




Speech By  
**Trevor Watts**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH**

---

**LIQUOR AND GAMING (RED TAPE REDUCTION) AND OTHER LEGISLATION  
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (5.35 pm): I rise today in support of the Liquor and Gaming (Red Tape Reduction) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. It has been interesting listening to the debate. It really comes down to one basic principle: the Labor Party seem to always—

**Mr Bleijie** interjected.

**Mr WATTS:** I have no conflict. I have no investment in the liquor industry, but I take the interjection. I will talk about my experience in the industry later.

I think there is an important principle here. Labor always look for the bad in the community. They are looking to see who is going to do something wrong and then they want to overregulate it. That overregulation stops good people from being volunteers, it stops good people from putting on events, and it stops good people from going into business. The LNP are looking for the good in people. We will be tough on crime. When people do the wrong things, they will be pursued and punished accordingly.

I think there are two fundamentally different ways of looking at society. We believe people are going to do the right thing. We would like to free them up to do the right thing. We would like to give them their individual rights and we trust them to exercise those sensibly. If they do the wrong thing, then we will have legislation in place and police who will enforce the legislation to make sure they are appropriately punished. As I say, since the Liquor Act was changed in 1992 by Labor, it has been a complete and utter debacle. There has been knee-jerk reaction after knee-jerk reaction after knee-jerk reaction. Every time something went wrong, another amendment would be introduced. Good people who were in the industry have left because of the compliance costs and the difficulties associated with running a business involved in the liquor industry. Lots of people just would not bother. The same happened with volunteer organisations such as Rotary, Lions and various P&C groups—people who want to have a wine and cheese night when they first enrol their children at school. They want to get together to have a social wine and cheese and want to charge \$5 at the door for that. Someone had to put in an application and wait for 28 days to get it signed off by the police, to take it to the department to get it stamped, to pay \$57 and to do a security risk assessment. It really just boils down to this being a nanny state. We had a situation where the president of the P&C and the principal of the school could not be trusted to get six bottles of wine and make sure that a few parents could have a drink and a good time while meeting and getting to know each other. It was totally ridiculous legislation and completely unnecessary.

I certainly thank the Attorney-General for proposing these amendments. I look forward to further amendments as we get information back from the group that has been formed to advise on where the red tape can be cut. I thank the Attorney-General for the legislation. I thank the committee for its deliberations. I thank the secretariat for all the work it has done. I thank those who made submissions to the committee as well. I note that one group representing the P&Cs submitted that they are very concerned about this potentially causing a problem. I remind them that if an event is on

the school premises the owner of those premises still has all the same controls that they would normally have. If it is an event that they are not happy with, it cannot go ahead without the approval of the person who is in control of the premises. P&Cs and headmasters will be able to make decisions about what is a suitable event under what sort of suitable circumstances and then they will be able to go ahead with that.

I would like to thank the Attorney-General for accepting some of the recommendations of the committee. I think they were well considered. I certainly appreciate the fact that the Attorney-General has taken those on board because I think they will reduce red tape and make sure the act, when it is passed, has better effect. The bottom line is that we trust and value volunteers in our community groups. Certainly in Toowoomba North there are a lot of community groups and a lot of people who want to put on little functions. There are groups that want to raffle a bottle of alcohol at their functions. There are various other community groups that for one reason or another—let's say it is the Toowoomba Basketball Association. They might have a game on and they want to hold a bar. They have to organise to get approval for the bar 28 days in advance. They have to put up restrictive areas. They have to make sure someone in the organisation is trained in the responsible service of alcohol. It has been a very difficult process for volunteer organisations to undertake.

Labor's approach to the Liquor Act since 1992 encompassing the ensuing amendments has been a moving feast. We have had regulation compiled on top of regulation compiled on top of regulation until it was almost unbearable for the industry, and that is where we are at now. I myself have been and am qualified in the responsible service of alcohol. I have been a nominee and a licensee. I have been in control of cafes, nightclubs, bars, pubs and special facility licences. I can honestly say that the amount of regulation and red tape that has been forced upon that industry over the last 20-something years has reached a ridiculous point.

