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Puritan wowers need to move on

**Paul
Nicolaou**



Minister John Graham, whose ministerial responsibilities include boosting the night time economy, knows why stultifying red tape has become a barrier to its growth.

The minister is right in identifying a deeply embedded “puritanical idea that nothing good happens after dark”.

It’s a polite way of saying that for decades there has been a deep undercurrent of wowerism holding back the night time economy.

Speaking at a Business Sydney event to launch the NSW Productivity Commission’s report on the night time economy, Mr Graham said policy was traditionally more about “saving people from themselves” than fostering the benefits of a vibrant sector.

Sydney can only hope the landmark report led by Productivity and Equality Commissioner Peter Achterstraat is a big step in the right direction.

The report gives both an economic and social rationale for breaking down the regulatory barriers. It forecasts an \$8.2bn annual boost to the NSW economy if we can replicate the intensity of Victoria’s night time economy.

Commissioner Achterstraat’s report is a solid basis for the NSW government’s third tranche of regulation-busting measures.

The first of its vibrancy reforms included an 80 per cent cut in licensing fees and extended trading for licensed venues offering regular live entertainment. The number of newly approved licensed live music and performance venues increased from 60 in 2023 to 200 in 2024, taking the total number to more than 450. But for every regulatory rock that is turned over, more must be exposed to the light.

No longer will food truck vendors and similar mobile businesses be required to spend weeks and months getting permission to operate from individual councils. Approval to trade will instead cover multiple council boundaries.

Many more outdated regulatory impediments should also go. To again quote John Graham, businesses shouldn’t be forced to spend thousands of dollars obeying regulations from a puritanical era that no longer reflects our global city’s aspirations.

Paul Nicolaou is executive director of Business Sydney