




Speech By  
**Peter Russo**  
**MEMBER FOR TOOHEY**

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Record of Proceedings, 9 March 2021

### **LIQUOR (ARTISAN LIQUOR) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr RUSSO** (Toohey—ALP) (12.29 pm): I would like to speak in support of the Liquor (Artisan Liquor) Amendment Bill 2020. The Legal Affairs and Safety Committee is a portfolio committee of this Legislative Assembly which commenced on 26 November 2020 under the standing rules and orders of the Legislative Assembly. The Liquor (Artisan Liquor) Amendment Bill 2020 was introduced into the Legislative Assembly and referred to the committee on 26 November 2020. The committee, in its report No. 4 which was tabled in this assembly on 12 February 2021, has recommended to the assembly that this bill be passed.

The purpose of the bill is 'to strengthen the artisan liquor industry in Queensland by supporting the growth and sustainability of craft breweries and artisan distilleries, while still maintaining appropriate regulatory controls and oversight'. This intention of purpose will be achieved by a number of proposed amendments to the Liquor Act including creating a new liquor licence category for legitimate craft brewers and artisan distillers and providing additional authorisations for eligible producer/wholesaler licensees.

The proposed amendments to the liquor licensing legislation are in response to the Queensland Craft Brewing Strategy and recommendations arising from the entrepreneurial pipeline project report. The bill aims to assist the artisan liquor industry with the adverse effects of the coronavirus. It was reported to the committee by the Australian Distillers Association that COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the distilled spirits industry and its value chain, and it is commendable that the government has taken decisive action to help struggling small businesses to not just remain viable but also have a path for future expansion.

Before the pandemic disrupted the industry, Queensland craft brewers and artisan distillers contributed significantly to the Queensland economy and employed over 1,800 people combined. It was anticipated that by 2024 the craft beer industry would contribute over \$100 million to the Queensland economy. Members of the Australian Distilling Association had estimated that another 106 jobs would be created in artisan distilleries throughout the state over the next two years.

In April 2020, the Independent Brewers Association reported that nationwide sales at craft breweries were down 67 per cent as a consequence of COVID-19 related business restrictions and closures. The measures in this bill, and an associated regulatory decision to waive certain fees associated with the new licence to reflect the impacts of COVID-19, are particularly welcomed as the industry rebuilds and recovers from the pandemic. Further, as federal government measures such as JobKeeper are tapered and removed over 2021, the support of the Palaszczuk government is acutely welcomed.

Consultation with the craft brewing industry on general regulatory reform occurred following the release of the Queensland Craft Brewing Strategy in November 2018. Between December 2019 and January 2020, approximately 60 per cent of independent craft brewers were surveyed on a legislative proposal relating solely to craft brewers. Public submissions on this previous proposal were also sought in January 2020. Overall the craft brewing industry was generally supportive of amending the Liquor Act to introduce a new licence category specifically for craft beer.

A separate consultation process relating to the recommendations of the entrepreneurial pipeline project report, focusing on support for artisan liquor producers, commenced in November 2019 and concluded in March 2020. Consultation was undertaken with 13 distilleries, three wineries, 25 breweries, two meaderies, one cidery and other stakeholders, including industry representatives and social health stakeholders. General agreement about the artisan producer licence authorisations, and contained in the bill, was reached at a roundtable meeting attended by representatives from the Queensland Hotels Association, ADA, Clubs Queensland, IBA, government agencies and other stakeholders on 2 March 2020.

The IBA advised the following in relation to the government's consultation on the legislative framework for the artisan liquor licence that preceded the bill: Queensland brewers were instrumental in the development of the original proposal for a new legislative framework and were satisfied with the outcomes of that work. We were confident that, if legislation was introduced reflecting this framework, it would satisfy the need to simplify the liquor licensing process and create market access opportunities for artisan liquor producers as stated in the inquiry overview.

Subsequent to that framework being finalised, it was presented to other stakeholders for comment. While much of the original framework was retained, several critical components were subsequently amended and as a result we now consider these amendments to be a retrograde step that go some way to defeating the intention of simplifying processes, creating better market access and ensuring the continued growth of these industries.

It is important to note during the public briefing that the department advised that after the passage of the bill there will be ongoing consultation with the industry 'to iron out any implementation issues or any further considerations that those industries wish to put to government'.

The bill will create a new 'commercial other—artisan producer licence'. The proposed new artisan producer licence will include subcategories of beer and spirits and will allow licensees to sell craft beer or artisan spirits produced on the licensed premises to the public, apply for an enduring approval to sell samples and limited amounts of takeaways of their craft beer or artisan spirits at promotional events, and conduct online orders for the sale of their craft beer or artisan spirits.

Whilst the committee recommended the bill be passed and notes the comments in the report at 2.1.2.3 that have been referred to earlier in my contribution to the debate, there is obviously work that needs to be undertaken with the Liquor Gaming Regulation Authority. Any tension between brewers and the authority on the interpretation of the Liquor Act needs to be looked at. So I repeat what I said earlier in the debate on the bill: that the continued consultation with the craft brewers will hopefully lead to the tensions referred to in 2.1.2.4 in the committee's report to be resolved.

I would like to thank the members of the committee for their collaboration and input into this inquiry. I would like to acknowledge and thank the secretariat for their commitment. I would also like to recognise the professionalism of the Department of Justice and Attorney-General and thank them for the clear and informative responses they provided. I support the committee's recommendation and I commend the Liquor (Artisan Liquor) Amendment Bill 2020 to the House.