



Liquor and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2008

GLEN ELMES
Member for Noosa

Hansard, 9 September 2008

Mr ELMES (Noosa--Lib) (7.50 pm): I rise to speak to the Liquor and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2008. As we have just heard from the shadow minister, the member for Clayfield, the LNP agrees with many aspects of this bill. But in my short presentation tonight I would like to concentrate on some of the areas that we have concerns with and, also from the point of view of a local member, some of the concerns that I have and some suggestions that perhaps the Treasurer, as the responsible minister, may like to take on board. But we need to understand what the problem is so far as drinking is concerned. I would like to quote a couple of statistics before I begin in earnest. The ABS statistics from the Alcohol consumption in Australia: a snapshot 2004-05 reported that 78 per cent of all people who consumed alcohol did so at a low health risk level, while one in eight drank at a risky or high-risk level. Proportionately, the number of people drinking at a risky or high-risk level has increased from 8.2 per cent in 1995 to 10.8 per cent in 2001 and to 13.4 per cent in 2004-05. Risky drinking is five to six standard drinks per day on average. High-risk drinking is seven drinks plus per day on average. What this means is that between 1998-99 and 2004-05 the overall number of hospital separations with the principal diagnosis of mental or behavioural disorders arising from alcohol increased from 23,490 to 35,152.

It is estimated that, between 1992 and 2001, 31,132 Australians died from alcohol related diseases and injury, and in the same period almost half a million hospitalisations occurred due to risky drinking in Australia. The only figures I could find in terms of the cost of this risky drinking goes back to 1998-99, and the cost to the Australian community was \$7.8 million. This week's Sunday Mail reported that it had obtained some unpublished figures from the government showing that every two months a Queenslanders died--and here is the article from the Sunday Mail --'Every two months one person never makes it home'. That is a terrible figure. Young people are dying--and we had an incident in Caloundra not so long ago--because of the fights and so forth that occur outside licensed premises. The follow on from that is the glassing and the assaults that happen both inside and outside some of our licensed venues.

The government's plan with this particular bill is to enhance the role of harm minimisation. The bill looks at risky alcohol consumption. It wants to achieve a shift in society's attitudes. As a starting point, it looked at the Brisbane City Safety Action Plan, which recommended a review of the Liquor Act 1992. It was rolled out to the rest of the state via the Statewide Safety Action Plan. What we now have is the result of that public consultation. If members have a look at the Brisbane City Safety Action Plan, it contains five points.

They include managing alcohol, strengthening policing, improving transport, creating a safer environment and working together. Under 'Strengthening Policing', the first point was to allocate additional police officers. I know there was a plan to do that through the Tactical Crime Squad so far as Brisbane was concerned. But, in the case of my seat of Noosa, as of 20 August we had one officer in charge and 20 operational police available at the Noosa Heads police division. To expect them to run a 24-hour police station and two police beats and then to get around and police patrons coming out of hotels and nightclubs and so forth at three o'clock in the morning is just unreasonable. When I was looking for speaking points for this particular presentation, I came across a media release put out by the Treasurer. 'More Liquor Licensing officers announced as new--

Mr Nicholls: Which one?

Mr ELMES: This one here.

Mr Nicholls: Just one?

Mr ELMES: Just one--that is all I could find. 'More Liquor Licensing officers announced as new liquor laws introduced: Fraser'. It was about the fact that 10 new Liquor Licensing officers have been appointed in various parts of Queensland. There are 10 of them all together--eight places get one each and two places get two each at a cost of \$1.1 million.

None of those come anywhere near the Sunshine Coast. As I understand it, Liquor Licensing officers on the Sunshine Coast number three. They have a responsibility for an area that stretches from Landsborough and Beerwah all the way through to Noosa. It is also interesting to look at how the money will be spent. In this press release, the Treasurer states-- It's estimated that a maximum of \$22 million will be generated by these fees in the first year of operation ...

According to the budget papers that the member for Clayfield read from a few minutes ago, we find out that a couple of years down the road the revenue derived from this measure will be in the order of \$30 million. I also understand that half of the amount--whether it is \$22 million or \$30 million--is going to be allocated to the administration of this legislation. So it is good old Labor economics: raise \$30 million and spend \$15 million to administer it. But then what are we going to do? We have another \$15 million or thereabouts--\$11 million this year and \$15 million a few years down the track--that we are going to spend on harm minimisation.

What we will do--and this is another good Labor trick--is have a wonderful television campaign, put out some radio commercials and put a couple of posters up in the nearest pub and we make heroes of ourselves. The community expects these licensed venues to be policed by both Liquor Licensing and the local Police Service to make sure that hotels and nightclubs adhere to whatever conditions they have on their licence and to make sure that people are able to get home safely, be it at midnight or three o'clock or five o'clock in the morning, and not cause any disturbance to, in the case of some of the venues that I have in my seat, some hundreds of people who live in and around those licensed venues.

