# Exemptions to the freeze on new late night liquor licences in inner city Melbourne: early impact and experience in the four affected municipalities

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## Summary

This study investigated the impact of the exemptions to the liquor licence applications ‘freeze’ – introduced in 2015 by the Victorian Government – to a policy (implemented in 2008) that had banned the approval of new liquor licence applications for licensees seeking to trade past 1am in four inner city municipalities.

The ‘freeze’ applied to all licence categories except clubs, restaurants and cafés. This study examined the experiences of the applications for new liquor licences trading past 1am, to better understand how the Government guidelines were implemented in practice.

## Outcomes

The study found that nine months following the partial lifting of the freeze there was little growth in late night trading (permanent licences), and a lack of demand for late night licences outside of the freeze areas over the five year study period.

Findings also revealed there had been barely any increase in applications for late night permanent licences, there was an increase in late night temporary licence applications, one new late night licence was granted, and of the four applications made, one was rejected.

From a public health perspective, the partial lifting of the freeze in Melbourne in July 2015 was met with some initial concern as it would lead to an increase in alcohol availability, in terms of increased hours of late night trading.

One aim of this study was to examine the experience of the four affected municipalities in handling the requirement that applications require council support before being forwarded to the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation. Differences in implementation of the guidelines emerged as a significant theme.

The four local governments were seen to vary widely in the ways in which they understood and approached the provision of ‘council support’ for post-1am applications, and the State Government produced no guidelines associated with the new step of ‘council support’, meaning it is hard to know what is intended with this aspect of the exemption policy.

The way in which exemptions to the freeze have been introduced in Victoria has introduced an additional outcome, whether intended or not, of significantly changing the role and power of local government in liquor licensing decisions. This has posed a challenge to local governments that has been met with widely divergent approaches.

## Recommendations

Exemptions to liquor licence applications has important implications for alcohol policy. The main implication for alcohol policy relates to the requirement to demonstrate that the application be supported by the relevant council. The implications of this policy change are far-reaching, as demonstrated by the significantly different interpretations by the four local councils ranging from ‘veto’ to re-labelling ‘support’ to a position of ‘no initial concern’. One of the study’s recommendations is the use of clearly defined terms, as the choice of wording is critical, with ‘support’ having very strong meanings for the councils.

[view the report](https://fare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Revised-Freeze-Exemptions-Final-Report-FINAL.pdf)