

National Liquor News - September 2012

### **NSW spirits restrictions repeats mistake of the alcopops tax**

DSICA was very surprised and disheartened at the news that the NSW Government decided to ban the serving of shots, doubles and RTDs above 5%ABV in Sydney's Kings Cross precinct after midnight on Friday and Saturdays. These were the only products specifically banned from being served after midnight. I hope the government will continue to allow the serving of singles of whiskey, cognac, vodka, etc – because they are identical in alcohol to most shots.

This singling out of just one product category as the cause of the bad behaviour is very like the Australian government's tax hike on alcopops, and it is similarly misguided in its logic. The ban on shots, doubles and RTDs above 5% is misguided because it is not the type of drink that causes the very stupid behaviour and violence, it is the drinker, their beliefs about alcohol and attitude to drunkenness, and how fast they drink - irrespective if that is beer, wine or spirits.

I won't even start mentioning illicit drugs.

There were several other restrictions announced, such as no more than four "alcoholic drinks" can sold at one time to an individual after midnight - presumably this means separate glasses or jugs, not four 'standard' drinks of alcohol. Bar service has to end an hour before closing.

And there will be no glass in any form after midnight on any night. That restriction is the end of every RTD in a bottle, irrespective of its ABV. Presumably most of these drinkers will go to wine – at 10-14% ABV instead of 4-7% for RTDs.

Aside from just one type of drink not being the problem, the service ban will fail to solve the King's Cross problems for largely the same reasons the alcopop tax failed: easy substitution. And the substitution will take place in two ways, one which is merely pointless, and the other way probably dangerous.

The pointless substitution is that after midnight the spirits drinker simply asks for three or four single nips. Or for a couple of beers or wines instead if that is more convenient. After all, they will be allowed up to four glasses or jugs at a time.

The dangerous substitution is one of timing - those people inside a venue who really don't like beer and wine essentially pre-loading on spirits heavily before the midnight ban puts their preferred drinks out of reach. How that makes the nightclubs safer is hard to see, despite more RSA marshals.

Or if on their way to the Cross, they can simply pre-load even more than they had intended on distilled spirits before they reach the precinct where - by NSW government decision – they can't drink what they prefer to drink.

Instead they can have a jug of beer or cider, or a bottle of wine, without interference.

DSICA supports the NSW government's intent in trying to reduce as far as possible the level of violence around Kings Cross. But it cannot see any way that the spirits ban after midnight will be more than a pointless gesture.