




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

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LIQUOR (ARTISAN LIQUOR) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (4.47 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Liquor (Artisan Liquor) Amendment Bill 2020. It is interesting to have a bill that we all agree on and that is about the manufacture of beer. That is a great start.

I am someone who grew up with home-brew that my dad was making under the stairs at home. I grew up in England surrounded by different ales, bitters, stouts and other things. When I first came to Queensland in 1988 I was pretty disappointed by the beer options available. Slowly I got used to them—Powers, XXXX and VB. I struggled my way through them all while I was at university, both drinking and serving them. As people know, I was involved in the industry for a very long time. I have seen Hahn Ice, 303 and several other brews come forward from the big companies. It has been really interesting in recent times to watch small local manufacturers put their time and local produce and their heart and soul into brewing and manufacturing in lots of areas across Queensland, but particularly in Toowoomba.

Toowoomba, interestingly enough, had a brewery many years ago called the XXXX Brewery, which was ultimately bought out by Castlemaine Perkins and then shut down. It is good to see that proper craft brewing is alive and well. I have to say that most of the craft brews I have tasted taste a lot better than the brew I made when I was at university. I was really trying to manufacture for alcohol content. These guys are actually manufacturing for taste.

In my patch, Adrian at 4 Brothers Brewing does a great job. I was first introduced to it at the opening of the new radio station in town. We also have Volcanic Brewing, and soon to open at Highfields is Monty Brewing, which looks like it is going to be a fabulous establishment. I hope that their beer lives up to the building they have built because it looks really good. We also have Pechey Distilling, which is in the member for Condamine's electorate but I am going to claim it anyway because they make vodka and gin and I do not mind either of those on the right occasion.

It is good to see that Queensland is developing a mature alcohol industry not only in terms of manufacturing and brewing but also in terms of consumption. For years we have seen that binge culture happening—get as much into you as quick as you can. Harm minimisation is very important. I see that this was raised in the report. I think it is important to address it because what I see from the craft brewing and the boutique distillery industry is very far from that practice. Therefore, it should be incumbent on this House to make sure that we do not overregulate this industry because the process of distribution and the process of manufacture and service delivery is different. I think it is to be encouraged so that we all have good choice of brews and local produce. It is great to see the matching of local brews and food being delivered in our restaurants and cafes. I also have to give a shout-out to Burleigh Bighead, which is not in my patch unfortunately, but they make a zero-carb beer which has been serving me quite well. I am hoping that continues.

It would have been useful to have had a regulatory impact statement. Whenever we introduce legislation in this place, we need to understand the economic impact of it. As someone who was in the liquor industry for many, many years, sometimes regulatory changes come through this place that do not have the desired effect and are a massive impost on first the business and then that obviously gets

passed on to the consumer. We have all seen the growth in on-premise price compared to off-premise price which I think has been one of the drivers of the preload drinks culture that we have seen which has not been helpful. This is moving in a different direction and that is to be commended.

I think there is more we can do, but it would be useful to monitor the regulation and see where we can wind back some of this regulation in a safe and sensible way. There is an opportunity that still exists going forward for local Queensland manufactured produce to be distributed in independent grocers with complementary food from the area as well. This is not about opening up hundreds of additional bottle shops but about making sure that independent grocers have an edge in this space where they can present local produce. It is something that Tasmania has managed to achieve quite well with local production. It is something I encourage the government to look at as an opportunity for those small businesses to be able to distribute locally manufactured and locally produced goods.

In Toowoomba there is a great opportunity around the Carnival of Flowers. It is currently called the Festival of Food and Wine. I am going to recommend that we change that and add 'craft beer' on the end. There has been plenty of beer available, but it has been difficult for those people to be able to distribute it at that event under the previous legislation. It has been a complicated process that has meant that if you are craft manufacturer it is not an easy process and there are plenty of hoops to jump through. I think this bill will be helpful.

As we see our tourism industry open up, I think there will be a lot of European visitors in particular who will very much appreciate that we have more than a couple of beers available. It has also put pressure on the large manufacturers to make sure that they up their offering and that they offer more diversity and different tastes and flavours. I think that is a good thing because a drinking culture should be about enjoyment, pleasure, socialising and friends. It should not be about slamming down as much alcohol as you can in the shortest possible time. I think these changes are sensible and something to be encouraged going forward.

I think we should look at the industry overall and look at how we distribute alcohol. This was an amendment to the bill from 1992, if memory serves me correctly. That bill has been amended several times. There have been several changes to legislation and increasing regulatory performance. I encourage the government to continually look at that with the objective of encouraging sensible, moderate consumption for people's pleasure in a social setting, rather than where we ended up and where parts of the industry still are, and that is having a binge culture which is both harmful in the short and long term and is nothing that I think anyone in this House wants to see.

With the right amount of consultation with stakeholders going forward, there are further opportunities to bring sensible changes to the Liquor Act. One of those would be around independent grocers and one of those would be about overregulation that is not increasing harm minimisation but rather is sometimes driving towards that binge culture that we do not want to see.

I think this is a good start. Let us keep on the journey. We all enjoy a nice brew from time to time. To have choice and opportunity in our local areas for both manufacturing and distribution jobs I think is great. I look forward to going to Monty's when it opens at Highfields and enjoying a locally made from local produce brew matched with local produce available in our area. The Darling Downs is a great food and beverage area—something that should be encouraged going forward. I encourage everyone here to go out and visit one of their local breweries.