




Speech By  
**Aaron Harper**

**MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA**

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**TACKLING ALCOHOL-FUELLED VIOLENCE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL;  
LIQUOR AND FAIR TRADING LEGISLATION (RED TAPE REDUCTION)  
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (9.13 pm): Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise in this place to give my contribution on the issue of alcohol fuelled violence. I have spoken on this previously in 2015 when I articulated the impacts of some of the things I have seen during my previous role as an intensive care paramedic with the Queensland Ambulance Service proudly serving the people of the northern region for a little over 25 years—a role, albeit not with the same skill set, that I continue to perform now as an unpaid volunteer in the role of honorary officer attached to the Kirwan Ambulance Station in the Thuringowa electorate. People may ask why I would continue with that role now that I am a member of government. My answer is very simple: it allows me to look after people and, importantly, keep in touch with the coalface and the very people who deliver a professional service and provide aid to the injured in the line of duty. It is our paramedics who, amongst others, have to endure the side effects of alcohol fuelled violence. We only have to look at the rising incidence of assaults on paramedics to see there is a clear crossover with alcohol fuelled violence. Let me paint a scene for those paying attention in the House.

Paramedics are on their knees providing aid to a young man who is lying on a footpath at what is clearly a chaotic scene. There is noise from loud music pumping from inside the nightclub on Flinders Street very late on a Friday night. Police nearby are trying to bring a sense of calm as mostly intoxicated bystanders surround the scene. They are angry, frustrated and some just want to fight the person who 'did this'. That action would most likely just lead to another victim. But on that footpath a young man lies unconscious and bleeding from facial and head wounds with a likely traumatic brain injury. He is now vomiting. If untreated and if he survives he may go through life with a form of disability that is commonly called—and correctly diagnosed as—an acquired brain injury. How strangely apt that we now have to accept there is a name for these patients who are the victims of drunken and possibly drug affected individuals who are out there just to get drunk, brawl, fight and show how tough they are to their friends. My God, Mr Speaker, our society needs a wake-up call. This cannot go on. It is completely unacceptable to allow this behaviour to continue, because if we do nothing it becomes accepted behaviour.

As someone who forms government I will not accept this behaviour. I implore this House to take a cold, hard look at the facts. We have had deaths on our streets throughout this state because—and solely because—of alcohol fuelled violence. Collectively as a government, which rightly should put the public safety for its citizens paramount, we cannot allow this situation to continue. I ask that fellow members in this House please think long and hard about any decisions they will make that go against the core fundamental values of ensuring a safe and just society. Please check your moral compass when you enter this place, and I hope that it points you in the direction of common sense. We know that over 70 per cent of Queenslanders want change. Parents want to know that when their children go out at night they will come home safely. I know that feeling because, like many of you in this place, I am the

parent of a 19-year-old. If he does go out into the drink safe precinct his mother and I will be constantly checking with him via his mobile phone, asking if he is okay and waiting up until he gets home. We should not—nor should any parent—need to stress about our loved ones going out for what they hope will be a good night out with their friends.

I come back to that scene. After vital signs are checked, intravenous lines put in, bleeding controlled and medication drawn up, should the worst happen and the patient starts to have a seizure, he is packaged up and wheeled to the ambulance. Some intoxicated person then comes in to spark up the scene, pushing and grabbing the paramedic as he is simply trying to get the patient into the safety of the ambulance and get out of there. The stress of that environment is not nice. As we have seen recently and as is often the case, these patients will wake up, if the injury allows, and want to fight the paramedic inside the ambulance—fists flying, kicking, ripping out IV lines. He just wants to fight. Is it hypoxia, lack of oxygen? Is he combative because of a brain injury? It is a bit too early to tell. Police are requested. The patient is subdued and sedated and, in this case, transported to the Townsville Hospital for scans and a night of observation.

I know this case well because it was mine just a few years ago. I go back to the station some time later to change my shirt due to the blood from him pulling out his IV line. Police ask if I want to fill out an assault form. On that occasion I choose not to, thinking he was hypoxic from that lack of oxygen and that just impeded his judgement. But in my time I have filled out quite a few assault forms.

The worst thing about doing that Friday night job is returning to the nightclub strip another four times, well into the hours of Saturday morning, to back up other crews called to pick up drunken, intoxicated, vomiting or unconscious patrons. From my experience, after a shift like that, just the thought of having to go back on Saturday night and repeat it is sometimes all too hard. It is a tough, demanding, sometimes horrible, stressful job when over the years you see the same thing, shift after shift. I feel for my peers who continue to do this.

Hopefully with a change in these laws there will be a reduction in these cases, but only time will tell. The evidence I see from the changes in New South Wales and other countries that have implemented changes to address the issue is a sure and telling sign that lockout and liquor laws, reduction of hours and common sense will and in fact do make a change for the better and point us in the right direction as a society that is indeed the correct course to chart.

Luckily, the patient I previously described does survive without a traumatic brain injury. He does not need to live on a disability pension due to having an acquired brain injury, but there is a cost to society—the ambulance response, the police response, the night in hospital, the scans, the nursing and medical staff who look after him. If he does have an acquired brain injury, he goes into an intensive care unit and is intubated and ventilated at a cost of over \$2,000 a night. The cost from his length of stay in the hospital as he is rehabilitated is enormous. He does not have an income due to his injury and his time off work. His life will have changed forever. From some reports, looking after just one head injured patient like that can cost up to \$12 million over the course of a lifetime of care.

I note with interest the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Southern Downs, in this place in 1992, 2005 and 2010 asking that the issue be addressed and debated in the House. In fact, in 2010 he went on an early morning run while in Townsville, came across a stench and witnessed drunken people coming out of nightclubs on Flinders Street as the sun was rising. He said that we needed to address that. The member for Southern Downs now has the opportunity to add his views, hopefully in a positive manner, to this debate.

I would also ask opposition members, particularly the members for Gaven, Mudgeeraba, Burdekin and Moggill, who have all played an important role either in emergency services or in the health sector, to listen carefully and to use their experience to point them in the right direction on this bill. We each have an opportunity to make the correct decision as a responsible government, to leave a legacy from the 55th Parliament to have morally made the correct decision in addressing the terrible issue of alcohol fuelled violence and its horrible effects on our community across Queensland. I commend the bill to the House.