to zero in on Surfers' future*
- *Zero Tolerance, your texts shout a clear message*
- *Beauty and the beat*
- *Policing at the core of Surfers ills*
- *Taxi ride from hell*

These dramatic headlines and the issues covered by the GCB are only a snap shot in the daily lives of residents in Surfers Paradise and other parts of the city. If I add the electronic media clips over this period there is a similar coverage and negative headlines for Surfers Paradise and the Gold Coast. These headlines regarding Surfers Paradise are not limited to local media, and stories on Schoolies, alcohol related violence and street crime have been reported in all states of Australia as well as overseas.

For the major media company on the coast, the GCB to consider running 26 pages about violence on the streets of Surfers Paradise under the banner **"SAVE OUR SURFERS"** clearly indicates to all there is a big problem in Surfers Paradise. Some will say and it is a reasonable proposition, "that is far too late to save Surfers Paradise" however I do not agree with this comment and I will continue to work with the police and within the community in a constructive and pro active manner.

Many in positions of authority would like to ignore the problem, however the reality is, there is alcohol related violence and public drunkenness on every street corner on most weekends, young women harassed by drunken youths and businesses forced to close for fear of being robbed or their staff intimidated and or bashed. Every weekend there is damage done to private residences by drunken persons walking or staggering home from Surfers Paradise just ask the residents of Budds Beach, Paradise Waters, Paradise and Chevron Island.

I have personally been a strong advocate for a "Zero Tolerance" policy to street crime in Surfers Paradise and I have championed this idea within the media and community groups.

The Gold Coast pioneered the early lock out in night clubs (3am) and it would be innovative and forward thinking to see the Queensland Government trial a "Zero Tolerance" policy on the streets of Surfers Paradise this coming event season, Schoolies, Christmas and New Year.

There is ample evidence of similar policies working across the world and the stand out result must be the Mayor of New York Rudolph Giuliani who introduced a "zero tolerance" policy more than a decade ago. New York is now a safe and liveable community.

The Gold Coast has 823 police in the city and to the best of my knowledge the police numbers are allocated/calculated on a permanent resident basis and the additional visitors to a destination are ignored relative to police numbers. In the near future I would like to see consideration given to police numbers based on the average population on any given night including tourists, visitors and local residents. I understand the police numbers in Surfers Paradise are 130 approximately. I have nothing but high praise for the officers stationed at Orchid Avenue police station and all other police in the city, they do a magnificent job under extremely difficult and at times trying circumstances.

We simply can't continue to do the same and expect a better result in crimes against the community such as, public disorder and drunkenness, bashings, alcohol related violence, robberies and common assaults.

The police in Surfers Paradise have an early intervention policy which appears to be working to minimise the levels of public disorder, however more can and should be done. Every effort must be exercised to turn around the behaviour of those who continue to make Surfers Paradise a no go zone for the majority of the local community.

The police statistics may inform the committee that the levels of public disorder etc in Surfers Paradise are less than in Fortitude Valley, however the Valley does not have the media coverage that Schoolies and the Super GP receive focussing on public disorder, alcohol related violence and public drunkenness nor does the Valley have up to 40,000 teenagers there 24/7 for the 10 day Schoolies celebrations or up to 200,000 visitations to a sporting event (Super GP) over four days.

I can't ever recall seeing the Courier Mail devote 26 pages to a, "Save Our Valley" campaign!

Surfers Paradise also hold one of the largest New Years Eve celebrations in the state and the result of this is, thousands of additional revellers on the streets and the corresponding alcohol related street violence, public disorder and drunkenness.

In 2007 I was in charge of the Schoolies event (on behalf of the State Government and the GCCC) as Chief Executive Officer of Surfers Paradise Alliance, and there were 789 arrests in 10 days most of which were seen on the 6pm nightly news across Australia. More negative images of our tourism industry and products such as Surfers Paradise to be overcome at great expense to both tax payers and the private sector to maintain the industry let alone grow the industry.

