




Speech By  
**Dr Christian Rowan**

**MEMBER FOR MOGGILL**

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

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (9.24 pm): I rise to address alcohol fuelled violence and the Tackling Alcohol-Fuelled Violence Legislation Amendment Bill 2015 and the Liquor and Fair Trading Legislation (Red Tape Reduction) Amendment Bill 2015. I am well qualified to speak on this topic, given I am an addiction medicine specialist, having been awarded my fellowship of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians Chapter of Addiction Medicine. I am also a member of the Australasian Professional Society on Alcohol and other Drugs. I am registered with the Medical Board of Australia in not only this medical discipline of addiction medicine but also medical administration as a fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Medical Administrators. As a former president of both the Australian Medical Association of Queensland and the Rural Doctors Association of Queensland, for many years I have been actively involved in pursuing the public health issue of respective governments adequately addressing all forms of substance related harms and disorders and the development of whole-of-government, evidence based strategies and solutions.

According to the Australian Education and Rehabilitation Foundation, the cost to society of the misuse of alcohol is \$36 billion per year. Alcohol fuelled violence, which is a subset of the above public health issue, needs to be comprehensively addressed through sound, evidence based policy. On this there is no political disagreement. All parliamentarians in this place want to reduce and eliminate alcohol fuelled violence. What we disagree on is the best way to do this.

As a community we need to rethink our relationship with alcohol and commit to cultural change in order to achieve a reduction in the physical, psychological and social harms of excessive alcohol consumption. Unfortunately, our binge-drinking culture is now at record levels, with significant harms and at-risk behaviours for many not only in Queensland but also across Australia. It can be said that, whilst the individual human costs of substance related harms can be catastrophic, the community implications are also immense and destructive, with our cohesiveness as a society jeopardised.

I have witnessed firsthand the clinical consequences of alcohol fuelled violence, having worked in a number of emergency departments as a doctor and having also been involved in the management oversight of emergency services as a health administrator. Treating those with chronic, long-term alcohol or drug dependency syndromes can also be a significant challenge. This requires compassion, empathy and a complex set of highly developed clinical skills, and I take this opportunity to recognise those teachers, mentors and health professionals whose invaluable knowledge and imparted insights have allowed me to develop the required skills to be a well-developed clinical specialist.

We must be cognisant that often today alcohol is consumed by some along with amphetamine type stimulants such as crystalline methylamphetamine or new synthetic drugs or even anabolic steroids. This can then often heighten an altered sense of perception and situational awareness, leading

to enhanced erratic and violent behaviour. Alcohol fuelled violence, with or without other drugs, is also certainly a major occupational health and safety issue for emergency services workers including paramedics, police officers, doctors and nurses.

In order to reduce any form of substance misuse and abuse, a balanced investment by government in supply reduction, demand reduction and harm minimisation via access to alcohol and drug treatment services must occur. We must take this approach as a matter of urgency given the plethora of substance misuse and abuse issues, from alcohol to illicit drugs to synthetic substances to prescription and over-the-counter medication dependency disorders which are affecting many in communities in urban, regional and rural Queensland. But we must take a whole-of-Queensland-government approach and not focus on one-dimensional solutions.

In my view, it is far too simplistic to simply focus on lockout laws and trading hours—in essence, crowd control. There is nothing in the current proposals that addresses illicit drug, synthetic drug and volatile substance fuelled violence in all communities, not just entertainment precincts. Taxing alcohol products by volume and not price, preferentially taxing low-alcohol products and also ending alcohol marketing to young people, along with enhanced school, community and social education programs and further developing a range of ambulatory and inpatient services, along with therapeutic communities, is also vitally needed. Community alcohol outlet density provisions also need reviewing, along with strategies to address preloading.

While there is some variance of views in academic circles as to their translational effect, it is my view that mandatory minimum sentences for serious alcohol or drug fuelled violence offences are also important in sending a zero-tolerance message to the broader community. Strengthening fines for related antisocial behaviour should also be considered.

