It's a Saturday night in Kings Cross, Sydney.
LOCKUP OR LOCKOUT

The NSW Government’s Response to Alcohol-Related Violence

Alexandra Potter

It’s a Saturday night in Kings Cross, Sydney. The famous neon Coca Cola sign flashes an enticing red light, promising a good night on the town. Young partygoers spill out of taxis to bar-hop up Darlinghurst Road. At the intersection of Darlinghurst and Bayswater Roads is a police roadblock. It’s 11pm and a mob of riot police stand awkwardly, anticipating trouble. Those spilling from the taxis gingerly straighten themselves as they file past.

In the distance a bottle smashes and the police mob fractures, some running towards the sound while the others tighten their grips on their guns.

Patrons wait nervously in lines for the more popular bars. Other bars stand empty, security yawning while door
staff hold clipboards of empty guest lists. Venues like World Bar still draw a crowd. The dance floor is packed and the queue snakes part way up Bayswater Road, but tension bristles in the air. The security guards who flank the bar doors are in turn flanked by police officers. Kings Cross, once noisy, brash and vibrant, is now subdued, tense and uncomfortable.

The click of heels echoes as young people join the queue, but the chatter and laughter that usually fills the streets is gone. In spite of the dulled mood, the young revellers have made an effort to dress up for the night. Women in bright, sassy dresses defy the cold while men in skinny jeans adjust the shape of their hair before settling on a bar.

I line up outside one of the busier bars.

‘This is bullshit!’ the guy in front of me exclaims as he is denied entry by security. ‘We came here for a good night and now we can’t do anything!’ His friends yank him down the street away from the police.

On Victoria Road, a scuffle breaks out and a young man cops a square punch to the jaw. On another street, two men and a woman stumble down the footpath. One of the men shoves the woman into a wall; her head smacks against the brick. The other man intercepts and another argument ensues. Clutching her head, the woman slides between the two men, pushing them apart as they lay into each other. The throngs of police protecting the area are just metres away on the main
drag. The entire attention of the twenty-odd officers is focused on a bikie gang passing through; these other altercations go unnoticed.

Just across from this same road, Thomas Kelly and Daniel Christie lost their lives two years ago. Their deaths cast a long shadow over Kings Cross, galvanising the community to demand action to end the violence.

For many young Australians, alcohol is a rite of passage, and a night spent drinking with friends in the city’s hotspots is a social ritual. On 7 July, 2012, 18-year-old Kieran Loveridge purchased two-dozen cans of premixed alcohol and consumed them with two friends at a home in Quakers Hill. Each can contained 1.9 standard drinks, so by the time Loveridge headed into the city he’d had the equivalent of fifteen drinks.

Court documents note that the boys drove into the city – arriving at around 7.30pm – where Loveridge continued to binge. Eventually, they headed to Kings Cross. After being denied access to their venue of choice, Cargo Bar, the young men were permitted entry into Pontoon Bar. They ordered shots.

The men then moved on to a bar on Bayswater Road but were again denied entry. With another friend Loveridge made his way across Victoria Road where he encountered some acquaintances. He didn’t recognise them, and grabbed their shirtfronts aggressively.
As this commotion took place, seventeen-year-old Marco Compagnoni came walking along the footpath. Compagnoni had been working that night, handing out flyers to people on the streets of Kings Cross. As he walked past, Kieran Loveridge – suddenly and without warning – elbowed Compagnoni above his left eyebrow, splitting the skin.

After this attack Loveridge found himself alone on Victoria Road, leaning against the wall of Kings Cross Station in the shadows of the streetlights.

At around 10pm, 18-year-old Thomas Kelly walked down Victoria Road, accompanied by his girlfriend and another friend. The trio were on their way to meet some other friends at a Bayswater Road hotel. As Kelly walked past, Loveridge stepped out from the wall and punched Kelly in the face with enough force to knock him to the ground.

The CT scan revealed a massive fatal fracture to Thomas Kelly’s skull. He suffered injury to the left frontal area of his brain and lacerations and a haematoma on the right side of the back of his head. The neuropathologist assessing the case attributed these injuries to a single, severe hit to the back of the head caused by the contact Kelly made with the pavement.

Within an hour of striking Thomas Kelly, Loveridge had attacked three other men.

