




Speech By
Mark Furner

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

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

 **Mr FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (8.17 pm): This evening I start by commending the Tackling Alcohol-Fuelled Violence Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. This evening, I am very proud to be here, debating this fundamental piece of legislation that the Palaszczuk Labor government has introduced, as the chair of the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee. Before I get into the threshold parts of my speech, I wish to commend a number of people. I would like to commend some of the committee members from the LNP. I listened to the contribution of the member for Mansfield, who spoke about a six-person committee. Unbeknown to him, the committee started as a subcommittee, because some members had prior commitments. For example, the member for Morayfield was on his honeymoon and the member for Gympie had prearranged an overseas holiday, and that is understandable. However, those commitments meant that the committee was reduced to a subcommittee. The subcommittee started by travelling to New South Wales and visiting Kings Cross, the Sydney CBD and Newcastle. I put on the record my appreciation and that of the subcommittee of the New South Wales police, representatives from St Vincent's Hospital emergency department, the New South Wales Legislative Assembly and the Hon. George Souris, the former chair of the New South Wales Law and Safety Committee.

In Newcastle the police division was outstanding in their demonstration of the peer review facts. They were uncontested by the subcommittee. The committee in its full composition did not contest the data that was presented to the subcommittee. Professor Kypri, who holds a Senior Brawn Research Fellowship with the School of Medicine and Public Health at the University of Newcastle, provided peer review expert evidence and data to the committee.

From there we returned to Brisbane. I extend my appreciation to the subcommittee for their time—the member for Beaudesert and the member for Lytton. They and I went out to Fortitude Valley from approximately midnight through to around 5 am. We put in a decent stint going around the safe night out precinct. We had a look at the watch house and the emergency department at the Royal Brisbane Hospital. We were escorted by Inspector Ray Brownhill from the Fortitude Valley police.

In Townsville Superintendent Glen Ketchell, Inspector Roger Whyte and Sergeant Mike Sands from the Townsville police showed us around. The member for Lytton, the local member for Townsville, and I were the only members who took up the opportunity of having a look at the Townsville safe night out precinct and seeing the good job they do. We concluded our inspection around 2.30 am.

At the Gold Coast hearing we did inspections of Broadbeach and Surfers Paradise. I thank Inspector Simon Chase and Acting Senior Sergeant Byrne, all committee members and Bernice Watson for their involvement in this inspection. I thank Greg Thomson for his involvement in the inspections.

I want to make special comment about a young fellow who was being interviewed by the media when we were on the Gold Coast. I speak of Tobias Ridolfi. He was the latest victim of an assault in a nightclub. I hear a lot of arguments put forward that no assaults are occurring in nightclubs. He is now blind in one eye as a result of a severe bashing in the SinCity Nightclub.

I return to referring to the peer review data that was provided to the committee. What we heard from the industry was, in my opinion, built on a house of cards based on assumption and hearsay. The Public Health Association of Australia provided data and indicated that data collection in Australian hospitals, ambulances and things like that could be improved. That is why we as a committee recommended that appropriate data be provided—not hearsay and assumptions provided by the industry. We want appropriate data to be available to us so we can make informed decisions in the future. The witness indicated, however, that there are significant trends in the data over time to show that there are more problems with alcohol in both emergency departments and ambulances. We heard from a number of submitters that there is an overwhelming unreporting of data and information on this issue.

There have been two systematic reviews on the relationship between alcohol and harm. Both were considered by the committee. They were by Tim Stockwell and colleagues in 2009 and Hahn and colleagues in 2010. Stockwell actually reviewed and examined 49 unique studies from many countries concerning the effects of trading hours and violence. Studies which did not provide controls from other potential harms were excluded.

Among those, 11 report at least one significant outcome indicating adverse effects of increased hours or benefits from reduced hours. It concluded on the balance of reliable evidence that extended late-night trading hours lead to increased consumption and related harms. Conversely, if we reduce the hours it will reduce the harm in venues. There was significant evidence in 10 qualifying studies to conclude that increasing hours of sale by two or more hours increases alcohol related harms. Policies decreasing hours of sale by two hours or more at on-premises alcohol outlets may be effective strategies for preventing alcohol related harms.

A study in Perth in 2002 found that bars being permitted to trade just one or two hours extra after midnight double the right of late-night violent incidents reported to the police. A Norwegian study found that each additional one hour extension to the opening hours of premises selling alcohol was associated with a 16 per cent increase in violent crime.

Professor Kypri provided new and very recent data to the committee which demonstrated a comparison between rates of reported assaults in Kings Cross and the Sydney CBD. The overall fall in assault rates in Sydney was 20 per cent in the months after January 2014. In Kings Cross they fell by 45 per cent.

A 2015 study by Professor Gordian Fulde indicated that there was a significant reduction in the number of alcohol related serious injury and trauma presentations to the emergency department in the 12 months after the introduction of the new liquor regulations. This change was seen throughout the week but it was especially marked on weekends. He found there was a 24.8 per cent decrease in presentations resulting from alcohol related injury when compared to 2013.

