



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

LOCKOUT MYTHS BUSTED

29 August 2016: New research has busted a number of key myths surrounding New South Wales' lockouts and last drinks, and once again put the research evidence at the forefront of the debate.

With an independent review nearing completion – the Callinan Inquiry is due to hand down its report to government later this month – it comes at a time when the impact of Sydney's liquor law reforms is once again the subject of great interest and, disappointingly, much hearsay and fiction.

The report from the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE), *Correcting the Sydney lockout myths*, returns common sense and perspective back in to what has become an emotive and anecdotal debate – investigating and effectively dismissing five oft-repeated mistruths surrounding the measures implemented in 2014.

In February 2014, the New South Wales Government introduced a range of measures to reduce alcohol-related violence, including restricting entry to new licensed premises ('lockouts') after 1:30am and the cessation of alcohol sales ('last drinks') at 3am in the Kings Cross and Sydney CBD Entertainment Precincts.

Importantly, FARE's report relies solely on the most up-to-date evidence – a variety of robust and reputable data sources from the City of Sydney, the NSW Valuer General, and the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) – to assess the veracity of the claims and ultimately debunk those that don't stand up to scrutiny.

The analysis challenges the false 'ghost town' narrative, which relies on a claim that foot traffic in Kings Cross between 5pm and 4am on Friday and Saturday nights had declined by 80 per cent.

The average decline is in fact only 19.4 per cent.

Far from suggesting a large adverse impact, the data indicates that pedestrian traffic didn't change significantly outside of lockout times and that the measures were successful in reducing pedestrian traffic after 1:30am. This is consistent with policy intentions to reduce harm while continuing to support a sustainable and diverse night-time economy.

The report also investigated the number of business closures resulting from the Sydney measures, finding that the frequently cited count of around 40 is wildly exaggerated.

After assessing the nature of closures (with many clearly attributable to factors other than the liquor regulations) and accounting for the natural flow of businesses in and out of the market, it's clear Sydney's night-time economy has remained relatively stable.

There are only four fewer businesses trading between 5pm and 4am on Friday and Saturday evenings in Kings Cross (from 170 in 2012 to 166 in 2015) – further evidence of the continued health of the local economy.

Anecdotal reports have contributed to the myth that the measures applied to Kings Cross and the Sydney CBD have simply shifted alcohol-related problems to a neighbouring locale.



Foundation for Alcohol
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However, the research evidence tells a different story; rebutting this assertion with a robust analysis of assault and violence data showing no displacement of harm to the areas surrounding entertainment precincts.

The rate of non-domestic assaults during the lockout period on weekends has reduced by 70.2 per cent in Kings Cross and 30.7 per cent in the Sydney CBD. Following last drinks at 3am, the assault figures are 75.5 per cent and 41.5 per cent respectively.

Those declines are reflected in the latest data from Darlinghurst's St Vincent's Hospital, where alcohol-related trauma admissions to intensive care reduced by 44 per cent in the two years following the introduction of the measures.

The research also addresses misleading reports of land and property values, which misrepresent the extent of the decline and fail to acknowledge significant increases in property values.

Strong increases in residential and mixed use property values have far outweighed the modest reduction in some commercial property values. Residential property values in The Bays and Potts Point rose 35 per cent between 2014 and 2015 while mixed use property values in Woollahroomooloo, Potts Point, Elizabeth Bay, and Darlinghurst rose 15 per cent.

FARE Chief Executive Michael Thorn condemned the alcohol industry's reliance on 'junk science' and stressed the importance of informed and truthful opinions in a debate so crucial.

"The alcohol industry has attempted to paint a picture of a city that's empty, businesses shuttered, employment prospects bleak, property values in decline, alcohol-related harm still unchecked, and spilling into adjoining neighbourhoods. But the evidence to the contrary is overwhelming," said Mr Thorn.

"The evidence makes clear that the liquor law reforms have been successful in curbing antisocial behaviour, while also supporting a diverse range of business opportunities and a safe environment for patrons, tourists, and residents," said Mr Thorn.

ENDS

Media notes:

Mr Thorn is available for interview.

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The **Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE)** is an independent, not-for-profit organisation working to stop the harm caused by alcohol. Alcohol harm in Australia is significant. Over 5,500 lives are lost every year and more than 157,000 people are hospitalised making alcohol one of our nation's greatest preventive health challenges.

For over a decade, FARE has been working with communities, governments, health professionals and police across the country to stop alcohol harms by supporting world-leading research, raising public awareness and advocating for changes to alcohol policy. In that time FARE has helped more than 750 communities and organisations, and backed over 1,400 projects around Australia.