



Speech by

## John-Paul Langbroek

**MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE**

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### LIQUOR AMENDMENT BILL

**Mr LANGBROEK** (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (6.01 pm): I rise to speak to the Liquor Amendment Bill. The bill seeks to impose a 3 am lockout condition on all licensed premises in Queensland, making the current lockout conditions in operation in Brisbane, the Gold Coast, Townsville and Mackay blanket conditions for the entire state. I have a personal opinion on lockouts in nightclub precincts in the south-east corner, but I feel it is only my duty to express my personal opinion in this House when I have sufficient evidence to back that up. Unfortunately, I do not have adequate evidence to suggest that 3 am lockouts should be placed over the entire state. We are all too familiar with why a safety plan with strict lockout provisions was brought in. Several incidents of street violence—alcohol induced violence—had occurred on the streets of Brisbane and the Gold Coast, so I am not denying the fact that something had to be done and a plan had to be formulated.

3 am lockouts were heralded as the way forward—the shining light of the new safety plan. Lockouts sought to address the growing problems associated with the management of public intoxication and minimise harm by restricting early morning club hopping. Interaction between intoxicated patrons in public places was considered a primary factor leading to violence and vandalism, and the effect of the lockout is to minimise numbers of patrons on streets and in public places surrounding licensed premises by spreading their departure times over a longer period. This all sounds good, but before we go about making this a blanket state policy I would have been happy to have seen some statistics proving that street violence, if at all, has been reduced.

When the minister does get around to producing statistics on street violence incidents since lockout provisions were brought in, we cannot be jumping to conclusions that it is because of the 3 am lockouts alone that street violence has reduced, if indeed this is what the statistics show. I understand, in fact, that the offences against police numbers have increased and this is explained by the fact that in Brisbane and the Gold Coast there are more police at 3 am to assault. 3 am lockouts are one strategy to reduce the incidence of alcohol induced violence on our streets but there must be a multifaceted plan to this problem. This is not an issue that can be improved through a one fix-all solution.

The minister will stand up and inform us all that 3 am lockouts are only the first stage of the safety plan. The second stage will include tougher statutory licence conditions on all licensees with permission to trade after 1 am, including crowd controller numbers, installation and maintenance of closed-circuit TV cameras, restrictions on the frequency and duration of happy hours, prohibition of drinking competitions and mandatory development of house policy. Irrespective of whether stage 2 is more than a one fix-all solution, stage 1 will only bring in lockout provisions. Stage 1 is, therefore, incomplete. 3 am lockouts alone are not enough and it is not enough for the minister to say that the next stage will fix it.

The Surfers Paradise electorate is the nation's most concentrated nightclub and entertainment precinct. We have 3 am lockouts in operation and I will explain to the House what happens every Friday and Saturday night at 3 am. Club hopping has certainly stopped, except there is often a mad dash to more popular venues at 2.45 am. When the lockout hits, people start going home. 3 am, however, is also the traditional changeover time for taxis. Therefore, at the time people are heading to the taxi line to grab a cab home after being locked out, the frequency of taxis slows down. So, instead of a steady stream of people

going home after a night out between midnight and dawn, there is a mass of people needing to get home at one time and at a time when the available transport home is minimal. If anything, there are now more people, many intoxicated, in public places with no way to get home. How is that addressing problems associated with the management of public intoxication and reducing the interaction of intoxicated patrons in public places? Keep in mind that this is the supposed primary factor for violence and vandalism. If anything, 3 am lockouts as a sole provision potentially increases the likelihood of interaction of intoxicated individuals in public places at 3 am.

What the government needs to stop doing is offering bandaids solutions. If a 3 am lockout is to occur, look at the practical effect that is happening in Surfers Paradise and complement a 3 am lockout with the provision of adequate public transport to supplement taxis and ensure enough police are visible on the beat at this time. That is the government's responsibility.

The first stage should be seen for what it actually is—a diversionary tactic that shifts the blame from the government to the licensees themselves. This safety plan has everything to do with placing restrictions, be they worthy or not, on licensed premises. What does that imply? It implies that it is the licensed premises which are to blame for incidents of violence on our streets. Why does the plan not include the provision of more police on the beat at lockout time? Why does the government not look at providing more public transport services around the lockout time? I will tell members why: that would mean the government would actually be accepting the fact that it is as responsible as the licensed premises for stopping the problem of alcohol induced violence. This safety plan should not only be placing restrictions on licensees but also be providing more resources to the police and the public transport system. Now that is a plan.