So far as I can see, the only promising thing that has come out of the money that is to be raised by this measure is the 10 Liquor Licensing officers at a cost of about \$1.1 million. I decided to have a look at some of the hotels, nightclubs, clubs and larger restaurants in Noosa and at the licence conditions that some of these particular facilities have placed upon them.

With the exception of a couple which have some provisions relating to sound barriers, noise pollution and so forth, there are only two that have any sort of condition imposed upon them regarding crowd control, moving patrons away at the end of the night and so forth. One of them is the Noosa Heads Surf Club. The condition on its licence is that someone has to be there an hour before it closes and an hour after it finishes. The other one--and I found this quite amusing--was Irish Murphies. Irish Murphies is a place that decided to go for a nightclub licence right beside a radio station I happened to manage five or six years ago. I was very interested in some conditions attached to its licence.

Mr Rickuss: And the ambience.

Mr ELMES: And the ambience of the whole place, as breakfast announcers go to work at four o'clock in the morning. One of the things I found by looking into that is that the radio station is no longer there. The conditions that Irish Murphies now have to trade under in some instances should be repealed. I suppose what I am saying is that we have Liquor Licensing officers around the place. Overwhelmingly, and at least in Noosa--and I suggest anyone who would like to look up some of the nightclubs, hotels and so forth that exist in their respective seats will find the same thing--we need to put some teeth into this. The venues that I get complaint after complaint about have no conditions applied to their licence at all. I would like to see hotel and nightclub licences reviewed as a matter of course, and that should be set every couple of years. So, as circumstances change, conditions can either be added on or, in the case of Irish Murphies in Noosa, some of the conditions can be removed.

In the case of Liquor Licensing officers on the Sunshine Coast, one of the amusing things that happens when I ring up and make some inquiries is the response, 'I'm terribly sorry, Glen, we're not allowed to talk to you.' That is another example of open and transparent government, I suppose. One of the things that licensees should be looking at, and it should be built into licence conditions, in my view, is the question of how patrons, when leaving a licensed premises at three o'clock or five o'clock in the morning--in my seat they close at three o'clock in the morning--are going to be dispersed quickly to their place of living. In regional areas where there is little or no public transport, I am here to tell members that from talking to taxidivers I know they are not too keen on turning up and taking half a dozen drunks home at three o'clock in the morning--and who can blame them?

If the situation is such that there is no public transport available, once again, some of the conditions we should be looking at from the point of view of hotels, nightclubs and so forth is the provision of courtesy

buses that get people away from the venue and disperse them to where they live so that we do not have gangs of drunk people roaming the streets. It is at that particular point where there are fights, vandalism and antisocial behaviour occurring which then spins out of control. There are people living in their homes, particularly older people, who are feeling very conscious about their own personal safety. The member for Clayfield touched in a very substantive way on the issue of community clubs. As I understand it, the cost for a licence at a small community club is \$500. The member for Clayfield went through the experience that he has with his children who play in Brisbane. It seems to me completely fanciful to expect that there will be a person available at any time working behind the bar who has done a responsible service of alcohol course--I think it was a \$90-odd cost--to allow that particular club to operate. In my view, the people who hold office in some of these smaller clubs tend to hang around for much longer than some of the players, or, if they are junior players, the parents. They tend to move and come and go. But some of the officials tend to hang around. It is something that they put a long-term commitment into. It is not possible for one of them to be in the bar the whole time, but we are talking about clubs that may have only a hundred people who are on the grounds--not in the bar but on the grounds in total.

I would suggest that having one of the officials who has done a RSA course keep a watching brief on two or three, or half a dozen people who might be in a bar at any one time does not seem to me to be such a bad idea. If we are really concerned about how our smaller sporting clubs and community organisations are able to continue to operate, we should bear that in mind. I know that the member for Gregory is speaking to this bill later tonight, but another issue that I want to draw attention to is that of the hotels that trade from 10 am till midnight and have a fee imposed on them of \$2,700 or \$2,750. In many of these really small country towns there is a hotel and that is about all that is there. There are a couple of farms and houses in outlying areas. It is the only place that people have to socialise together and to interact, and to impose another cost on people is really penny pinching. It might not seem that much, but \$2,700 is \$2,700. There are much easier ways of the government finding a dollar than to be taking it off small country hotels and small country communities.

As I said, the opposition certainly supports the bill. In many instances we have some concerns. I would like to see a lot of work done on the licences that are issued and on the conditions under which licences continue to exist. If we can do that, then there will be some meaning to people paying a licensing fee to operate. If we just sign people up, have people pass over their money and they are then allowed to continue uninterrupted forever, it smacks of a cash grab and not of something which is terribly responsible.