I note in the Sunday Mail 8/11, that the 2009 Schoolies event organisers (Government) will close down beach entertainment at midnight and in my opinion this is a recipe for a disaster on the streets and in the hotel rooms of Surfers Paradise and this action should not be allowed to happen. I'm sure the police do not agree to this change, as it was at the explicit direction of the police that I extended the entertainment on the beach past the 2am close down on a number of occasions (the latest closed down after 3am).

Closing down the beach entertainment early will result in more violence on our streets and more public disorder and drunkenness as well as a higher chance that innocent Schoolies will be involved with older persons who have access to alcohol and or drugs.

What I have witnessed touring the hotels, motels and apartments blocks during Schoolies is nothing short of a national disgrace.

I'm of the opinion that unless something is done immediately to further educate young adults about the dangers of alcohol and drug abuse, remove the supply of alcohol and drugs to minors, and introduce additional security measures within accommodations buildings then Schoolies is only a drink, a pill or a needle away from a result that nobody wishes to see happen to any young Australian, least of all one who is celebrating the completion of 12 years of education.

The State Government invest many millions of dollars in the annual Schoolies celebrations and it is the largest policing exercise in Australia with police allocating some 6500 shifts not to mention the other Government services such as SES, QAS, doctors and nurses.

The very fact that 6500 shifts are allocated to police in managing Schoolies in Surfers Paradise is another clear demonstration of the enormous task facing both Governments and the community in managing the excesses of the youth of today.

Australia has a major challenge in educating young people that binge drinking is dangerous, can lead to alcohol related violence and can also lead to criminal convictions as a result of the actions of some while under the influence of alcohol and or drugs.

The parental supply of alcohol to minors who attend Schoolies is a major challenge and I strongly recommend that the police take a harder line in enforcing the legislation preventing the third party supply of alcohol to minors. Schoolies and alcohol, equal alcohol related violence as seen each and every year on the streets of Surfers Paradise. More can and must be done to stop this alcohol related violence.

The majority of Schoolies from Queensland are under the age of 18 years, the legal age for the consumption of alcohol, however this does not seem to, a) inhibit binge drinking and b) the supply of alcohol to minors. How and where do under age Schoolies and others obtain the supply of alcohol for a period of up to 10 days while on the Gold Coast?

There is no single solution to these challenges nor a single authority whose responsibility it is to fix the problem, however I believe that unless the challenges are approached on a wide front involving all levels of Government the solution may merely be a band aid requiring further remedial action at a far greater cost to the Government, Council, the community and young Queenslanders.

In my opinion some of the possible solutions to alcohol related street violence are listed below, and I state that many of these suggested solutions are not the responsibility of the State Government, however the community can't differentiate or choose not too between the levels of responsibility across Government and Councils on many matters. The community just want somebody/anybody to address their concerns.

- 1) Zero Tolerance to street crime and violence
- 2) More CCTV cameras across the entire city not just Surfers Paradise monitored 24/7 linked to police headquarters
- 3) An advertising campaign: "If you play up in Surfers Paradise be prepared for your grandmother and your boss to see you on the 6pm news and the front page of the Courier Mail"
- 4) Additional street lighting
- 5) Additional transport in and out of Surfers Paradise. Mini Buses, taxis, limousines etc.
- 6) Fewer licensed premises in Surfers Paradise (highest % in QLD)
- 7) Increased police presence
- 8) Increased focus on drugs and drug dealers in clubs and in Surfers Paradise (more drug squad and licensing police)
- 9) A complete refurbishment of Cavill Mall and the entertainment precinct.
- 10) GCCC to improve public amenity in Surfers (public toilets)
- 11) Licensed clubs to contribute to the solutions such as mandatory radio communications between licensed venues and take shared ownership of the problem/solutions (public drunkenness)
- 12) Earlier closing times for pubs and clubs, 2am

I wish to make a further point regarding CCTV cameras. It is reported that there is one CCTV camera for every 14 residents or 4.2 million cameras in the United Kingdom. These figures include both public and private CCTV cameras. (Channel 4 TV June 08) The use of CCTV cameras is a low cost and world's best practice public policy that must be expanded across the city of the Gold Coast.

