



Speech by
Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard Tuesday, 23 November 2010

LIQUOR AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Ms GRACE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (3.19 pm): I rise to support the Liquor and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. The electorate of Brisbane Central has many licensees in it, particularly in one of the dedicated drink-safe precincts—that being Fortitude Valley—and it is fantastic to see some real action and work towards harm minimisation when it comes to alcohol induced violence.

I pay tribute to the work of the Law, Justice and Safety Committee—in particular the chair, Barbara Stone, the member for Springwood, who I believe did an excellent job. The parliamentary inquiry made a number of recommendations which have now been picked up by the government. The committee did a very thorough job in visiting many of these precincts. I think they got some fantastic information when they visited the Fortitude Valley precinct.

I heard the member for Mermaid Beach talk about there not being enough consultation. I do not know what happened in his electorate, but I can tell members that in my electorate there was ample consultation by the committee. I do not believe that licensees in the Fortitude Valley area can complain about not having their concerns or issues raised, understood and fully evaluated. I believe that they thought they got a very good hearing. They certainly were very eager participants in the process that was undertaken.

I welcome the central policy principle of the government's response—that is, the commitment to a place based management approach. Since being elected I have witnessed in the Valley in particular and also in the CBD, which are in my electorate, numbers of people equal to those at any sporting event in the Valley entertainment precinct on a Friday and Saturday night. When I go to a sporting event I see the management that takes place in controlling those crowds. It is great to see that we have now picked up that basic principle that these are huge numbers and we need to manage them. I believe that a place based management approach is the best way to go forward.

These precincts are going to be known as drink-safe precincts. They will be piloted in the Valley, in Townsville and on the Gold Coast. It will be fantastic when they are set up and running effectively. The committees have been meeting. I believe that we will see a great change in those areas.

The government is committed to ensuring community safety while still allowing people to enjoy alcohol responsibly and to retain a vibrant night-life in Queensland. In a state as large and diverse as Queensland, one size does not fit all. Responses to alcohol related harm and the potential for harm must be scalable and appropriate within a risk based regulatory framework. That is what this bill will deliver.

The central policy principle of the government's response to the Law, Justice and Safety Committee's final report into alcohol related violence is a commitment to the development of a place based management approach with a primary focus on community safety. That is definitely the way to go. A place based management approach ensures practical solutions to local problems. I know that the committee is vehemently working towards solving those problems.

As part of this place based management approach, the government will pilot drink-safe precincts in key late-night entertainment areas across the state where issues such as crowding, queuing, traffic and

inadequate amenities, such as poor lighting, impact upon safety. In this regard, the bill allows for the pilot drink-safe precincts to be prescribed in a regulation. I think that is most appropriate.

Drink-safe precincts have a community safety objective. That will become their main purpose. To this end, the bill provides for a drink-safe precinct to be prescribed for the purposes of minimising harm and the potential for harm from alcohol abuse and misuse and associated violence and minimising alcohol related disturbances or public disorder in a locality. Drink-safe precincts will be managed similar to a major sporting event, with coordinated use of police and other state and local government resources. That is such a welcome change that this bill is providing. I put on the record how much I appreciate the goodwill and cooperation of the Brisbane City Council in coming together with the state government to look at these problems and try to find solutions. I think together we can do a great job.

I will put in a pitch. We need to get the federal government involved. I think it has a role to play. If there is some money available in relation to harm minimisation from alcohol related violence or education programs, we should use these drink-safe precincts as a catalyst to trial any projects that the federal government would like to put funds into.

Increased police response, more support services provided by community groups, better public transport information and special safe zones will be features of the new drink-safe precincts. I have been to the meetings held so far, and these issues are very high on the agenda. Other local issues such as crowding, queuing, traffic and toilet amenities will also be addressed by drink-safe precinct committees in the pilot areas. I can assure the House that those issues are currently being developed and discussed. There are some quite good ideas coming forward to be implemented in a very short time.