At this point two police constables intervened. The officers noted that Loveridge was affected by alcohol:
agitated and emotional, waving his arms and yelling. Unaware of Loveridge’s rampage through Kings Cross, the officers recorded his details and gave him an infringement notice.

The day after the attacks in Kings Cross, Loveridge was watching television with friends when the news broadcast a story of the fatal attack on Thomas Kelly. According to reports, Loveridge became worried while watching the broadcast, saying to his friends, ‘Was that one of my fights? I don’t know.’

On 12 July, he raised his concerns about the possibility of being Kelly’s attacker with his new football coach. He recalled being involved in some fights, but wasn’t sure who he’d assaulted. A week later, while watching a Canterbury Bulldogs coaching session with a friend at Belmore Sports Ground, Loveridge was approached by detectives and arrested without incident. He was charged with the murder of Thomas Kelly, and later pleaded guilty to manslaughter and four assault charges on the condition that the charge of murder was withdrawn.

Ten minutes from where Thomas Kelly was fatally king hit, Sydney’s newly revamped Star Casino in Pyrmont is a hive of activity. With two nightclubs inside, groups flock to the waterside venue. It is still hours away from the lockout and closure times in the Cross. Girls wrapped in tight bodycon dresses strut past groups of
young guys jostling each other as they wait in line, while boy racers in their modified Nissan Skylines do laps around the Casino. There isn’t a cop in sight.

The party is shifting to the Inner West venues that have no lockouts or early closures. Newtown, on the fringe of the city and usually considered a more alternative community removed from the heavy clubbing scene, is filled with late-night revellers in search of longer parties.

‘We’ve always had a regular crowd, but nothing like this,’ a bartender tells me as he tries to fill the multitude of drink orders being screamed across the bar at him.

It’s 1am and lockouts are now in place in Kings Cross. Those in the bars stay until the 3.30am closures, while those outside move across Sydney filling other venues that are not scrutinised. Packs of police stand around idly, their hands resting inside their bulletproof vests.

Between July 2012 and December 2012, Sydney experienced a horrific spate of alcohol-fuelled violence that left two young men dead, four in induced comas and dozens of others with black eyes, split lips, busted eyebrows and heavy bruising. The attacks were random and senseless; Sydney was reeling.

The spike in violence created panic amongst the media and the community. This particular menace – the king hit – was to become the subject of heated debate that first the NSW Liberal government and then Premier Barry O’Farrell would try to combat with one legislative swipe.
Growing pressure within Parliament from State Labor along with unrelenting questioning from the media forced the government into a corner, where they reached for the nearest policy that could be implemented quickly. This was a system of lockouts, early closures and an increased police presence, which had been operating with success in Newcastle since 2008.

After the media began to campaign for the introduction of new laws, the government ran with the Newcastle ‘Solution’, as O’Farrell labelled it, in 2012. The nomenclature implied that it was indeed a solution rather than a response or a strategy. O’Farrell stated they were ‘tough’ laws that would combat alcohol-fuelled violence. After passing through parliament with bipartisan support, the laws were implemented in Kings Cross, Darling Harbour and the Sydney CBD.

As the only non-drinker in a family who is quite partial to a beer on a Friday arvo, or a nice red with dinner, alcohol consumption has always been a curious pastime to me. I’ve lived the teenage years of alcohol experimentation, so I’m not a complete teetotaller; I’ve experienced the good and bad effects of alcohol first hand – downing too many alcopops in a drinking challenge was the first of many memorable dabbles with alcohol.

As I entered my mid-twenties, my priorities changed. I had finished six long years of university, was working full
time, while also taking night courses and had developed a slightly obsessive interest in health. And it turns out I’m allergic to the sulphides commonly found in wine, beer and cider, so alcohol became a messy pursuit that did not sit comfortably in my digestive system.

But the more often I was sober, the more fascinated I became in the drinking habits of the people around me. My interest in exploring the drinking culture of Sydney and the influence it has on male identity piqued after the headlines began reporting frequent instances of one-punch hits which seemed to contradict the drinking behaviour of those around me, in particular male drinkers who were equally perplexed by the apparent rise in violence. Then, in 2014, my younger brother was assaulted in an unprovoked, alcohol-fuelled attack.

