

Takapuna locals call for Government review after 'saddening' decision on bar opening hours

Takapuna Central Residents Group media release, 21 July 2017

Takapuna Central Residents Group members are devastated following a 19 July Alcohol Regulatory and Licensing Authority (ARLA) decision which may see local bars and nightclubs applying for liquor licences with a 3am closing.

The decision followed a 4-week appeal hearing on Auckland Council's Local Alcohol Policy, which proposed that bars in the Auckland CBD could apply to be licensed until 4am with a 3am cease of alcohol sales outside the CBD. Despite strong appeals from public health groups and the Takapuna Central Residents Group, the hours were not deemed unreasonable by ARLA.

Jill Schroder of the Takapuna Central Residents Group says she was saddened by the decision.

"These new laws which let councils develop local policies were intended to increase community say on alcohol matters, but in the end the alcohol industry spoke the loudest. We have suffered enough from the effects of hazardous drinking in our local night-time areas. We can't wait another six years until this policy is reviewed."

The 4-week appeal hearing in Auckland was almost unique in that most councils around the country have opted to negotiate with alcohol industry appellants rather than have their policy debated in a public hearing. This has often resulted in policies becoming less restrictive as they progress through the negotiation process.

"There is an increasing gap between community expectations for greater control and the reality of the Local Alcohol Policy process under the current legislation," Mrs Schroder said.

"So the Takapuna Central Residents Group, together with Inner City Wellington and the Victoria Neighbourhood Association Inc, have written to Hon Amy Adams Minister of Justice, calling on the Government to undertake a formal review of the effectiveness of the processes relating to Local Alcohol Policies, hearings and territorial authority support to ensure community voices are heard.

"We have called on the Ministry to evaluate whether our new liquor legislation is being implemented in a way that supports the stated intent of enabling communities to have meaningful input into local licensing decisions."

She said the experience of community members in Local Alcohol Policy hearings is formidable and complicated.

“Deadlines, rules of evidence, disclosure and participating in a formal legal hearing are often a foreign experience for community members. This is the antithesis of enabling increased community say on alcohol matters.”

Alcohol Healthwatch Executive Director Dr Nicki Jackson was equally disappointed that the on-licence trading hours were not curbed back further in Auckland.

“There is overwhelming evidence that alcohol-related harm increases exponentially after midnight. When compared to the rest of the country, Auckland experiences more alcohol-related hospital admissions and more night-time assaults. In countries where trading hours have been reduced, significant reductions in violence have been seen.

“Further, despite common belief, not all international cities are open so late at night. The Takapuna Group expressed a strong desire to not allow bars and nightclubs in the local area to be open late and produced a great deal of evidence demonstrating the harm they experience.”

She said that with no action taken locally to reduce the long opening hours of bars and nightclubs, the next step is for communities to pressure their politicians to take action on the low price of alcohol and restrict advertising and sponsorship.

“Alcohol-related harm is estimated to cost New Zealand up to \$5 billion per year. We simply shouldn’t accept this – our heavy drinking culture affects us all.”

ENDS

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