One of these areas where I think it is highly appropriate to have a risk assessed management plan is nightclubs. If someone wants to open a nightclub, it is a good thing to require that. If someone has a cafe that principally sells coffee, cakes and maybe some meals why on earth do they need to have a risk assessed management plan in place in order to serve a bottle of wine to me and my wife at six o'clock on a Friday afternoon? Why do they need a risk assessed management plan in place to ensure that a couple of 40-somethings are not suddenly going to go crazy after two glasses of wine?

**Honourable members:** Ha, ha!

**Mr WATTS:** Okay, 45. I do not think this is necessary where it is a low-risk business. I have consulted with people as they have tried to do a risk assessed management plan. I talk of people who have experience as chefs, they have bought a little cafe and they want to go forward and start a business. They are interested in having a bottle of wine available for people and all of a sudden they are asking, 'How do I do a risk assessed management plan?' So straight away they get the chequebook out, they hire someone like me to come along and expensively consult and advise them how to do a risk assessed management plan. The whole thing is just ridiculous because at the end of the day you could almost photocopy and submit a previous one because there is no risk from these businesses; the risk is minuscule. Putting together a community impact statement and a risk assessed management plan for a small cafe that wants to sell wines or a Roman coffee late at night is unnecessary. It is complete nonsense to suggest that it was of any benefit, apart from to people who might be writing those plans and charging fees for them. I do note that the commissioner has a discretionary power to require a RAMP. If they feel there is a potential risk they can require one, and I think appropriately so because there may be some circumstances in which it would be necessary. So I think it is certainly a good idea to have that discretionary power.

I have mentioned several parts of the bill, but there are some other aspects of the bill that I think are worth mentioning also. We will be exempting low-risk community organisations from requiring a permit to conduct a not-for-profit event, and I add again these are volunteer type organisations. They will not need those in order to hold an event. In terms of the proposed cessation of advertising relating to certain liquor and gaming applications in the *Government Gazette*, it is my experience that placing a sign on the front door of a premises has pretty well always been the best way to let people know that an application has been submitted. Over the last 20 years I have spent thousands of dollars on advertising in the *Government Gazette* and I do not think anyone has read them apart from the government to check that I spent my money. I certainly endorse removing that requirement. I think it is important that the community has the ability to know that a licence has been applied for, and putting a sign up on the front door and putting the details of that up on the web is very appropriate. That again reduces the burden of regulation for low-risk premises, and I certainly endorse that. The bill will also remove the renewal requirements for clubs and hotels with certain

types of gaming machine licences. Again, this is regulation that the businesses have to go through and pay for and I think it is unnecessary.

As we are reducing red tape, there is an area that I think is worth mentioning, and that is the approved managers' register. I have run businesses in which we have had to have an approved manager. There were rules that were written for the CBD talking about distance, time, access and how far away an approved manager has to be. One of those was also the requirement for a register. Just to be clear, I was advised in the past that not only do I have to check the licence of the approved manager, which of course could be out of step with their RSA and their RMLV, the responsible management of licensed venues—so they could actually have a valid qualification for one but the other one could have expired. So first of all you have to check that both of those are valid every time they start a shift by dialling into the net. Then you need to make sure they fill out the book. Then you need to make sure that the book is signed off at the end of the night. I think that that is crazy overregulation. I do not think it has made any venue safer in any way at all. I do not think that having that book in place has done anything at all apart from making sure that a bureaucrat has something to check when they turn up. Has it made the venue safer? No. Has it stopped people getting unduly intoxicated or made them safer? No, I do not think it has had any effect in that area at all. Again, that requirement assumes that the management of the premises and the individual manager will try to do the wrong thing and, therefore, they have to fill out this book and somehow magically that will mean they will do the right thing. Let me tell honourable members that good people will do the right thing, anyway and bad people will not. They are certainly the ones who have not been filling out the book and they have been flouting the law in certain areas. Therefore, I see no benefit at all in having to sign on and sign off.

People have expressed the view that this is potentially weakening some of the legislation. There is an awful amount of common law legislation in this area that will still apply. There is obviously still a fair amount of criminal law that will apply and premises will still have a duty of care. When we are talking about low-risk venues I do not believe at all that this is going to have some detrimental effect on society where people are suddenly going to rush out and cause all the kinds of problems that people have spoken about.

