

Alcohol-related Violence (Proof)

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Speakers - Paluzzano Mrs Karyn; Rees Mr Nathan
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ALCOHOL-RELATED VIOLENCE

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Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO: I direct my question to the Premier. What action is the Government taking to crack down on alcohol-related violence across New South Wales?

Mr NATHAN REES: Let there be no doubt that people in New South Wales have a right to enjoy a drink or two, or perhaps even three on a hot day. Sadly, antisocial drinking and alcohol-related violence are growing problems throughout the State. In fact, while the total number of non-alcohol-related assaults has decreased in the past two years, alcohol-related assaults have increased by almost 5 per cent. In 2007 there were 21,000 alcohol-related assaults across the State. Most of these offences are committed late at night, by young men, in and around licensed venues and drinking precincts. Historically, this violence tends to increase over the summer. I am determined to act quickly and decisively to get on top of this problem before the summer starts.

Today I have brought forward a comprehensive set of new initiatives to deal with this problem. This is a bold first step to address a drinking culture which, in some cases, has been out of control. We have a drinking culture in Australia going back to the Rum Rebellion and those periods of excess. I want to be clear: These new measures are not targeted at drinkers who do the right thing, nor should they impact on licensed venues that are already providing a safe drinking environment. But they have to be tough, and I am not afraid of ruffling a few feathers to stop this violence. The Commissioner of Police and the Director of the Office of Liquor and Gaming have advised me that, to a large degree, these problems are concentrated in and around particular licensed premises. They have told me that in the worst performing more than 50 assaults occur each year. They have also provided me with a list of around 50 pubs and clubs which, in their view, are likely to be alcohol violence hot spots over the summer.

From 1 December, a new set of standard licensing conditions will apply to these venues. They will include mandatory 2.00 a.m. lock-outs, cessation of alcohol service 30 minutes before closing time, plastic or polycarbonate glasses after midnight to stop this most recent spate of glassings, no shots and drink purchase limits after midnight, and 10-minute alcohol sale time-outs every hour after midnight. We will also review the security arrangements in place for each of these pubs and clubs. Where it is needed, they will be required to provide extra security and drink marshals to monitor alcohol consumption levels. We will also work with these venues to address local transport issues. For example, this could include placing a levy on a group of licensed premises within a high-risk drinking precinct to fund security at nearby taxis ranks or bus services. We will do our bit by providing targeted and high-visibility policing in alcohol violence hot spots as well as a targeted advertising campaign in high-risk venues. More venues may be added to the 2.00 a.m. lockout if police see a local spill-over effect occurring.

A high-level implementation team including the Deputy Commissioner of Police will oversee the new arrangements and advise me where and when changes need to be made. We will refine and tweak the policy settings and implementation as required. If the team identifies new problems over the summer, we can add to or improve these conditions. Similarly, if licensed premises clean up their act over the summer and succeed in reducing incidents of alcohol-related violence, then we will consider amending these conditions. This set of standard conditions for high-risk licensed premises is designed to deal with this problem over the coming summer, but we need to find longer-term solutions.

From today the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing will work with the industry on replacing these targeted conditions with a statewide sanctions scheme. The scheme would be graduated and could start with mandatory conditions like lock-outs for first-time incidents, going right up to removal of licences for repeat offenders. We will also develop a safety star rating system to reward safe practices and provide responsible drinkers with information about where they can go to enjoy a drink in safety and comfort. As I said, we know most alcohol-related assaults occur in and around licensed premises late at night and in the early hours of the morning. Accordingly, we will also

bring forward new laws to impose a freeze on any new 24-hour licence. New licensees will be limited to 18-hour trading and existing licensees will have their conditions reviewed to improve safety.

As I have repeatedly emphasised both in this House and in the public domain, transparency is a central feature of this administration. So to help increase public awareness about which licensed venues are safe places to drink, the Government will authorise New South Wales Police to provide the independent Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research with figures that link violent criminal incidents to specific licensed venues. Licensed premises and the Government both have roles to play in dealing with this problem, but so do the idiots who engage in this reckless behaviour. The Government has provided police with the powers to deal effectively with anti-social drinkers. This includes the power to move on intoxicated persons and the power to detain a person who appears to be seriously affected by alcohol and is behaving in a disorderly manner. But there is more we can do to make anti-social drinkers take responsibility for their behaviour. That is why we will also bring forward new laws to crack down on minors who use fake IDs and to give police new on-the-spot tip-out powers to deal with people who drink in declared alcohol-free zones.

In recent times the community has witnessed a spate of what are known as glassing attacks. Let us not beat around the bush on this issue: Glassing is gutless, glassing is un-Australian and it has to stop. We have in place severe penalties to deal with people who attack with glasses. This includes a maximum 25 years in prison for a charge of causing grievous bodily harm with intent, and a maximum 10 years for recklessly causing grievous bodily harm. Let us not forget that this stupid behaviour could kill someone, and that would see someone serving serious jail time. However, I want to be sure that our criminal laws are fully equipped to deal with these cowards. For this reason, the Attorney General has asked the New South Wales **Sentencing Council** to undertake a review of all sentencing laws relating to alcohol violence. That council is chaired by Justice James Wood and includes representatives of victims of crime and New South Police. If they tell us we need to change our laws in any way to deal with this behaviour, we will.

Alcohol-related violence is a growing problem in our community. My Government is determined to deal with it. This is a comprehensive set of initiatives. It is a serious attempt by my Government to get on top of a drinking culture that in Australia has seen too much violence in and around licensed premises and, regrettably, too much violence in people's homes. Law-abiding people have the right to be safe and to feel safe when they enjoy a drink or two. But be warned: My Government will do whatever is necessary to protect and enforce their right to have a quiet safe drink.