

Make 2am closing time for Melbourne nightclubs



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Susie O'Brien

WHY are we letting a handful of wealthy city nightclub owners run our city?

Why should their need to maximise profits overrule the safety of our kids? As a mother I'm sick to death of hearing about the latest round of carnage on our city streets. Who knows when your own child will be next? Who knows when an innocent night out will end in mayhem, violence, and maybe even death? It's time to get tough and take action. So let's take back control of our city.

At the moment it seems that the rights of a few nightclub barons are overtaking the rights of us all to be safe on our own city streets. The club kings have legal rights to operate until dawn, fill their venues with thousands of drunk partygoers, serve all kinds of crazy drinks, control their own security, and so on. They say it's about the rights of consumers to come to the city and drink, party and dance when and where they want. But let's be very clear. These party barons don't really care about your right to have a good time. They just care about their right to maximise profits and holding law makers to ransom.

I do blame pubs and clubs for the behaviour of their patrons. They serve the booze, and they provide the venue that attracts louts to the city in the first place. They're the ones who should be on the front line of fixing up this problem, not on the back foot, resisting all moves to clean up the city. But it's also a wider social problem.

Gen Y and younger Gen Xers have grown up thinking that they should have the right to do what they like, when they like. And, sadly, this includes getting fall-down agro drunk

and leaving others to literally clean up the mess. But here's a news flash for the selfish generation: Getting pissed at a club and starting a brawl with the bouncer who chucked you out isn't a sign that you've got rights as an individual. It's a sign that you're a wanker. And it's a sign that your parents need to stop indulging you and your loser boozy mates, and make you stand on your own two feet.

Both the State Government and Opposition need to get together with the police and Lord Mayor to confront city violence front on. This is happening, but more needs to be done. I welcome recent moves, for instance, to shut down clubs and pubs, that break liquor licensing laws, for 24 hours.

But 24 hours is not enough for repeat offenders who make heaps of money from drunk patrons buying more grog. And it's also yet another example of action being taken after something has happened -- it's just too little too late. I support moves to ban new late-night liquor licences until the end of 2011. But how does that help us police the clubs that are already open until dawn? It just means they have less competition and thus grow larger and more powerful.

But why are any of the big city nightclubs allowed to serve booze in glass any more? Why not just mandate at a city-wide or state-wide level that all bars should serve booze in plastic containers after midnight? But this is still just playing around the edges. It's time to get radical. For instance, why not just close all premises at 2am? I've been there, done that and I can tell you that nothing good happens in the city after 2am. Sure, we'd need to find a way to empty the city of drunk revellers. But how hard could this be?

We could fund some free public transport out of the city or subsidise cabs for a few hours. But over time people will adjust their expectations and know that their night will end at 2am rather than 5am or 6am, and this will be less of a problem. I know party-hungry Gen Yers think it's about their right to party, but it's really about the rights of a handful of already stinking rich businessmen to make money around the clock.

I was in the city on Collins St on Saturday night, and saw this first-hand. A girl in a hot-pink party dress was vomiting in the gutter, her friend holding her bleached blonde hair out of her sick-stained face. A guy with half his bottom hanging out of his jeans was hopping into a cab with a few mates, heading for another nightclub. They were clearly already very drunk. Groups of young people were milling around a laneway nightclub, smoking, openly drinking out of bottles on the street, and planning their next move. And this was just 11pm. Just imagine how disgusting things were by 5am when everyone had another six solid hours of booze in them.

I am proud of our city, and proud of its status as a vibrant, exciting city at night. But when it's no longer safe to walk the streets, action needs to be taken. I am sure I will be howled down as a wowsler by some. But it's your kids now who are at risk, and my kids in the future. They stand to lose a lot more than a night on the town if nothing is done now.