The hospitality and liquor industry, including pubs and clubs, must be part of the solution with respect to this problem when it occurs in entertainment precincts. The vast majority of licensed venues and their patrons take a responsible attitude to the consumption of alcohol.

I do hope that these comments are not confined to history on the pages of *Hansard* and that the knowledge, skills and expertise of those in the 55th Parliament, regardless of political persuasion, are used to good effect in order to build upon the principles of the multifaceted, comprehensive and considered plans of action for the sustained long-term reduction in the harms associated with excessive alcohol consumption and drug use which were developed by the former LNP government. In 2014 the former LNP government introduced the \$44.5 million Safe Night Out Strategy following months of public consultation and discussion about the issue of alcohol and drug related violence. It should have been given a proper chance to work given that the early results revealed a reduction in a range of offences including physical and sexual assaults as well as property damage. Key elements of the strategy included establishing 15 safe night precincts across Queensland; drug and alcohol education in schools from years 7 to 12; stronger and better coordinated liquor licensing provisions; and enhanced penalties for offenders, including a new offence of unlawful striking causing death resulting in a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. I am pleased to note that the Queensland Alcohol and Other Drugs Action Plan 2015-17, which was developed by the LNP when in government, was launched last year. This well developed initial plan has the potential to reduce the physical, psychological and social harms of alcohol and other drugs.

There should be bipartisan political leadership on this important public health and societal issue. Despite the rhetoric of the Labor Party that it was going to seek individual contact with all current parliamentarians about this issue prior to the introduction of this legislation, I have in fact not received any formal contact from the Labor Party. The Attorney-General said a few months ago, quite correctly, that all of us here are parliamentarians first before being politicians. Unfortunately, those words of Labor are not matched by actions. I would like to acknowledge my professional medical colleague the member for Stafford, Dr Anthony Lynham, for his clinical work and public advocacy with respect to alcohol fuelled violence and assaults. I do not doubt his genuine commitment in having these matters addressed. I know on both sides of the House we all recognise the need for cultural change and sustained action to eliminate alcohol fuelled violence. As a father of four, as a doctor and as an elected representative to this Queensland parliament, I feel a great deal of personal and professional responsibility with respect to ensuring that senseless violence related to alcohol and drugs is addressed through not only legislation but also long-term strategies and action plans which are adequately resourced. Unfortunately, the current one-dimensional, zealot-like proposal within a narrow supply reduction legislative framework currently before the Queensland parliament is inadequate and deficient given that it is not an enhanced, multifaceted, broad-ranging, whole-of-government solution building upon previous LNP and former Labor government initiatives. The current proposed legislation also has legislative inconsistencies with casino precincts being exempt. It is also clear that current data collection mechanisms on this issue are flawed, inadequate and require an urgent process of rectification in order to develop evidence based public policy.

All forms of substance fuelled violence and harms within all Queensland communities must be addressed. This includes urban, rural, regional, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. No one individual nor one political party is entitled to moral or ethical ownership of this issue. We all agree alcohol fuelled violence must end. What we disagree on is the best way to do it. This issue is complex and multifaceted. I want substance fuelled violence, including alcohol fuelled violence, to end. But Labor's inadequate legislation will not achieve this outcome for Queensland with respect to the Tackling Alcohol-Fuelled Violence Legislation Amendment Bill 2015.

In conclusion, I also support the commentary of the LNP members with respect to the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee report on the Liquor and Fair Trading Legislation (Red Tape Reduction) Amendment Bill 2015. As always, my door remains open, regardless of the outcome of the vote this week, to sound evidence based public policy for Queensland in relation to substance harms and substance fuelled violence in all its forms. Given that Katter's Australian Party MPs have now indicated their support for the bill, I look forward to seeing the independent review and evaluation of the laws in 2018 following implementation later this year.

Finally, I am pleased to have made a professional contribution to this debate as opposed to the shameful contribution, personal attacks and conduct of the member for Ferny Grove during tonight's proceedings. In conclusion, I pay tribute to the thousands of Queensland patients I have treated and assisted in dealing with their alcohol and/or drug problems over many years.