




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

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LIQUOR (ARTISAN LIQUOR) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mrs GERBER** (Currumbin—LNP) (12.22 pm): I rise to make my contribution to the Liquor (Artisan Liquor) Amendment Bill 2020. Firstly, as the deputy chair of the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee that considered this bill, I acknowledge the support for this bill and acknowledge the hard work of the secretariat.

I do not believe anyone in this chamber can interject when I say that liquor production and distribution plays a large role in our economy and, in particular, plays one of the largest roles in the night-time economy. It generates economic activity. It creates employment opportunities. Of course, it brings people together to socialise. To quote Abraham Lincoln—

I am a firm believer in the people. If given the truth, they can be depended upon to meet any national crisis. The great point is to bring them the real facts—and beer.

We on this side of the chamber hope that this bill helps meet the needs of small business brewers and artisan distillers during our current crisis. However, the real fact of the matter is that these amendments have come far too slowly.

In my role as shadow assistant minister for the night-time economy as well as justice, I have travelled from Currumbin to Cairns to talk with small businesses, including artisan distillers and craft brewers, about what they need in order to support the industry, particularly as they try to adapt to the COVID-19 environment. So I can say that these amendments are welcomed, but for some they have come far too late and for others they do not go far enough.

In summary, the proposed amendments: create a new liquor licence category for legitimate craft brewers and artisan distillers called the 'commercial other—artisan producer licence'; expand the existing promotional event permit framework; provide additional authorisations for eligible producer wholesale licensees; and encourage the transition of existing licensees to the new artisan producer licence category. Artisan producer licensees will be authorised to do the following: sell their own liquor products and other Queensland artisan liquor products for consumption on their premises; sell their own liquor products for consumption off their premises; sell their own liquor products wholesale; sell their own liquor products online; apply for a licence condition to sell samples and takeaway of their liquor products at promotional events, subject to volume limits; and apply for a commercial public event permit. These amendments are aimed at assisting the artisan liquor industry with the adverse effects of COVID-19.

Yes, members heard me: these amendments are introduced to help artisan distillers withstand the challenges of COVID-19, but they are being introduced a whole year after the pandemic began. The government has moved far too slowly on this. Industry has been calling for support for almost a year. The government must do better to deliver support at the time that it is needed.

Independent Brewers Association spokesperson, David Kitchen, has described the proposals as too little too late. He noted that in April 2020 nationwide sales at craft breweries were down 66 per cent as a consequence of COVID-19 related business restrictions and closures. These amendments were

needed a year ago to allow artisan distillers and craft brewers to adapt and continue their business in the COVID-19 environment. In relation to the impact of COVID-19 on the distilled spirits industry, the Australian Distillers Association noted—

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the distilled spirits industry and its value chain.

I note the measures in this bill and the associated regulatory decision to waive certain fees associated with the new licence to reflect the impacts of COVID-19 are particularly welcomed by industry as it tries to rebuild and as it tries to recover from the pandemic, but they should have come before the House last year. It is really important to note that this was an industry that previously contributed over \$100 million to the Queensland economy and employed more than 1,800 people.

There are currently more than 200,000 Queenslanders unemployed and in need of work. These people are relying on this state government to look after them. Instead of offering some of these unemployed Queenslanders the opportunity to get back into the workforce by working in distilleries or at promotional events and helping to boost our night-time economy and despite the urgency of this matter, the state Labor government waited. As Mr Kitchen noted—

If these proposals had been implemented a year ago, brewers would be in a much better position to withstand the challenges of COVID.

No doubt these same brewers would have been in a much better position to employ more Queenslanders—something that is desperately needed right now. However, these brewers are sadly not in that position. They are only now moving into a position to withstand the challenges and ripple effects of COVID-19. Why? They were overlooked and neglected by this state government for over 300 days. When their industry was crying out for help, this Labor government dawdled on the issue. I guess that even a late step in the right direction is better than no step at all.

Now I will turn to some of the submissions from industry to the committee suggesting where the bill needs improvement. Stakeholders noted that the prohibition of licensees from being able to sell takeaway products from other artisanal producers is restraining the industry from truly succeeding. Similarly, the restriction on multisite brewers from selling their beer, produced at one site and sold at another site of the same company, is constraining.

Also raised was the fact that it is unnecessary to require brewers to provide their annual returns relating to production volume when this information is already available from annual Commonwealth returns. All this added provision does is create an extra level of bureaucracy for brewers to have to comply with. These are the things that this government needs to look at and to improve on—in particular, reducing the paperwork impost on small business and red tape.

In summing up, these amendments are welcome. We hope that they help small business. We hope that they help our brewers and artisan distillers. There is no doubt that these amendments are a late step by this state Labor government but nevertheless a good step, a step that we hope will help brewers and distillers in Queensland to adapt and ultimately thrive.