QTON No. 2

Legislative Assembly for the **Australian Capital Territory**
Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation

Inquiry into Canberra’s Night-Time Economy

Answer to question taken on notice

Asked by: Ms Elizabth Lee MLA

Addressed to: Mr Chris Gatfield, General Manager, Australian Hotels Association ACT

In relation to: Risk Assessment Management Plans

Hearing: 13 May 2026
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Mr Chris Gatfield took on notice the following question:

MS LEE: Thank you, chair. Thank you all for coming in and for giving this evidence. I want to just go to now fees and charges. That was referred to earlier. And in particular, we have heard from some witnesses yesterday about the astronomical liquor licensing fees. Perhaps, Mr Gatfield, you first. Has the AHA done any research or is it aware of why there is such a difference? I mean, Mr Dotta yesterday mentioned that it was, like, 10 times in the ACT as it is would be in Queensland and that is a major, major difference.

Mr Gatfield: Yes, look, in this jurisdiction, liquor licence fees are far higher than any other jurisdiction in Australia. So if you are a pub that closes at 3 am and you have got a 500-person capacity here, I think you pay about $22,000 in liquor licence fees annually. If you somehow manage to pick that up and throw it over the border and establish that in Queanbeyan, you would be looking at around 7,800. Some other jurisdictions are well below that, and I think WA comes in at about $1,000 or something along those lines.

So look, in terms of what that fee covers, fundamentally it is the same thing, right? It is the cost of regulation. It reflects your risk profile or perceived risk profile. Where I think the current framework presents challenges for my members is a lot of those venues, if you have a 3 am close and a 500-person capacity, if you are renting that premises, there is absolutely no way at this point that you are allowed to change your patron capacity or your trading hours without that having some effect on the value of your business. And you know, not to “hashtag not-all-landlords”, but a lot of landlords would not permit you to do it, full-stop.

So one of the things that we think would be really useful is for people to be able to manage those capacity and trading hour issues—if you are not using those hours or you do not need that capacity—by using a RAMP, so your Risk Assessment Management Plan. You could put a voluntary cap on your trading hours or a voluntary cap on your patron capacity and have your liquor licence fees reflect the actual risk profile of the business. Because if you are generally shutting up shop at 11 pm, clearly you are not using those hours. And if you only really ever have 200 people in the venue, you should not be paying that kind of exorbitant fee. So I believe our submission actually contained data on the differences in terms of state by state, territory by territory.

MS LEE: Yes, which is where I got that.

Mr Gatfield: So yes, happy to provide more information on that if you would like that. But you know, realistically that is the reason why the fees are where they are. But I am not entirely sure what the justification is for that level of differentiation between states and territories.

MS LEE: Yes, yes. And so in terms of the RAMP that you were talking about, have you got real-life examples of where you have assisted one of your members, or one of your members has done that, and it has resulted in a reduction? That is what is happening in practice?

Mr Gatfield: That is what we are asking for in our submission. At the moment that kind of flexibility does not exist.

MS LEE: Yes, okay. Does not exist, yes.

Mr Gatfield: However, in other jurisdictions it does. So in New South Wales, for example, you can apply to have what is called an Occasional Extended Trading Condition added to your liquor licence. So it keeps the hours on your liquor licence, so it maintains the value of the business, and allows you to trade—12 times a year—a little bit later with notification to police and the council and a range of other bodies. But fundamentally, when that business is either sold or someone else takes it over, they can choose whether to use those full hours or maintain the limited hours.

It is a way to minimise your costs, reflecting your actual risk profile and the way in which you operate the business. So we think that that has legs in Canberra because there are a lot of very large venues who have very late trade who do not necessarily use those hours. And during winter, a lot of people are going to be inside and your beer garden will be empty. And if that is 350 people who are meant to be out there, you are paying for nothing.

MS LEE: Yes. Correct me if I am wrong, was that trialled at all during the COVID era?

Mr Gatfield: I think a lot of things were trialled during the COVID era.

MS LEE: Yes, true.

Mr Gatfield: I might have to take that on notice. There were a range of measures that were put in place during COVID.

Mr Chris Gatfield: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:

While the ACT Government have recently introduced increased licence flexibility allowing venues to change their floor plans several times per year for special events, I am not able to locate information on similar changes during the pandemic.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation

Signature: Date:

By Mr Chris Gatfield, General Manager, Australian Hotels Association ACT