

John Robertson MP

Leader of the Opposition & Member for Blacktown



Shadow Minister for Western Sydney

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Dear Mr Southalan

Thank you for your letter dated 23 February regarding alcohol related violence and the tragic incidents in recent months. I appreciate the time and effort you have put into sharing your views on mandatory minimum sentencing with the NSW Opposition and I apologise for the delay in responding.

Like most people, I have been appalled by these incidents of alcohol related violence on Sydney's streets. The death of Daniel Christie in January from an alcohol related assault on New Year's Eve was a devastating and shocking tragedy.

Daniel's death was the latest in a long line of serious alcohol related incidents to occur on our streets. 23 year old Michael McEwen, was bashed and left fighting for his life while walking with friends in Bondi in December. In November, Brazilian national Lucio Stein Rodrigues died after an attack near a licensed premise on Goulburn Street. Security guard, Fady Taiba took 19 days to wake from a coma after he was punched in the head at a bar in September. Simon Cramp is lucky to be alive according to his neurosurgeon after he was punched and kicked repeatedly on George Street in June last year, and Thomas Kelly was only 18 when he was killed following an unprovoked attack in Kings Cross in July 2012.

Last year I developed Labor's comprehensive plan to address alcohol related harm after careful consideration and consultation with police, medical professionals and academics. Titled *Drink Smart Home Safe*, Labor's policy is underpinned by an 18 month trial of 1am lockouts in Sydney's hotspots – the CBD and Kings Cross – based on the measures implemented in Newcastle which led to a 37 per cent reduction in assaults after dark.

Labor's policy also subjects pubs and clubs in those hotspots to strict but sensible restrictions on alcohol sales. No shots and other high-alcohol content drinks from 10pm and no alcohol served from 3am.

To support licensed venues implement these responsible measures, Labor will also treat every Friday and Saturday night in Sydney as major events. If we can safely move hundreds of thousands of people on New Year's Eve, surely we can do the same out of Kings Cross.

We are unequivocal in our commitment to introduce late night train services to get revellers out of Kings Cross to Town Hall and Central – from where they can connect to other transport options. We will also explore introducing late night trains on lines across the city.

Another key plank in our policy is a new risk-based licensing scheme. The evidence from the ACT, Queensland and Victoria which deploy such risk-based licensing is that it motivates establishments to act responsibly and take proactive measures to reduce alcohol violence in and around their venues.

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Labor will fund covert sting operations to catch licensed premises selling alcohol to underage minors. We will also establish a new independent liquor regulator – a statutory “cop on the beat” whose job will be to oversee our entire policy framework and minimise alcohol-related harm.

Labor will mandate the collection and reporting of alcohol sales data to allow the Government to map alcohol sales by suburb to understand the true extent of alcohol related harm in NSW. This information will enable researchers and policy makers to develop, implement and track the progress of evidence based alcohol policies.

It was only after repeated calls in January this year for the then O’Farrell Government to support Labor’s plan that the Government finally acted. This was a step in the right direction but the Government’s measures fall short of Labor’s policy to stop alcohol violence.

The Government plan failed to implement key planks of Labor’s policy:

- Extra police presence
- Tough restrictions on shots or high alcohol drinks
- Late night rain services out of Kings Cross to Town Hall and Central

On March 14th this year the NSW Opposition announced it would make it compulsory for courts to take Victim Impact Statements into account when sentencing in cases involving death. I introduced a bill into the Parliament to this effect on 20th March, prompting the Government to introduce their own bill concerning Family Impact Statements on 8th May, reversing their earlier decision.

And again in response to Labor’s plan from the beginning on the 28th May the Baird Government announced it would introduce a ban on the sale of shots after midnight.

Labor’s aim is to implement strong policies to stop the violence from happening in the first place – no parent should have to watch their child die because of such senseless violence.

Labor is prepared to introduce bold measures that will help change our society’s culture around alcohol. I believe that, if implemented, Labor’s *Drink Smart Home Safe* policy would achieve genuine change. I have attached a copy of Labor’s policy which provides further details of our initiatives.

For your interest I have also attached two excerpts from Hansard of my comments on the *Crimes and other Legislation Amendment (assault and intoxication) Bill 2014* and the *Liquor Amendment Bill 2014*, as well as a Hansard speech and media release on Labor’s Upper House amendments to the *Crimes Amendment (Intoxication) Bill 2014*.

Once again, thank you for sharing the views of Australian Lawyers for Human Rights with me on this important issue.

Yours sincerely


John Robertson MP
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