At the beginning of 2014, Jack (not his real name) was attending a friend’s house party in the Sydney suburb of Neutral Bay, in the heart of Sydney’s North Shore. Jack was 20 and standing at just under 6 foot 2, he had a slim but athletic build and a calm disposition – a peacemaker, not a fighter.

Jack had gone to the party wearing a Chicago Bulls jumper. While walking a girl home from the party, he noticed three men on the opposite side of the street. He hadn’t given them much attention until one of them called out to him: ‘Oi! You a fan of the Chicago Bulls?’

‘Yeah, they’re pretty cool,’ replied Jack, nonchalant.
The three men crossed the road and approached Jack. ‘That sounded pretty arrogant to me,’ one of the guys said to the other two. Before he knew what was happening, they had Jack’s arms pinned back while the third man threw rounds of punches into his stomach. The girl stood beside them, screaming for them to stop.

Two of the three men were a match for Jack’s height, but heavier built. The other man was smaller. He didn’t throw any punches, instead he begged Jack not to tell anyone. ‘They’ve been drinking, they’re not normally like this,’ he petitioned before they fled.

Coincidentally, Jack’s attackers were on their way to the party that Jack had just left. Jack phoned his friends to let them know he’d been beaten and to warn them to be aware of the three men roaming the streets. Then he called the police.

Through his friends at the party, Jack was quickly able to learn the identities of the three men, and likewise they learnt of Jack. The next morning, one of the primary aggressors sought Jack out on Facebook, sending him a message begging Jack not to go the police as it may jeopardise their futures; he explained that they are really just ‘good guys’ who got out of control because they’d been drinking. It wasn’t them throwing the punches, he wrote, it was the alcohol. With this admission in hand, Jack attended North Sydney police station and pressed charges.
The next day I photographed my brother’s injuries for evidence. He was swollen and sore, with a split lip, scratches around his head and a black eye. While Jack’s physical injuries healed quickly, the emotional trauma has been much harder to recover from. To this day, he is still angry about the injustice of these unprovoked attacks and has become more aware of the behaviour of those around him when he goes out.

We found out the next day that Jack’s attackers were about to enter their final year of high school at a private school on Sydney’s Lower North Shore. That same night they had also attacked a sixteen-year-old on his way home.

While Jack’s attack was random and unprovoked, it highlights an undercurrent of social aggression that has resulted in young men wandering the streets in search of a fight.

I want to know how it’s got this way. What is it that causes young men – like Kieran Loveridge and my brother’s attackers – to go out on the hunt, zoning in on unsuspecting victims?

I swear I am going to bash someone tonight.’

These were the words allegedly uttered by eighteen-year-old Kieran Loveridge on his way out for a night in Kings Cross.

‘We’re in a state of crisis!’ the media screeched, as alcohol-related violence stories grew in prevalence and
prominence. ‘It was a crime spree lasting more than an hour’ reported The Age, referencing Kieran Loveridge’s actions. ‘City’s Violent Epicentre’ was the headline in the Sydney Morning Herald, while on news.com.au the headline ‘12 Months of Terror: the king hit violence killing our young men,’ screamed for our attention.

In the days and weeks that followed the attack, there was a real sense of fear in the community, and Kieran Loveridge was vilified on social media. ‘I definitely felt more nervous going out,’ Sydney-sider Grant told me. ‘I’m sure most people looking for a night out were put off by the extra security, but I was really glad it was there. Anyone on the street could be a potential attacker.’ After news of the attacks broke out, Grant admits he curbed his drinking behaviour: ‘I become more confident and carefree when I drink, and I was worried that being less aware of my surroundings or being a bit more cocky would make me vulnerable to an attack, so I just stopped drinking.’

The responses shared on an online forum for a Parramatta Football Club, for whom Loveridge once played, are discouraging. The unflattering list of labels to describe him, including ‘scum’, ‘a shit bag’ and ‘a parasite’, were followed with interjections of hopes for his future. ‘I hope he ends up in jail and gets a cock meat sandwich every day for lunch followed up with a hot beef injection for good measure.’ ‘Glad they caught this pussy shit,’ one commenter said. ‘Lock the bastard up and throw away
the key,’ another followed in agreement. ‘I was a year above this kid at school,’ wrote one of the other forum contributors, ‘Spoken to him a couple times but not at all surprised by what he did. He is a shitbag.’