It is of great interest and I note in the terms of reference the committee do not appear to have included the specific item, "the cost to the community of alcohol related violence".

This cost will difficult to calculate in dollar terms and can range across many parameters including the social and environmental impacts, damage to both public and private property, the damage to brand reputation and the image of Surfers Paradise and the city, the damage to the tourism industry and more importantly the psychological damage to the community caused by constant violence in their

community and the fear of not being safe on the streets of Surfers Paradise or other emerging trouble spots such as Burleigh Heads and Coolangatta.

The social impacts of street violence can manifest itself in many ways across the community, older residents are afraid (a grandmother was bashed and robbed in broad daylight in Surfers Paradise recently), while young adults see alcohol related violence as part of the challenges of going out at night, some even get a thrill out of watching fights and drunken melees and families stay out of Surfers Paradise after dark to protect their children from being exposed too and placed in danger. Taxi drives and other transport operators are concerned with violence and there is anecdotal evidence that suggests taxi drivers avoid Surfers Paradise at night because of this reason therefore creating another and much larger problem the lack of available, timely and reliable transport in/out of Surfers Paradise.

I understand the Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA) legislation makes it unlawful to serve patrons who appear to be or are intoxicated or under the influence of drugs. I ask how, is it possible for thousands of people to leave licensed establishments and spill onto the streets of Surfers Paradise and other suburbs of the city seemingly under the influence of alcohol, and if this is fact, then how and why are they being served?

I also acknowledge that many people may be under the influence of alcohol and or drugs before entering licensed establishments in Surfers Paradise after drinking either at home, in the car or at another licensed establishment. I suggest that more attention be paid to the appearance of patrons presenting themselves at licensed venues seeking admission and more stringent conditions of entry be applied to patrons who seem to be under the influence of alcohol and or drugs. Recently, there was a very serious incident in Surfers Paradise where a person was assaulted by persons who were either removed from or denied entry to a licensed venue and allowed to wander the streets.

Another concern is the numbers of patrons who are admitted to licensed venues relative the allowable maximum number (Sq Mtr per patron), as per the relevant legislation or planning laws and I ask the committee to investigate this formula in an effort manage the overall numbers of visitors to the Surfers Paradise entertainment precinct and therefore be in a better position to manage alcohol related street violence. Workplace Health and Safety issues must be adhered too and the strictest controls on numbers will assist in delivering this outcome.

The possible overcrowding of licensed premises brings with it a number of other social challenges including the potential challenges for mass evacuations if necessary and the space to accommodate thousands of party goers in the small and narrow streets of Surfers Paradise, particularly Orchid Avenue the night club centre of the precinct.

In addition electronic Identification should be considered as an entry control procedure to ensure that repeat offenders are identified, removed and banned for entering licensed venues for a period into the future. In the United Kingdom trouble makers at football matches are identified and face life bans for acts of violence and this action has seen a change in behaviour from football fans.

For over three years the Gold Coast City Council has been pontificating over declaring the so called "H" block (Gold Coast Highway, the Esplanade, north /south and Beach Road, Hanlan Street, Elkhorn Avenue, east /west) within Surfers Paradise as a "Special Entertainment Precinct" and I ask the committee to seek an explanation from the Gold Coast City Council as to why this proposal has taken over three years.

My understand is, a declaration of a "Special Entertainment Precinct" will allow the precinct to be managed differently, Council to have different local laws, and to consider the cumulative effects of licensed late night venues in the precinct and determine the saturation point of these venues in Surfers Paradise. Other issues that will come into consideration are security, commercial activity, advertising and events all of which contribute to or impact upon the potential for additional violence.