I turn now to the public costs. Professor Najman indicated at the Brisbane hearing—and I think these are reasonable questions to ask—

To what extent should we be using public funds to reduce the harm created by a private industry? To what extent are we as taxpayers obliged to pay for doctors, for nurses, for public health people, for a whole range of community health workers, to do things because commercial enterprises want to proliferate and increase their hours of sale?

They are reasonable questions to ask and they are reasonable matters to raise before a committee.

At the hearing Professor Kypri compared the cost and benefit of the proposed interventions with those for other health outcomes. He stated—

To achieve a 20 per cent change in assault rates, compared with my colleagues working in cancer prevention, those numbers are unheard of.

At the Brisbane hearing Ms Olsson from the RBWH appeared with the Queensland Nurses' Union. She indicated that from September 2014 to September 2015 they required security assistance 1,798 times in the emergency department alone. Three-quarters of those were secondary to alcohol related incidents.

Mr Tony Brown referred the committee to a study which indicated the cost of alcohol abuse in Australia was \$36 billion per annum. Dr David Rosengren said a yet-to-be-published snapshot survey of emergency departments across Australia and New Zealand at 11 pm on 26 January this year for 'incidents of alcohol association' attendance found Queensland recorded the second highest incidence in Australia of 19 per cent.

I turn to the impact on police. Cairns and Townsville police indicated to the committee that dealing with alcohol affected people had become their core business. Police are taken away from their real functions of protecting our society from criminals to babysitting intoxicated young adults and, in the process, being assaulted themselves. How much crime could be solved if they did not have to perform this? Police overwhelming support these laws as well.

The President of the Queensland Police Union of Employees, Ian Leavers, provided the committee at its hearing on the Gold Coast an explanation of his campaign which commenced in 2009. It is a campaign with the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons to change the violence mixed with alcohol consumption. He indicated to the committee that he was sick and tired of police being belted senselessly day in and day out. It is too much. Sadly, police officers are being assaulted on a regular basis far more often.

Mr Leavers also went on to express his experience in terms of the impact on police resources. He indicated that in terms of safe night precincts they were funded up to \$5 million a year for Surfers Paradise, the Valley and Townsville. He referred to it as a bandaid solution. Former premier Campbell Newman offered \$20 million to fund that but that money was never forthcoming. There was a drain on police resources around the state. To put extra police into one of the precincts—and he referred to Airlie Beach—it meant police needed to travel from Mackay, which is 130 to 140 kilometres south. This is not feasible.

In relation to the impact on business, it was submitted to the hearing that ‘there may be an initial reduction in the number of licensed premises and jobs, but an altering night-time economy will see the introduction of new types of lower risk premises, which in turn will see jobs and revenue figures strengthen’. There is evidence that young people in Newcastle are now spending more money in the night-time economy in that city than they did prior to 2008, when the reforms came in. In the Sydney CBD, the number of licensed premises has increased by 13 per cent and the number of licensed premises has more than doubled in Newcastle. To put this into perspective for Queensland licensees, there are approximately 7,300 licensees in Queensland and only 105 licensees, or 1.4 per cent, have approval to trade between 3 am and 5 am.

Professor Wayne Hall indicated that the alcohol industry argues that ‘the one-way door will shut down Queensland’s night life and reduce tourist numbers’. He referred to a study by the National Local Government Drug and Alcohol Advisory Committee which ‘found that between 2009 and 2011 there was a 9.6 per cent decline in “drink” sales revenue in Newcastle after the restrictions were introduced but this was offset by a 10.3 per cent increase in revenue from “food” sales’. There is a balance in delivery and return to savings in these particular areas where this has been tried and tested.

I congratulate the Katter’s Australian Party for their support on this bill and the amendments they put forward, because the committee did hear examples of the need to consider some measures to make sure that time is permitted for the introduction of these laws.

I would like to turn to one particular argument about the effect on the music industry. I would like to refer to a good friend of mine who is a strong musician, Ali Gibbs. She put a blog on Facebook recently indicating that some venue owners have stated their opposition to these law changes, saying it will destroy Brisbane’s live music scene. She said—

I would recommend these venue owners, many of them musicians themselves, consider the culture of the live music scene being too closely linked with the sale of alcohol. Then they would realise that as venues with the objective of promoting live music and using acts as a drawcard for more alcohol consumption they destroyed it a long time ago.

A recent Galaxy poll indicated that 74 per cent of Queenslanders want these changes. No argument should be permitted to accept these laws based on the number of submissions received.

The question is: do we have a problem? Dr Green from the emergency department on the Gold Coast informed the committee that alcohol is the ‘most pervasive drug in society’. He is correct. Alcohol is a legalised drug and is preferred amongst all society.

