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27th May 2008

The Hon
Minister for Health
Victorian Government
2 Treasury Place
MELBOURNE 3002

Dear Minister

For your urgent attention re 2am Lockouts

We write as the newly formed association representing liquor licensees of Melbourne.

Our members, and we suggest the hospitality industry at large, are eager to work with you in the quest for greater understandings of, and there-from in developing practical and effective strategies to combat health concerns relating to excessive alcohol consumption. We assure you that the industry at large does not take lightly its public responsibilities surrounding these issues.

We are therefore very supportive of finding and implementing appropriate initiatives to both understand and address health related issues and to reduce alcohol related violence and disruptive anti-social behaviour. Such issues are as we understand it, the overriding concerns upon which the trial on-premise licensed venues lockout has been based. We implore you however to question the conclusions that the lockout will be an effective strategy.

There are without doubt many factors to be considered in these complex issues.

Notwithstanding the urgency with which these issues need to be managed and addressed, we genuinely believe that the intended outcomes will not be achieved by mandating a “trial” lockout. Indeed we fear the opposite will emerge, specifically that refusing the public entry or re-entry to entertainment venues after 2am will actually result in increased incidence of alcohol abuse and indeed actually fuel violence and assaults.

We regard that the data upon which the government has relied in forming its views and conclusions has not been adequately tested or analysed. We strike that opinion particularly as the views now formed by the government from that analyses contradict the advice formally provided to our members at accord meetings particularly over the most recent 12 months. Indeed we had immediately up to the announcement of the lockout, been under the impression that our co-operative efforts with councils, residents and police were successful and commendable.

Without fuller investigation of the pattern of and true underlying causes of the behaviour which the government purports to be addressing by the lockout and other licensing matters and without proper consultation involving all stakeholders, there is undeniably serious risk of-

- Encouraging unsupervised alcohol consumption and binge drinking;
- Fuelling anti-social behaviour;

- Creating increasing incidence of public violence;
- Exacerbating domestic violence;
- Worsening the amenity for residents;
- Undermining public support and disenfranchising key stakeholders, including the licensees upon whom the government should be relying on for support.

We ask you to consider these serious consequences that may well flow on from the lockout. In addition, previous proven initiatives such as Responsible Service of Alcohol will be lost where consumption is moved outside of compliant venues such that current behaviour is no longer supervised and professionally managed. The industry is proud of its recent record of responsible service within licensed venues and refutes that the behaviour which the lockout seeks to address is evident either within or emanating from the licensed venues which are now targeted.

Many in the industry have strived extremely hard to achieve public awareness and deliver positive results in relation to responsible alcohol consumption. It is already on record that the voluntary Liquor Accord process has demonstrated that licensees are willing and eager to participate in and proactively contribute to a co-operative and united approach to licensing issues. Notwithstanding that many within the industry are perplexed as to why this existing consultative channel appears to have been ignored, the ALLM hopes to be able to work proactively with the government at all levels and with all stakeholders from this point forward.

It is to that end that we seek urgently a review of the imminent 2 am lockout pending fuller consideration and consultation, a process in which we would hope to be able to assist the government and the public with as a proactive industry.

The government is being seen to be forcing extreme and dictatorial restrictions upon Melbourne's social freedom to engender behavioural change. The public, in whose interests these mandated restrictions are purported to protect, are expressing considerable opposing sentiment to the government and monumental challenges are being mounted even before the lockout is implemented.

We emphasise that we, as the new industry association, have not orchestrated this public outcry. Understandably, we support our patrons' rights and the rights of the wider community to express their points of view. We are however deeply concerned that such a public revolt will not auger well for the future if there is to be a united front by all stakeholders, including the government, local councils, and residents together with licensees on this immediate issue and further more stringent upcoming government measures.

We strongly suggest that a unified approach from all stakeholders will not only be more effective, but indeed more convincing for all.

In the interim, we implore your intervention before irreparable damage is done to the government, the industry and the amenity. The opportunity to maximise the understanding and impact upon the underlying public health issues will be lost.

We would greatly appreciate the opportunity to discuss these matters further.

Yours sincerely,

Brian Frewin
Acting Secretary
Association of Liquor Licensees Melbourne