



Inquiry into Canberra's Night-Time Economy

Answer to question taken on notice

Asked by: Mr James Milligan MLA

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

In relation to: Workplace Protection Orders – recommendations

Hearing: 13 May 2026

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Transcript provided: 21 May 2026

Answer Due: 28/05/2026

Mr Chris Gatfield took on notice the following question:

MR MILLIGAN: We can go in and talk about the insurance costs and see if you have had a response from the government in terms of the inquiry that they have just conducted. The other area is safety, and safety in relation to your staff, and any instances that may have occurred and how you handled those instances. Then the next one is, in March last year I ran a motion calling on the government to provide relief for businesses that have been affected by light rail in the town centre, and what sort of feedback may have come from there.

And then the last one is pretty much a business concierge. What would that look like? So if we set up a business concierge with the ACT government and we put in specialists in that field with business experience, with a business background that understand business, and turn them into pretty much like a client manager for businesses and that is their point of contact, what would that look like and how would that benefit your members? So is there anyone that would like to start off with any one of those topics? Yes?

Mr Gatfield: I will take worker safety, thank you, Mr Milligan.

MR MILLIGAN: Yes, excellent.

Mr Gatfield: So we have received a number of reports recently—an increasing number of reports—about staff experiencing either verbal abuse, harassment, intimidation or, on occasion, physical assault while they are at work. This is not just, you know, in pub land. This is across restaurants, cafes, accommodation, hotels, you name it. It does not seem to be particularly a CBD problem. It is widespread.

We—along with colleagues in the retail sector who are largely experiencing the same thing—are firmly of the view that everyone has the right to feel safe at work. I think that is incontrovertible. People should be aware that, even though this is a workplace that necessarily involves the sale of alcohol, it is absolutely inappropriate for staff to have to experience anything other than a safe

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workplace. So we are very firm advocates for raising the penalties for assaulting frontline hospitality staff. Whether that applies to the retail sector, I will let the Retailers Association answer that. But really just complemented by a public-facing campaign to make sure that the public realise that that kind of behaviour is not okay.

We are also, unfortunately, in a position where I have one particular member who has become the resident expert on workplace protection orders because he has had to go through the process many a time. So that particular process—while we welcome it and it is a fantastic framework, it is very clunky. It is very time-consuming. It is time-consuming on the applicant. It has holes in it that unfortunately mean that a lot of the time the people who a WPO is directed to cannot be located, therefore they cannot be served. They may not turn up to court.

So we think that while the framework is good, it could be improved. It could be a lot more human-centred and a lot more victim-centric. So we would love to be able to make some recommendations around how to possibly streamline that. As I said, I have one particular member who has been incredibly involved in WPOs and making applications for them. I am happy to provide the committee information on that on notice if that would be helpful. But for mine, worker safety is my number one priority because they are basically the best asset that we have as an industry.

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

As above, AHA ACT are happy to provide the personal details of this particular operator to enable to Committee to meet with them.

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

Signature:

Date:

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