I would like to refer to a DANTE executive summary researched by Professor Miller that was tabled and provided to the committee—once again, peer reviewed evidence that is uncontested. It examines in length what has happened after the reforms. In Newcastle, for example, there are now more than 12.6 per cent of people who go out more than weekly. With regard to the amount of alcohol consumed before going out—this goes to the argument about preloading, which is certainly a federal government matter that needs to be resolved; it is not a state government matter other than changing hours—in Newcastle, 37.1 per cent do not have any, 37.8 per cent have one to five drinks, 19.1 per cent have six to 10 drinks and so on. Overwhelmingly, the type of alcohol consumed is beer—heavy—at 31.8 per cent. Why do they pre-drink? Because of the price and the ability of people to get into nightclubs after they preload where the RSAs are allowing that to occur.

I was asked on the Steve Austin program in one radio interview why I believe the LNP stands in the way of these laws. At that particular time in that interview I said that I have a suspicion. Steve Austin asked, 'What is that suspicion?'

Mr Crandon: Here it comes.

Mr FURNER: That is right. Here it comes. Bring it on. I will table a document by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education. It refers to the alcohol industry donating \$408,000 plus more to major Queensland political parties. But, out of that \$408,000, \$374,000, or 92 per cent, went to the Liberal National Party. I table that document.

Tabled paper: Document, dated January 2015, titled 'Alcohol Industry Donations to Queensland Political Parties: 2011-12 to 2013-14' [179].

You can draw your own conclusions on that basis. I had my suspicions, but I am not going to draw on those suspicions.

Mr Crandon interjected.

Mr FURNER: I want to go to a person who generally supports those opposite, and I am referring to Wendy Francis from the Australian Christian Lobby. A recent press announcement states—

... Wendy Francis said the lock-out laws were a natural extension to the current Safe Night Out strategy.

"The LNP could have included the Lock-Out laws as part of the Safe Night Out Strategy. It decided at the time to ignore advice from the expert panel it established to review lock-out laws.

"It now has the opportunity to rectify the situation by getting behind the Labor government.

Get behind the Labor government! Listen to your friends from the ACL.

I want to refer to a substitute member on the committee and that is, no doubt, the member for Moggill. The LNP's Dr Christian Rowan has really sold out his profession, his colleagues and the families of Moggill for political gain.

Dr ROWAN: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I find the member's comments personally offensive and I ask him to withdraw.

Mr FURNER: I withdraw. The Palaszczuk government has introduced legislation that can decrease violence and make the community safer. This evidence has been presented to the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee, and those proposed laws have the backing of numerous proponents, people like the Australian Medical Association Queensland, the Queensland Police Service, the Queensland Law Society, the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine, the Metro North Hospital and Health Service, the Public Health Association of Australia, the Australasian Professional Society on Alcohol and Other Drugs, the Queensland Police Union of Employees and the Queensland Nurses' Union.

The member for Moggill has ignored the evidence presented to the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee. He has ignored evidence in the medical literature—the entire basis of his profession. He has ignored the Australasian Professional Society on Alcohol and Other Drugs, of which he is a member. In fact, he is probably the only alcohol and addiction specialist in Queensland not supporting this bill. This disgraced former head of AMAQ has ignored his colleagues and his own professional society.

Dr ROWAN: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I find the member's comments personally offensive and I ask him to withdraw.

Mr FURNER: I withdraw. Worst of all, he has completely and repeatedly ignored his duty as a medical professional to progress his selfish political career.

Dr ROWAN: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order.

Mr Crandon: You're a disgrace. Now we know why you're no longer in Canberra.

Mr FURNER: You'll never make it there, sunshine, ever!

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Farmer): Order! This is a very heated debate. Let's try to make it to the end of the evening.

Mr FURNER: I am doing fine, Madam Deputy Speaker. The member has stated publicly that he will not support this policy—

Dr ROWAN: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. Again, I ask the member to withdraw. I find his comments personally offensive.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: I ask the member for Ferny Grove to withdraw and I ask you to desist from making remarks that could be considered personally offensive. You are obviously inviting the interjections that are being made.

Mr FURNER: Madam Deputy Speaker, I had withdrawn. I do not know what—

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Could I ask you to—

Mr FURNER: I do withdraw whatever I had to withdraw. The member has stated publicly that he will not support this policy because they ignored other factors contributing to violence. So we cannot reduce the violence caused by alcohol because we are not addressing all drugs. By this same logic he would not support a cure for 30 per cent of cancers, in my opinion, because it did not also address heart disease.

The LNP's policy is inconsistent with their interstate counterparts and the professions of their members. They have sold out the safety of the young people of Queensland, the medical professionals, parents' peace of mind and the safety of our front-line emergency workers.

In conclusion, for the sake of those family members of Col Miller and Trevor Duroux and the spouse of Melissa Abdo, do not let this opportunity pass you by, be on the right side of history and support this bill.