As an observer of the aftermath of the attack, the intense focus on Loveridge struck me. I felt conflicted and frustrated – I had experienced the concern over my brother’s comparatively minor attack and could empathise with the Kelly family, but certainly there was more to the story that had caused Loveridge to punch a complete stranger. I wanted to know more about Loveridge’s background and what brought him to Kings Cross that night. The online world was focused on who Kieran Loveridge was on 7th of July 2012, but many of my questions were still unanswered and I wanted to understand what had shaped this young man – and why he had behaved so violently.

Kieran Loveridge attended Model Farms High School in the suburb of Baulkham Hills. A placed filled with reserves and native animals, it is a tranquil pocket in North-Western Sydney. At school, Loveridge had a notorious reputation. During his initial trial, his fellow students gave accounts to the media that depict a boy intent on causing havoc. He once slashed the tyres of a teacher’s car and stole the groundskeeper’s lawn mower for a joyride. He was asked to leave before completing Year 12. Out of school, he was developing a reputation with
the courts and police. His juvenile record was discussed in court and highlights a history of antisocial behaviour.

In 2011, Loveridge was put on probation after he gatecrashed a party and assaulted the host, punching him in the face. He also had a record for assaulting a police officer, theft, malicious damage and affray. A prior record that led Justice Campbell, who oversaw the first trial for the murder of Thomas Kelly, to note, ‘These matters, taken together, lead me to infer that at least to some degree the offender has in the past exhibited an attitude of disregard for the law. He has not always responded to leniency and has required sentences of probation and control orders.’

By 2012, Loveridge was trying to restart his life and amend his track record of juvenile crimes, court appearances and frequent bouts of teenage rebellion. His court documents suggest he was taking charge of his life and developing future plans, until a night of drinking destroyed his newfound ambitions.

While Justice Campbell noted that Loveridge was not himself an alcoholic or a regular abuser of alcohol, he acknowledged that his exposure to his father’s heavy-drinking from a young age had a serious influence on his own patterns of drinking.

‘The single biggest factor influencing the way children drink is how their parents actually drink, rather than what their parents introduce them to,’ Doctor Michael Farrell from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre
(NDARC) at the University of New South Wales tells me in his Randwick office. ‘Children observe, so heavy drinking parents are more likely to have heavy drinking children – we know there’s a genetic effect. We’re not exactly sure what it is yet, but we know it’s there.’

But it wasn’t only Kieran Loveridge’s father who influenced him a young boy. His former classmates suggest that Loveridge’s increasingly aggressive behaviour at school was further emboldened by his cousin Corey Loveridge’s criminal actions.

Corey Loveridge, who was just a couple of years older than Kieran, was jailed for 45 years for stabbing 17-year-old Alan Ray Gordon. In the same night, Corey and his accomplice bashed and robbed 87-year-old Elena Parrelli in her home. The attacks happened in December 2010, and Corey was found guilty of murder in April 2012, just four months before Kieran Loveridge went on his rampage through Kings Cross. The Loveridge cousins were given their sentences in court just one week apart. While on remand in Silverwater Gaol, Corey Loveridge had extra charges added to his conviction after he was recorded on the phone ordering a teenage female relative to recruit someone to ‘bash the fuck out’ of one of the Crown witnesses. He also wrote to other family members from prison ordering them to ‘shut their mouths’.

Media reports state that Keiran became estranged from his family, disruptive at school, and was eventually
asked to leave the school before completing year 12. The struggles of the Loveridge family – fractured familial relationships, lack of guidance and the exposure to alcohol and drug abuse, as well as physical abuse – appear to have left both Loveridge boys with a disregard for the law, and an inability to see the consequences of their actions. But by July, Kieran was 18, focused on reengaging with his studies, participating in a program that combined years 11 and 12, and was developing his sporting performance. He had a girlfriend and was living with her, in her family home. In spite of whatever family dysfunction he had experienced growing up, he appeared to be forming stable relationships as evidenced by those who provided him with character references during the hearing. During the trial, his girlfriend’s mother provided a character reference, noting that Loveridge was always polite, respectful and paid his board. She was happy for him to be living in her home, and said she felt that he was grateful for the assistance she provided him. Furthermore, she believed he had been turning his life around before the attack on Thomas Kelly.

