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'Lockout laws failed': Deep political divisions over Sydney nightlife

By [Andrew Taylor](#)

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Prominent Liberals are calling on the NSW Government to repeal Sydney's lockout laws, while health unions support the retention of the controversial alcohol regulations, putting them at odds with local Labor politicians.

Harry Stutchbury, the president of the NSW Young Liberals, said the lockout laws stifled the "liberty of businesses and their patrons".



The lockout laws have taken an "immense toll" on Sydney's late-night economy, according to City of Sydney Liberal councillors Christine Forster and Craig Chung. WOLTER PEETERS

Christine Forster and Craig Chung, City of Sydney Liberal councillors, conceded the laws had broken the cycle of criminal behaviour in entertainment precincts like Kings Cross but taken an "immense toll" on the city's late-night economy.

The committee will hold its first public hearing on Monday, with Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore as well as award-winning musicians Josh Pyke, Jonathan Zwartz and Jenny Morris scheduled to give evidence.

Members of the committee, which includes One Nation MP Mark Latham and Independent Alex Greenwich, had "a very productive night out" in Kings Cross and the Sydney CBD in June, according to Mr Greenwich.



Alex Greenwich MP

@AlexGreenwich

From the Ivy, to Kings Cross and The Stonewall Hotel! Last night was a very productive night out with colleagues from across Parliament talking solutions & recommendations for the Inquiry into Sydney's night time economy. Make your submission here: parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/lis...



14 11:00 AM - Jun 14, 2019

[See Alex Greenwich MP's other Tweets](#)

The committee's chairwoman, Upper House Liberal MP Natalie Ward, said the debate over Sydney's nightlife was "complex, emotive and often depends on the particular shoes you stand in".

Submissions to the joint select committee on Sydney's night-time economy revealed deep divisions over the lockout laws.

Opponents claim the laws have devastated small businesses, nightlife and led to job losses, while police and [health professionals argue the regulations have reduced alcohol-related violence](#) - yet this is questioned by [some academics](#) and the NSW Small Business Commissioner.

The father of Thomas Kelly, who died after a drunken one-punch attack in Kings Cross in 2012, has [said he would not oppose](#) the relaxation or repeal of Sydney's lockout laws if the city remained safe.



Police and health professionals support the retention of Sydney's controversial lockout laws.
WOLTER PEETERS

The NSW Young Liberals said the regulations had not enhanced community safety and health outcomes, “but rather created onerous restrictions on free enterprise and further disillusioned young people from their government”.

The Young Liberals also said the lockout laws had shifted alcohol-related violence from Sydney's CBD to adjacent areas such as Newtown, while restrictions on serving certain drinks did not prevent anti-social behaviour.

Cr Forster and Cr Chung said dozens of bars, restaurants and daytime businesses in Kings Cross had been driven out by the “massive decline” in patronage and revenue.

“In Darlinghurst, Oxford Street, once a safe and bustling 24-hour economy, is now littered with empty shop fronts and restaurants,” their submission said. “And in the CBD, an overseas visitor is unable to order a single whiskey or a cocktail in the bar of an international hotel at one minute past midnight.”

In contrast, two influential health unions have called for the retention of lockout laws and last drinks policy. The NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association said the state government should also consider expanding alcohol restrictions across NSW.

“A vibrant night-time economy is about more than alcohol – it includes fitness and sport options, arts and culture, extended shopping and transport choices, food options, and sport,” its submission said.

The nurses' union also said an expansion of the night-time economy would require increased funding for transport, police and emergency care services to cope with increased demand.

Gerard Hayes, the secretary of the Health Services Union, said concerns about the viability of the night-time entertainment industry did not justify a roll-back of measures that had improved community health and safety.

“Rather, more positive action needs to be taken to raise public awareness of the dangers of binge drinking and to change public attitudes to alcohol and acceptance of alcohol abuse,” he said.

In contrast, City of Sydney Labor councillor Linda Scott questioned whether the lockout laws had reduced alcohol-related violence or “simply redirected” it elsewhere.

“It is clear that lockout laws have not worked,” she said. “Worse still, they have made our City a less fun and less accessible place to live, work and play.”

The NSW Labor opposition went to the state election [opposing any relaxation of the lockout laws](#), but John Graham, Labor’s spokesman for music and the night-time economy, said the party supported the committee making an evidence-based decision.

“As a parent with kids who are growing up, I have two questions: will there be safe and lively venues for them to go to, and where are they going to work - where are the jobs in music and hospitality?” Mr Graham, a member of the joint committee, said.

One Nation MP Mark Latham, who is also on the committee, [told 2GB in April](#) he supported an easing of the lockout laws, but venues should not stay open until sunrise.



Andrew Taylor



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