



## National liquor News - July 2016

### Time to get licencing back on track.

In a heavily regulated industry there seems no end to bureaucracy and pedantry when it comes to interpretation and enforcement of licencing laws.

Alcohol Beverages Australia (ABA) hears plenty of stories about ridiculous problems and delays with the issuing of licences, and of licensees being fined big dollars for petty breaches of liquor licensing regulations.

Like in Wollongong, where an owner experienced delays of a year for a bar licence approval, even though the police and the chamber of commerce had supported the application and a public meeting hadn't uncovered a single community objection.

Or the licensing inspector standing on a chair to take a picture over a wall, so he could then suggest a line of sight was possible in contravention of a licensing condition. The licensee had to go to the expense of having the wall extended all the way to the ceiling to prevent a pedestrian standing on a chair and seeing the venue.

One licensing expert said there used to be 90% certainty around applications that fulfilled requirements, that's now closer to 60% for packaged liquor licences. In some areas like Surry Hills in Sydney that percentage is far lower, so much so it's believed an unofficial freeze has been put on licence numbers in the suburb. Further north, the objections of only six local residents caused huge delays for a bottle shop in Newcastle and many applications are rejected now simply based on the number of all types of existing premises in the area and often out of date social and crime data.

Police in southern Sydney have recently confirmed they will oppose all applications in their local area for a PSA (that allows restaurants to serve a drink without a meal being consumed) and in the eastern suburbs the same policy of opposing applications applies to new bottle shops.

Once you finally get a licence the situation barely improves. Enforcement follows a similar pattern with huge penalties for pedantic issues like insufficient signage or a missing sentence on a sign (ripped off by a patron). Or staff having a knock-off drink after hours (often without the owners knowledge and bearing in mind the lockout laws prevent them from going elsewhere!). A Sydney Mexican venue was even made to get rid of candles in bottles because there was supposed to be no glass after midnight. What's next, plastic knives and forks, a ban on glass doors and windows?

ABA is not questioning the requirement for RSA regulations, or sensible health and safety regulations. We just want to focus on licensing requirements that actually address real world problems and enforcement that encourages operators to run clean and safe venues?

To help ABA work with governments to keep our industry strong and sustainable we want to hear your examples of liquor licence approval and enforcement going overboard and also your suggestions for licencing reform. Email your examples to [info@alcoholbeveragesaustralia.org.au](mailto:info@alcoholbeveragesaustralia.org.au)