The drink-safe precincts will be piloted in Fortitude Valley, which is in my electorate, Surfers Paradise and Townsville for two years from December. The government has committed some good funding to this for the first year. I wholeheartedly welcome the \$4.267 million that has been allocated towards ensuring that this pilot is a success. Some of this funding will go towards providing 24 additional police for Fortitude Valley. Can I say how welcome they are by the local licensees and the community in general. There will be 20 additional police for Surfers Paradise and 12 additional police for Townsville during the pilots. Additional police numbers are a welcome feature of this pilot project. Everyone has recognised the fantastic job the police do. I have witnessed firsthand what they do in the Valley mall and around the Valley precinct. They do an outstanding job. I know that they can do with extra bodies. This pilot is delivering those extra bodies.

An additional Public Safety Response Team will also be available. It will comprise two teams of four police officers. That is eight in total. They will be provided in Fortitude Valley and Surfers Paradise during the pilots. They are fantastic numbers. The other side of the House has nothing to whinge about. These greater numbers are much needed in these precincts.

Drink-safe precinct committees have been established in each of the pilot areas to draw together the combined resources of state and local government agencies and industry and community organisations. I thank the organisations that have taken part in these committees. When I have walked into these committee meetings the room has been full. Everyone is very keen to get on with the job. I thank in particular Danny Blair from the Valley Liquor Accord and Louis Bickle and Carol Gordon from the Valley Chamber of Commerce. We have had representatives from the taxi council, security providers, the union movement—the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union—a number of government and local government departments and committees present at these meetings. They are working together for the first time to deliver a great outcome for those who enjoy these precincts, particularly on a Friday and Saturday night.

Each committee has met three times since they were established in mid-September 2010. Each committee has made substantial progress in developing drink-safe precinct management plans with common visions established for improving patron behaviour, community amenity and community safety.

A number of localised initiatives have been developed to reduce alcohol related violence in these communities. For example, initiatives being progressed in the Fortitude Valley drink-safe precinct include installing TV screens outside the Fortitude Valley train station to show real-time information for commuters wanting to use NightLink train services and setting up a public transport hub in the Valley closer to the mall and in a much better location to provide information on all available transport options including taxis, NightLink buses and NightLink trains. It is fantastic the way they have come together and already provided a great solution to all of those public transport and available transport options.

It is intended that drink-safe precinct committees will continue with the implementation and monitoring of initiatives during the two-year drink-safe precinct pilots and I welcome the committee being chaired so far by the Deputy Premier, who, I have to admit, has done an outstanding job in pulling all of these ideas together and keeping the committee on track. Paul Lucas has done a great job and everyone who attends those meetings welcomes the excellent way in which he is chairing them. It is intended that the drink-safe precinct pilots will inform the development of any future regulatory framework. Therefore, we have that option of saying what has worked and what has not worked and what can be done in the future.

That is a fantastic outcome and one I very much welcome. In this regard existing trading hours and lockout times will remain to provide certainty to licensees—and I support that—and to patrons and give the new approach a chance to work. If the pilots are successful, there is the potential to implement them in other areas throughout Queensland as required. I know that everyone involved in this process is certainly keen to ensure that it is successful and that these precincts deliver what they are set up to deliver. Everyone is charged with going forward and wanting to find the best solutions.

In closing, I also welcome the new powers to ban people from specific areas. This was a power that was called for by licensees in the Fortitude Valley area. If Louis Bickle mentioned it to me a hundred times, he would have mentioned it to me a thousand times. I am sure that the minister would agree that this was one thing that licensees were very keen on. They seem to be able to identify those troublemakers and they wanted to ensure that the police had the powers to ban these troublemakers who have been clearly identified from the precincts so that those elements are removed and we can stop some very unsavoury behaviour from continuing. That is a great step in the right direction. I once again thank the committee for its work and thank the minister and his department for their work. I believe that any area can work extremely well if it is well managed. This bill is about bringing together all of the groups that can well manage these precincts. I support the bill wholeheartedly and commend the bill to the House.