Before the fatal attack on Thomas Kelly, it seemed as though Kieran Loveridge had found a much-needed positive role model: his football coach. His mother’s statements to the court credited importance of this coach; however, the guidance was short lived as his football coach died from cancer, and Loveridge grew more destructive in response. His prison psychologist notes that Loveridge did
not have an abusive relationship with alcohol as a teenager, however he struggled to effectively express himself and articulate his emotions.

In his first trial, Justice Campbell found Loveridge guilty of manslaughter and sentenced him to four years in prison. Almost two years later, an appeal by the Department of Public Prosecution saw the sentence increased to ten years with a non-parole period of seven years. The earliest Loveridge can be released from jail is November 17, 2022.

The Newcastle Solution was designed to curb alcohol-fuelled violence in inner city Newcastle through changes to drinking laws, lock out times of licenced venues and a heavier police presence. It aimed to reduce the amount of time people could spend drinking, and try to send them home earlier in the night. It was introduced in New South Wales to prevent repeat occurrences of the one-punch hit, but would the laws have prevented Thomas Kelly’s death that night in Kings Cross? It seems unlikely: Loveridge had been pre-loading on alcohol and had consumed a significant amount before even reaching a licensed venue. Changes to the way alcohol is served and the earlier closing time of 10pm for bottle shops would have had no effect on the early evening drinking that occurred in his friend's house in Quakers Hill. Furthermore, Thomas Kelly, as well as the other victims were attacked between 10pm and 11pm; hours before the 1.30am lockouts and 3am closures.
Six months later at 9pm on New Years Eve 2012, Shaun McNeil punched Daniel Christie in the face, causing him to fall unconscious and hit his head on the pavement. McNeil had drunk eight beers and a wine in a six-hour timeframe. He and his partner Sonya Walker had been on Victoria Road in Kings Cross when, as McNeil claims, the pair were approached by two teenage boys who tried to sell them drugs. McNeil says he become protective of Walker, and punched both boys while telling them he was a mixed martial arts fighter. The two teenagers hid behind Daniel Christie and his brother Peter, who happened to be walking past at the time. McNeil threw a punch at Daniel, who fell and struck his head against the concrete. They were standing in the same spot Loveridge had punched Thomas Kelly. Daniel Christie died in hospital two days later.

Like Loveridge, Shaun McNeil comes from a background of crime, aggression, dysfunction and substance abuse. At the time of the attack on Christie, McNeil was a 25-year-old labourer who spent his spare time bodybuilding in the gym and lived with his partner, Sonya Walker and her two children from a previous relationship.

In court, McNeil’s family claimed that after years of trouble, he was turning his life around and taking responsibility. McNeil has ‘given me many a heart attack’ but he was ‘growing into a wonderful person’ his mother had previously said. ‘He’s a boy, they get into fights, but
he’s never been involved in anything like this,’ she would later say during his trial.

While he was 25 years old and assisting with the care of his partner’s two children, he was still emotionally immature. His heavy partying, flaunted on his Facebook, showed a penchant for the adult pleasures of partying, drug taking and heavy drinking, but an inability to be accountable and take on a more adult role that comes with caring for others.

McNeil had been working as a removalist for Sydney City Removalists until he was sacked. A former colleague from Sydney City Removalists has spoken out about McNeil’s boisterous behaviour, noting times when McNeil had claimed to be a part of the Rhodes Chapter of the Rebels Motorcycle Gang, and had showed off photos of himself with the club patches. McNeil also spoke frequently of taking and selling drugs.

A prolific user of social media, Shaun McNeil created an image of himself as a tough, hardcore partygoer. Over 3000 Facebook photographs depict him with knives, tattoos, in punch-ups, at parties, at festivals and engaging in serious bodybuilding. He even has a couple of selfies after a fight with blood on his face and in another, sections of his shirt have been torn from his torso. ‘Monsters don’t sleep under your bed, they sleep inside your head,’ one update reads, giving an eerie insight into his state of mind.
Like Loveridge, McNeil had a track record of run-ins with the law; however, he never served jail time, a reflection of the leniency of the courts according to the police. His rap sheet includes four assault charges (two of them against women), breaching two apprehended violence orders, breaching a good behaviour bond through excessive drinking, possession of a knife and possession of drugs. While the maximum sentence for common assault and breaching an apprehended violence order is two years behind bars, McNeil remained free.

