




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

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LIQUOR AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (8.20 pm): What we have just heard is a sad retreat—a hypocritical account of what has happened from a man who came into this place with one thing in mind and who throws red herrings about brown paper bags whilst quoting disclosed figures to the Electoral Commission. He is a man who clearly thinks he is still trying to do the right thing by pursuing a policy that all of his colleagues have dumped. I wonder if those working in hospitality who pay their union fees and who have contributed to these guys would wonder if they are delivered in brown paper bags.

Let us get to the guts of what is going on. I do not think there is anybody in this House who does not want to solve alcohol fuelled violence and drug fuelled violence. The question is how. I stood in this place some time ago and tried to indicate, after years of experience in an industry, that what was being proposed would not work and that the tighter you tried to grasp this the harder you would find it. It is like quicksilver running through your fingers.

The only way to do this is over an extended period of time to get a cultural shift through education, by putting in ID scanners, by making sure we have assistance for people in precincts that are well lit, well policed and well looked after. This is where we want our young people to go for their entertainment. This is where they can find themselves safe: in a venue that is hooked up to the fire brigade with a six- or seven-minute response time, where there are radio connections to the police and where there are CCTV cameras recording everything.

I told people that what would happen is there will be private parties, people will be drinking at home, takeaway alcohol will be consumed and not in standard measures. I told people that is what would happen. The evidence is clear that this policy that has been pursued is not having any effect on changing things. We all understand that restricting supply of alcohol will lead to fewer complications with alcohol, but if you go into a nightclub and pay \$10 for a spirit or you can go to a liquor barn and buy a bottle for \$15 you have to ask yourselves where you should be restricting it and whether locking people out at some ridiculous time is going to have any effect.

I told people when we debated this last time that in my precinct in and around the city of Toowoomba accidents and injuries were occurring at eight and nine o'clock. If there were to be a lockout, clearly the evidence in Toowoomba would be that you would have a lockout in the early afternoon and you would encourage people out late in the evening. The simple facts are that we see a retreat. We see a policy that was more about an election. We see something that was supposedly populist with part of the community. What has it really done? What it has done is confuse and cause distress to family businesses that provide hospitality and service to their communities.

I am going to talk about The Southern Hotel, which is not in my electorate. It is in Toowoomba South. It is a family hotel that Richard Bowly, who is now deceased, and Richard Bowly Jnr ran very well. These are men who have massive hearts. They have donated thousands of dollars to charities and to sporting clubs over many years. They are community homes where people go and have a good time. They go for a meal, they catch up with their family or they celebrate a birthday party. What we are trying to say to our young people is: go out; we can provide you with a safe environment.

The former member for Brisbane Central, Rob Cavallucci, did a great job in drafting this policy. It is world-leading policy. All of the things that everybody around the world is looking at we had in one piece of legislation. We had serious banning orders in place. We had education for year 7 students. We had restrictions on venues to make sure they were complying with safe procedures. The amount of compliance involved in running a nightclub is extreme, and the problem is that good businesspeople eventually get out if they cannot make a profit. They will go and buy themselves a McDonald's or whatever.

Then you have the real danger—and this was happening down the coast and in other places—where bikie gangs and other people were looking at these venues as an opportunity to do other things than distribute alcohol. What we want is good operators with high standards, with business credibility, with safe conditions for their venue, with CCTV cameras, with trained people, with first aid, connections to the fire brigade, communications with the police, and connections to cameras outside the venue so that people can be tracked in and out as they move. We want banning orders in place so that if someone is a goose—and there are people out there who misbehave in precincts and in other venues—we can ban them across the state. We can say, 'If you cannot act civilly, then civil society is not letting you interact with our young people and others who are out having a good time.'

The banning orders and ID scanners are the key pieces of technology that need to be in place to reduce this kind of violence and activity on the street. We know that several of the assaults that have occurred that have led to extreme outcomes including people dying have been committed by people who have not even been into a venue. They are not dressed appropriately to get into a venue. You can restrict the venues as much as you like. If a bloke puts up on his Facebook page that he is going to catch a train, head into a precinct and pick a fight with someone and then kill them, how on earth is restricting their access to a venue ever going to stop that? We need to punish the people who behave like that and we need to pursue a cultural change whilst we are doing that. The cultural change will come through education and from good examples of behaviours from adults and other people going out.

We need to make sure that our footballers, sporting personalities and other people set good standards when they go out so the heroes whom our young people look up to know the expectation is that you can go out and have a good time without causing harm to someone else. All of that is not going to happen by shutting the venue and locking people out at one o'clock. I have literally been in a situation where I am standing on the front door with a girl who cannot get to a toilet and I am being told by police that if I let her into my venue to use the toilet they will give me a ticket. What is she supposed to do? There is no other way for her to get home. Her friends are inside. There is nothing she can do. What do you think she is going to do next? She is not going to stand in the street and wet herself. The lockout laws were ridiculous from the start.

More than that, we are now in a situation where we are looking at retrospective legislation over the extended permits. It is being asked at my local safe night precinct meetings: what are the rules around an event? What is an event? What does an event look like? How can we run our business when we are doing this? Why is it only one a month? Clearly we know there are different times in the year when there will be multiple days when you might want to open, certainly within one month. Why would you say one month? Why not just say 12 a year and if people want to use them at different times that is fine. We find ourselves in a situation where overregulation, overgovernment and overburden will try to grab hold of the quicksilver, it will run through their fingers and people will have illegal parties and do all sorts of other things because they cannot find a safe place to go out and have a good time.

With regard to the policy put in place, it is lunacy to suggest that one business with a different business model should be able to vote on the opening and closing hours of another business. It is pitching long-term families and friends who need to be working together to try to solve the problems in our CBD against each other. They are having brawls about their business plan failing if they are made to close at a certain time. It is an absolutely ridiculous policy.

It was bad for business. It was bad for hospitality. It was bad for jobs. It was bad for Queensland. It has made us a laughing stock around the world as we are trying to host things like the Commonwealth Games. There are opportunities here to get this right. There are people on both sides of this parliament who want to get this right, who want to see a cultural change, who want to get a good outcome, who want to reduce alcohol fuelled violence and other incidents that cause harm to our young people.

This is not the way. Simply saying, 'You don't know what you're talking about,' and unwinding it is not the way. There are people here with experience. I accept the good doctor's experience in the emergency department, but he needs to accept mine with 25 years in this industry. I know what the solutions are. I have been working hard for them since 1994 and the first time I chaired the liquor industry group in Toowoomba. We have great results in Toowoomba. We told them that the Newcastle model would not help us in Queensland. We were right and they were wrong.