More commercial activity attracts more people, additional security lessens risk and more events like Schoolies attract more alcohol related violence.

A "Special Precinct" status is not a new or untried and tested policy, and if this status will improve community amenity and lifestyle in Surfers Paradise I can see no reason for ongoing delays.

The Gold Coast City Council have recently received an internal report (27/10) PD 237/207/06(P4) Surfers Paradise Strategic Action Plan and under the section 5.3,e, *recent media coverage, and I quote e) Communications Strategy*

"The perception of Surfers Paradise amongst the wider Gold Coast community was identified to underpin some of the negative connotations of the precinct. Improving the image of Surfers Paradise through the development of a communication strategy in conjunction with key stakeholders, to positively promote and change the image of the precinct, will assist in managing negative sentiment and media reaction"

The GCCC in the above action (5.3,e) clearly indicate they are not across the levels of alcohol related violence and the other related challenges in Surfers Paradise and have recommended a communications strategy to solve the problems before addressing let alone identifying these problems and developing solutions

Alcohol related violence in Surfers Paradise is not a perception as claimed in this council report, it is reality and for the GCCC to say it is a perception of Surfers Paradise is both regrettable and an admission of their failure as the governing body in this city. I find this astonishing and ask the committee to fully investigate the GCCC actions within the Surfers Paradise precinct as on the surface one could be forgiven for thinking the GCCC are more interested in positive media coverage than addressing or finding solutions to the problems.

The GCCC report PD 237/207/06(P4) states *"Improving the image of Surfers Paradise through the development of a communication strategy"*, the image of Surfers Paradise will be improved by the GCCC engaging with the community, police, Government, social services networks and implementing some of the suggested solutions as detailed in the GCB, SOS articles and I am sure some of the recommendations from your committee's report.

The GCCC are totally responsible for issues such as street lighting, cleaning, public infrastructure and amenity, public toilets, local planning approvals, CCTV network, local laws and enforcement. All of these factors are relative to reducing alcohol related street violence in Surfers Paradise and across the city in suburbs such as Burleigh and Coolangatta.

Currently the Surfers Paradise foreshore is undergoing a significant capital works program where it is intended to enlarge the community spaces/areas that can be utilised for public events. Some of these events may or may not in the future be licensed and add additional risk to an already over saturated event precinct. It has been widely published that this much improved and increased public space will become an event destination second to none in the city.

I ask the committee to visit Surfers Paradise during Schoolies not on a Monday to Friday but on the Saturday or Sunday night and between 11pm and 3 am to witness first hand the alcohol fuelled violence on our streets. I would be more than willing to escort the committee should you wish to remain as inconspicuous as possible and I am sure the police can also assist during this visit.

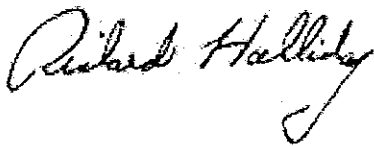
In addition the committee is also invited to participate in a street walk during a normal Friday or Saturday evening to experience firsthand the challenges confronting the Government and Council in managing the ever increasing crowds and alcohol related violence in Surfers Paradise.

For many residents living in Surfers Paradise, it is no longer seen as living in Paradise.

In closing, I have endeavoured to inform the committee as to some of the social drivers behind the community's feelings regarding the challenges facing Surfers Paradise and I do not believe for one minute there is either an easy or quick solution, however the community will continue to grow angrier by the day until such time as they see somebody or a level of Government/Council taking responsibility for the issues raised in this letter.

I look forward to the committees report with great hope and expectation that finally somebody is listening and more importantly acting to address our concerns.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Holliday". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'R'.

RICHARD HOLLIDAY
Chairman
Surfers Paradise Community Consultative Committee
Former CEO Surfers Paradise Alliance