

When the tragic death of tragic death of Thomas Kelly in Kings Cross from a so-called king-hit made headlines across Australia, it was the final straw for the O'Farrell government.

After several months of dramatic news reports filled with colourful identities and bikies parading their power, shootings in crowded streets and seemingly weekly drunken brawls, something have to give.

Kings Cross has long been regarded as the New South Wales' seamiest 24-hour-a day party hotspot. It's streets are festooned with beer barns, strip-joints, beefy bouncers, brothels, tattoo parlours and crime lords – not to mention the occasional of police corruption scandal and a dedicated series television show *Underbelly*.

But there are much deeper issues confronting the Cross than the three minute nightly news grabs laced with drama can convey and the ongoing debate over whether there is sufficient regulation and enforcement of liquor licencing is chief among them. following.

Licensed venues precinct are now bracing for the policy repercussions after Premier Barry O'Farrell very publicly tried to call time on wild nights of excess. Drug dogs will now routinely patrol trains and patrons will have their identity documents scanned and recorded.

Opinions vary widely still out on whether new measures will have any impact. Notably,

many licensed venues, backed by a formidable lobbying machine, will still be allowed continue trading well through the hours of the early

Many of the new restrictions followed a withering audit by the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing, which recommended 'dramatic change' for the venues in the Cross.

Mr O'Farrell says the problem is that people are sold alcohol until they are drunk, then thrown out with the problem then transferred to the streets.

"This is not what the community wants in what should be a vibrant and safe nightspot," Mr O'Farrell says, adding that the audit found a large disparity between the number of people being refused service because they were drunk and the number of people being turfed out for being drunk.

The state government has now told venues that they will not be allowed to serve neat shots or doubles measures or potent premixed ready-to-drink beverages after midnight. Buying more than four alcoholic drinks after midnight has also been banned and two Responsible Service of Alcohol marshals must be on duty in each venue from 11pm with no alcohol allowed to be served in the hour before closing.

The City of Sydney also responded by announcing six new closed circuit television (CCTV) cameras to be installed in the area extending the coverage area along the Darlinghurst Road 'strip' from Williams Street

The reality of problems facing Sydney's Kings Cross precinct are far more complex than nightly news reports suggest,
Paul Hemsley and Julian Bajkowski report.

CROSSING

"To the mingled
cheers and boos
of the mob,
she'd mount the steps of the paddy-wagon
like an aristocrat going to the guillotine,
will preaching defiantly away until the steel
clanged shut..." George Sprod

to Macleay Street and in Bayswater Road.

Mayor Clover Moore says that she has called on the state government to increase policing in the inner-city because of large crowds of intoxicated people engaging in serious crime and anti-social behaviour.

Ms Moore has repeatedly complained that successive NSW Governments have focused on locking people up instead of tackling the causes of crime.

President of the Local Government Association of NSW, Keith Rhoades says councils have also repeatedly called for greater liquor licencing controls over the past decade.

"At the last state election the LGSA called for all political parties seeking election to introduce restrictions on the sale of alcohol at pubs and clubs across NSW as detailed in the Last Drinks campaign," Mr Rhoades says.

Councils need to submit a Community Impact Statement (CIS) to the Casino, Liquor, Gaming and Racing Authority to determine a liquor licencing application.

"Councils have varying views on how

CURBING VIOLENCE

Uncertainty over communication between state and local government on curbing violence has led to more problems.

Mr Rhoades says councils restrict the sale and consumption of alcohol by applying development consent conditions on the development application of a proposed business as a way to prevent crime and address community safety and noise concerns.

"However, the general sentiment across councils that experience the cumulative impacts of large and or increasing numbers of venues is that current liquor licensing controls are insufficient," he says.

Most councils work with other agencies, such as the Police, on Liquor Accords with their local pubs, clubs, restaurants and bars to address issues relating to those venues.

But assessing whether the state government's restrictions actually work is a difficult endeavour. Even NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research

whether these strategies actually make the streets and venues safer – because there have been many different strategies implemented.

However there is evidence that good enforcement of responsible service of alcohol can work, Mr Morgan says.

"It does need a strong enforcement component be it by police or by the licencing authority to make sure licenced premises are complying with those restrictions," Mr Morgan says.

He says AIC did a study of the ACT police showing that the police maintained a high level of enforcement had a short term positive impact on assaults.

"Assuming that enforcement is sustained over time, then you would expect longer term impact on assault levels," he says.

According to Mr Morgan, jurisdictions including Kings Cross have liquor accords where licencees work with police and licencing authorities to come up with solutions.

These have included restrictions on certain drinks and getting rid of 'happy hours', which are no longer allowed in NSW.

BADNESS BY NUMBERS

A side effect of an increased police presence and restrictions on certain areas

THE LINE

much notice is taken of their input as a stakeholder at the CIS stage and many feel it is not given enough status," Mr Rhoades says.

But industry groups like the Distilled Spirits Industry Council of Australia (DSICA) are deeply sceptical of the effectiveness of the latest restrictions and complain the government is targeting only distilled spirits.

DSICA spokesman Stephen Riden tells *Government News* that while his group supports the intention of the restrictions to reduce violence in Kings Cross, they're baffled by the specific drink bans.

He argues the issue is that Kings Cross has a "really bad culture" and that "very large part of the problem" is an entrenched expectation of trouble.

"[It] attracts the people looking to cause trouble [and] young people who want to be where things are edgy and [near] that kind of vibe of possible danger," Mr Riden says.

The banning of only spirits at certain hours is definite sore point.

"It's a mystery," Mr Riden says. "And we think it's repeating the mistakes of the alcopops tax."

Conversely, the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) tells *Government News* that similar strategies used by governments outside NSW to ease violence have actually worked.

director, Don Weatherburn was declined to comment on the issue.

Mr Weatherburn told *Government News* that he couldn't comment on announced government policy and did not want to be accused of having a declared position on the topic.

However, the Australian Institute of Criminology's senior analyst, Anthony Morgan says Kings Cross is an area that has received a lot of attention, which has resulted in a government response.

Mr Morgan says Newcastle's entertainment district has stricter restrictions than those of Kings Cross, including a lockout and an earlier closing times for licenced premises.

Premises that were open until 6am were only allowed to trade until 3am particular types of alcohol could only be sold at certain hours.

"There was really good evidence that it actually had a significant impact on assaults in the Newcastle Entertainment District compared to similar areas," Mr Morgan says.

He notes all the components assessed were related to violence.

These included the consumption of particular drinks, levels of consumption and the actual number of hours that venues were open and could sell the drinks.

Morgan says it's difficult to assess

is that more cases of violence and arrests are reported.

It is a potentially vicious cycle for affected areas as governments attempt to make them safer with more police patrol and more restrictions, but it may give the perception that these areas are even less safe.

"Obviously a lot of attention is being given to Kings Cross in response to a high profile and tragic event," Mr Morgan says.

The reporting of violence has an impact on peoples' perceptions of an area and perceptions of safety, he says.

"Those perceptions don't necessarily accord with the actual levels of safety in an area," Mr Morgan says.

He argues that these types of "random" incidents involving two individuals who don't know one another aren't as common as people might think, based on the reporting that actually takes place.

"If you draw attention as what has happened with Kings Cross, you get a response. But at the same time, you do tend to increase peoples' concern about what might be there," he says.

He says its about balancing the risks or the perceived risks to business operators in terms of lost revenue.

"[It's about] The potential to improve public safety which might actually increase the number of people visiting the entertainment precinct," he says. **GN**