This plan does not properly achieve the aim of effectively managing public intoxication as it is too short-sighted and is more interested in shifting the blame and focus onto our licensees rather than onto how the government's lack of resources to its own services could also be improved to help the alcohol induced violence issue.

Interestingly, there is a specific clause in this bill which expands the licensed premises that are exempt from the lockout condition during the Indy carnival on the Gold Coast. I am referring here to clause 6(3) of the bill. They can do this because at Indy more police are stationed on the Gold Coast. The Beattie government knows that it can control crowds, even large crowds of intoxicated people, when enough police are on the beat. Better police resourcing must be part of this safety plan's first stage.

I would like to return to my original point and point out that I am unaware of any review process or consultation that could possibly occur in regard to the effectiveness of 3 am lockouts before the imposition of this short-sighted stage 1 on 1 July. If I could suggest what would have been the overwhelming response from licensees, this bill imposing across-the-board 3 am lockouts raises the same concerns as any blanket policy does. It is draconian and does not strike an appropriate balance between the rights and interests of licensees. What about the local pub of a regional centre? Is a 3 am lockout really necessary? Are there incidents of gang bashings that warrant a draconian lockout condition being placed on them?

Unlike the circumstances in the city and busy precincts like Surfers Paradise that may call for more regulation and police and transport resources, in the country this bill is the start of a plan of overregulation that will be an unjustified burden for smaller regional businesses and licensees.

**Mr O'Brien:** You wouldn't know!

**Mr LANGBROEK:** I take that interjection from the member for Cook, and I will point out that I was speaking to someone from a regional race club yesterday who told me that, when they want to have a fundraising event like a concert or with a DJ after the races to raise some money, under this plan and the second stage of it they will have to fork out more money to employ security guards at a draconian ratio to keep the crowd under control.

**Ms KEECH:** I rise to a point of order. The provisions before the House in this bill refer to stage 1. The member is referring to stage 2 and is therefore irrelevant.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! You can address those in your summing-up.

**Mr LANGBROEK:** So this clearly drains the finances of an already struggling group, the regional race clubs. We can see this blanket safety plan will kill their attempts to keep themselves viable.

The blanket 3 am lockout and more restrictive measures that will follow are required more so in highly concentrated night venue precincts. Regulation is needed, but in regional venues the regulations that may be appropriate in the city are just overregulation. Then again, the potential burdens of this plan on regional groups would have been recognised if an appropriate consultation process was undertaken. It would also have been interesting to find out what licensees, who have been subject to the responsible service of alcohol provisions for some time now, had to say about how the 3 am lockout would affect their bottom line.

Earlier this year, on 14 March, the front page of the *Gold Coast Bulletin* had the signs of six Gold Coast nightclubs on it. Three had a 'sold' stamped on them. Another two had 'show cause' on them and the remaining club said 'for sale'. It is anyone's guess as to whether the lockout is responsible for six venues either being sold or offering themselves for sale after the provisions came in without proper consultation or an adequate review process being undertaken.

Again, this government does not take everyone's interests into consideration when spitting out pieces of legislation it wants to rush through so it can say, 'Look what I did.' A blanket 3 am lockout provision is short-sighted. A lockout alone will not stop street violence and confrontation between intoxicated individuals. In fact, without more resources dedicated to police and public transport to complement a lockout time, the situation could actually become worse. A review process proving violence has dropped since lockouts were introduced is required to justify a blanket policy.

Furthermore, some sort of consultation process should occur to consider the interests of licensees and the impact on them, in particular regional licensees, before this policy is implemented. This safety plan is all about shifting the focus of responsibility from the government to licensees. This government must accept that it is responsible as well. We need more police on the beat and more public transport to get the people who have been locked out of premises home safely and consistently.

The minister was quoted in the *Gold Coast Bulletin* on 11 April as saying, 'People have the right to feel safe when they go out at night. I make no apology for our tough approach.' So it is tough. I agree with the minister that lockouts will help the situation, but only if the lockouts are put in place at the same time as this government accepts its responsibility with regard to policing and transport and recognises how it is crucial to any plan to fix this problem. That will truly provide the safe environment we want and need in our night-life precincts.