A year before he attacked Daniel Christie, McNeil and his partner, Sonya Walker, had been at the popular Sydney bar Scary Canary, when an argument erupted between them about Walker’s clothes. Walking back to their Kent Street apartment, McNeil held Walker against a pole and tried to strangle her.

Passers-by intervened, but once they had left, McNeil turned his attentions back to Walker, shoving her into a concrete wall. Police who attended the scene split the pair, telling Walker to go back to the apartment because she was too drunk, while ordering McNeil to stay away for the night. The police were subsequently called back when McNeil ignored their orders. On the second occasion, McNeil strangled a female friend in an RSL club. The attack was caught on CCTV, and when police arrested McNeil at the bar, he was found to be carrying a knife that he claimed was for self-defence.
Dr Julia Quilter, a senior law lecturer at the University of Wollongong, has written about one-punch attacks, alcohol-related violence and the inadequacy of the Newcastle Solution as a treatment for The Conversation as well as academic journals. ‘One of the primary problems with the Newcastle Solution is that it places a great emphasis on just one-punch attacks. Most offenders of one-punch attacks come from violent upbringings, and domestic violence is one of the most serious crimes that does not get the same kind of coverage,’ she tells me over the phone. It is in these fractured upbringings that people like McNeil and Loveridge experience domestic violence, and the behaviour becomes ingrained in their lives. These behaviours and ways of thinking start in the home, before they are taken out onto the streets.

The attack McNeil unleashed on his partner, Walker, is a critical example of how domestic violence is frequently mishandled by the police and the courts. Media reports note that when the police attended after McNeil had assaulted Walker and informed her she was too drunk to make a statement, they did not extend the full range of resources to her and she was sent home, to where McNeil returned to continue the argument.

McNeil was given a 12-month good behaviour bond and told to participate in anger management and grief resolution programs to help him curb his tendency to express his emotions through violence. For the assault on
his female friend in the RSL club, he was charged with common assault which ‘involved excessive consumption of alcohol’ and possession of a knife in public. He failed to appear in court, was fined $150 for having a knife in public and a warrant was issued for his arrest. He was later put on a six month good behaviour bond on the condition that he ‘obey all reasonable directions for counselling, educational development of drug, or drug and alcohol rehabilitation.’ He was later fined $500 for breaching the good behaviour bond, failing to attend probation and telling his probation officer that he was ‘still consuming large amounts of alcohol on a regular basis’.

McNeil’s history through the courts suggests that in our judicial system, there is a greater focus on the management of violence and anger after it has occurred, rather than prevention mechanisms that may stop the violence in the first place.

Across Australia, the number of anger management programs offered to offenders has decreased, according to the study ‘Prison-Based Correctional Offender Rehabilitation Programs’ performed by The Australian Institute of Criminology in 2009. In NSW, the duration of these programs is between 20 and 48 hours and, as such, are low intensity. The programs are generally delivered to groups of 8 to 12 people, while one-on-one programs are offered infrequently. Prison-based anger management classes in NSW are classified as ‘therapeutic’ and offenders need to be assessed before being
allowed entry to the program. The report criticised the system noting that ‘staff training and accreditation continue to be poorly developed for lower intensity programs’. The study also noted that ‘little is known about program effectiveness … Given the short-term timeframe in which these objectives are achieved, it is unclear whether programs afford offenders the opportunity to practice skills.’ Furthermore, ‘Pre- and post-program psychometric measures of change continue to be underdeveloped and not routinely implemented.’ McNeil was ordered to take these same anger management classes. But at no time was he made to confront his drinking behaviour.

After Daniel Christie’s death, there was more violence around Sydney’s CBD. On June 2, 2013, Simon Cramp was king hit by Daniel Angelos, an attack that left him on support machines with bleeding on the brain. Michael McEwen was placed in an induced coma after being attacked in Bondi; he made a recovery a month later. Also in 2013, finance worker Matthew Blackmore was randomly attacked in the CBD by a group of men, and in September, Fady Taiba was punched in the head while working as a security guard outside a nightclub by investment banker, James Longworth. It took 19 days for Taiba to wake from a coma.