The bill certainly brings us into this century in terms of making sure that we have a sensible way for people to advertise and promote the fact that they have applied for a licence. Reducing some of the costs involved in applying for a minor licence for small premises will help our hospitality industry and will certainly help our tourism industry. People who come here from overseas have an expectation that they might be able to have a glass of wine with their dinner and do not understand at all that someone may not have wanted to go through all of the regulatory burdens involved to ensure that they can serve that glass of wine. Removing that requirement in relation to low-risk premises is imminently sensible. I look forward to more sensible suggestions coming from the expert panel.

The bill supports and recognises the benefits of restaurants and cafes to our community. Small businesses should be encouraged, and they certainly should not have to jump over the same bar as a nightclub which operates late into the evening. The previous government has created an unnecessary atmosphere of hysteria relating to the distribution of alcohol, and that has been detrimental to people who simply want to enjoy a drink or sell a drink, and I think that is detrimental going forward.

I think it is sensible that there are processes in place to enable businesses to trade past midnight. If a local community group is going to be operating for an extended period of time or over several days, I think it is eminently sensible that there are checks and balances in place. But making your local school jump through the same hoops for a wine and cheese night as you would for a B&S at Thargomindah is crazy and completely unnecessary.

**Mr Johnson:** Hey, come on, Thargomindah B&Ss are all right!

**Mr WATTS:** I am not knocking it. I am just saying that they may have to jump through a few hoops regarding the liquor licence before they are able to go ahead.

**Mr Johnson:** They do after they have a few rums!

**Mr WATTS:** I should imagine they would out at Thargomindah! There are some safeguards in place in this bill. There are some good and sensible reductions of red tape that will not put people in any danger at all, and I think overall the bill will help small businesses involved in the liquor industry. I think it will help tourists enjoy their Queensland experience while they are out at night having dinner.

I would like to quote Clubs Queensland, because this is an example of the some of the things that the industry has had to deal with.

Regulatory interventions in the past decade have introduced more than 100 separate changes to policies, practices, guidelines, standards and compliance requirements. The imposition of these changes has been uncoordinated and at considerable cost to industry, operational efficiency and business certainty. The community clubs industry applauds the government's efforts to eliminate duplication and unnecessary compliance administration through meaningful reforms that can build business confidence without weakening the core harm minimisation requirements or general effectiveness of the Queensland liquor and gaming regulatory framework.

I think it is very important to understand that we are not talking about taking away core requirements. We are talking about my wife and me being able to have a glass of wine on a Friday night at an event at our children's school. The bill has been well thought through. I think the committee's recommendations were good, and I appreciate the Attorney-General taking those on board.

The most important thing to remember is that out of 6,774 community liquor permits in 2012, not one was rejected. In fact, since that requirement was introduced, very few have been rejected. The figure which I have been provided with is that since 2009, nine permits have been rejected. There is a lot of regulatory red tape and bureaucracy that people have to wade through. Volunteers are being stressed because they have to go to the local police station to get documents signed off and then take them to the liquor licensing department.

At the end of the day, since 2009 just nine have been rejected. So why have we been doing all of this paperwork? Someone has to be employed to check it all; someone has to file it all; someone has to make sure it is enforced. The hardworking volunteers of Queensland have been the ones who have had to go forward and run around their community to get all of these things done.

So in essence, I would say that I think this bill is a good start, but there is a lot more work to be done in liquor licensing. From a regulatory point of view, I think there are some serious problems in liquor licensing. Our community must also consider very carefully how we are going to address problems with alcohol consumption. My long experience is that the tighter you try to regulate and the harsher you try and control, the more problems will slip through your fingers. It is like grabbing quicksilver in your hand.

The problem areas are the youth and uncontrolled and unsupervised Facebook parties. I think the on-premise liquor industry is one of best in the world in terms of how it operates here in Queensland. It has been overregulated, which has made it unprofitable in certain circumstances. This bill is a good start in supporting our volunteers and our community groups, and it is a good start for small business and tourism. They should be allowed to distribute alcohol in an appropriate way.

I certainly commend the bill to the House, and I look forward to its follow-up from the specialist panel.