



Speech by

**Fiona Simpson**

**MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE**

Hansard Wednesday, 20 April 2005

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## **LIQUOR AMENDMENT BILL**

### **Second Reading**

Resumed from 19 April (see p. 940).

**Miss SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—NPA) (11.33 am): In speaking to the Liquor Amendment Bill, I thought it was relevant to look at the experience of my own area. On the Sunshine Coast, in particular Mooloolaba, we have had a very successful community group in operation for a number of years that has advised not only on community safety issues but also on issues that relate to alcohol. That group is Mooloolaba Safe. Mooloolaba has had a lockout curfew provision for a number of years. It came about by the Liquor Licensing Commission, in agreement with the community, negotiating such a position with the nightclubs in Mooloolaba, because it was recognised that there was a real problem in having extended opening times with people pouring out into the streets late at night. So they brought in a lockout curfew and it has operated for a number of years.

I want to reiterate the comment that my colleagues and other members opposite have made that this lockout alone is not the answer to solving community street safety issues and particularly alcohol related issues. In order for there to be a successful plan, a wide range of strategies have to be put in place. That plan needs more than just lip-service; it needs resources.

Public transport is absolutely critical. Whether there is a lockout curfew whereby people cannot move from premises to premises after a certain time or there is a later closing time, there is still a need for available public transport to get people away from the entertainment precinct as quickly as possible. The longer people have to wait for a taxi or for a bus, the greater the potential for problems to occur. Having people who are intoxicated or who have some level of alcohol in their system milling on the street trying to get home is just asking for trouble. These days a number of street crimes are occurring because young people have access to alcohol, but it is not only young people who are committing these crimes.

I take this opportunity to say to the minister that there needs to be a full review of the liquor licensing laws in this state. We need to look at the relevant resources that enforce the laws as they stand and at which laws are difficult to enforce because of the way in which they are drafted. A number of years ago the liquor licensing laws were changed to make it easier for cafe dining to be licensed. But that meant that the lack of service of food with alcohol became harder to police. Certainly, the concern was raised in my community about the potential for certain restaurants—not all restaurants—to act more like bars than like restaurants. It may be only a few establishments throughout Queensland that abuse this law but, because of the way in which the law is drafted, currently it is very difficult to police these establishments or to assess whether they are in breach. Previously, as I understand it, businesses were not allowed to trade unless they had a kitchen that was operating with a chef who was providing food. It is in that regard that there have been changes made to the legislation. We need to conduct some research into this issue to find out whether the lack of food or access to food as well as the extension of the delivery of alcohol services have had an impact upon the incidence of public drunkenness.

As has been mentioned, in a free market we ask: why should we restrict the sale of alcohol? It is recognised that there is a public benefit to that. If there are not restrictions and there is a complete laissez faire approach to alcohol marketing, then there is the potential for public harm. We have to balance freedoms with responsibilities, which is difficult to achieve with regard to legislation and practical policing and implementation.

In recent years some very good changes have occurred in our entertainment precincts in terms of the types of services that are available. At the same time, there have been changes in the social habits of not only young people but also older people. I think it is a mistake sometimes to tag young people as the only ones who are indulging in the excessive consumption of alcohol in public places. That is not always the case.

We cannot assume that we have a real snapshot of the problem. It requires appropriate and timely research, but we also need to review the regulations and how they are written to ensure that they are able to be policed. There has not been a real increase in the number of Liquor Licensing officers in relation to the number of licensees which are also now out in the marketplace, and this to me is of great concern. Furthermore, there is also the issue of policing. The issue here is that police really will not be across the detailed licence laws except with regard to where people are intoxicated and are creating a public nuisance. As far as the ability of police to determine whether a premises is in breach of the act on other issues, that is far more complex. That is why we need specialised Liquor Licensing officers who are available and in the field.

Let me go back to Mooloolaba Safe. This is a group that originally had seed funding out of the health department. It meets every month. It is comprised of Transport representatives, Liquor Licensing representatives, people who have licensed premises, taxi owners, community representatives and council representatives. In the past we have had council rangers, but we also have the police there. It is a good working model that I believe could be replicated in other areas. Certainly I have urged Maroochy Shire Council to embrace it and support it, because it does need good partnerships between state agencies, the community and local councils. It cannot be one-off crisis summits. There have to be standing committees that have the right working relationships that have meetings with agenda items that address not only ongoing issues but also special events in order to build up a corporate knowledge of what happens with particular events and what is required.

An issue that has been raised recently at Mooloolaba Safe, and I can mention it here, is the need for security officers on taxi ranks. One could say that this has come out of the fact that there are not enough taxis to ferry people at certain times of the morning, and that is true, but it is also recognition that there needs to be some supervision on the streets. Security officers will never be police officers, but we need them linked in with police and providing timely responses to police. We also need police there to provide police powers and follow-up. This has been an issue in my community. People have been saying they want security levies from licensed premises to assist towards the funding of security officers on taxi ranks.

In all of these issues there is no one answer that fixes all, but there must be a collaborative arrangement that is ongoing between the agencies in Brisbane and in other areas. Certainly from our experience what we have seen has worked well in Mooloolaba. Does that mean there are no problems? No, it does not. It means that there is a process in place where there are some very frank and very practical solutions put forward. There have been some very good projects over recent years. Schoolies week was one where we had a community group that was heavily involved in arranging those programs but with good collaboration with groups like Mooloolaba Safe. We also get feedback from accommodation managers, and that is a very good process.

We have also seen that violence continues to be a matter of great concern on our streets. We cannot get away from it. There has to be access at the right time to police in cars who can deal with these issues. In recent years I know there is greater competition, particularly with domestic violence and the amount of time it takes police off the streets, but we cannot ignore public drunkenness or people drinking in public places where it is not allowed and where they are causing a public nuisance. These issues escalate. They always escalate. They create a climate of fear in a community. That is why even issues of public drunkenness where someone at that time may not seem to be physically at harm must be addressed as being a serious issue. They may step in front of a car or they may end up hurting somebody else, but they add to a community perception of not being safe.

That is one of the greatest concerns I have in this day and age. With all of the access we have to information about the impact of excessive alcohol consumption, somehow we are not addressing the root issues that are seen as becoming an increasing issue not just with young people binge drinking but with other age groups as well. This is impacting upon a wider section of society than it has ever done before. All of these issues must be part of a considered review of the Liquor Act whilst having regard to the appropriate research so we can start to have strategies that do not just make us feel good as politicians but actually start to make a difference, because the impact and the cost of failing in these areas is too high.