Predictably, the spate of violence was sensationalised in our nation’s media, and the issue soon became a political one. Everywhere Premier Barry O’Farrell went – Parliament
House, a school visit, on location at a construction site, attending a conference – he was hammered by the reporters about his government’s strategies to stop the violence. But there was confusion about the approach, and how far-reaching it could be. In both print and on radio, O’Farrell made inaccurate claims about the drop in assaults, only to later adjust the numbers to reflect assaults inside licensed venues had dropped by a third, and that this figure did not include assaults outside of venues and on the streets. The true statistics from the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research revealed a decline of 4.5 per cent in assaults between January 2012 and December 2013. While the rate of violence was decreasing, the drop in assaults was significantly less than the 33.3 per cent the O'Farrell government claimed. At the same time, rates of domestic assault increased by nearly 2 per cent.

Scrutiny continued. Channel 7 organised a media event, following Premier Barry O’Farrell and Police Commissioner, Andrew Scipione, through the streets of Sydney on a Saturday night to capture their reaction to the impact alcohol was having along George Street in the heart of Sydney, while his government continued to debate the problem. Robert McEwen, the father of bashing survivor, Michael McEwen, penned a letter to Barry O’Farrell released through Fairfax media, insisting on state action. The Kelly family spoke forthrightly to the media between court visits.
As the pressure built, Barry O’Farrell campaigned for more ‘locally tailored’ solutions that reflected the model being used in Sydney’s Northern beaches district of Manly. Sobering-up centres, extra police and ID photo scanners at venues that commonly have violent encounters were measures that had been successful in curbing alcohol violence in Manly. These measures were voluntarily practised by the hotels and bars in Manly, and like Newcastle, Manly was targeted as a location for change as it experienced higher levels of alcohol-related violence.

NSW Labor took an opportunistic stand and released their own plan, ‘Drink smart, home safe’, an adaptation of their Newcastle Solution which included measures like 1am lockouts, 3am last drinks and no shots after 10pm in Kings Cross and Sydney CBD, more late night/early morning transport, risk-based licensing structures for bottle shops and hotels, a new independent liquor regulator, undercover operations that target sale of alcohol to underage minors, and the mandated collection and reporting of alcohol sales data.

Leader of State Labor, John Robertson, released a statement on his website claiming ‘O’Farrell’s inaction on alcohol violence is a failure of leadership.’ He accused Barry O’Farrell of having ‘no plan – and no action’ and had failed to effectively implement the Newcastle Solution in January 2014. In another statement in January 2014, Robertson claimed O’Farrell ‘doesn’t have the guts to
implement lockouts’, citing that the Liberal Party ‘are owned by the liquor lobby – lock, stock and barrel’, and challenging O’Farrell to act, ‘The test for Mr O’Farrell is to implement lockouts – if he doesn’t, then it’s proof he is a wholly owned subsidiary of the liquor lobby.’

On the 21st of January, 2014, Barry O'Farrell gave a public announcement outlining the new laws. The legislation would be brought into state parliament that would include new mandatory sentencing laws by February 1, and lockouts and reduced trading hours by the end of April.

The new measures also included 48-hour bans for troublemakers from venues and locales, and there is a current two year freeze on the approvals for new and existing licensed premises. Bar staff found to be breaching responsible service of alcohol requirements can have their competency cards revoked, disqualifying them as bar workers, while licensees can face fines of up to $11,000 and/or imprisonment of up to 12 months, as well as strikes under the Government's Three Strikes disciplinary scheme.

There were also changes made to the judicial procedure with new mandatory minimum and maximum sentences that are dependent on the severity of the crime. ‘The electorate looks to the government for guidance about drinking behaviours and the maintenance of safe drinking spaces,’ Dr McDonald says to me over the phone, ‘Policy needs support from the community to get traction.’
The Newcastle Solution became the ‘Sydney Solution’ within an area encompassing Kings Cross, parts of Darlinghurst and the Sydney CBD. The lockouts and 3am licensing restrictions were applied to venues within a new CBD entertainment precinct stretching from Kings Cross to Cockle Bay, The Rocks to Haymarket and Darlinghurst. O’Farrell also appeared on 7.30 with Leigh Sales, in which he announced, ‘It is no longer acceptable to go out and drink yourself stupid, take illicit substances, start fights, “coward punch” people or engage in other assaults thinking you [will] get away with it.’ The new legislations had bipartisan support and by mid-2014, were in full swing.

With a political debate raging, two young men being laid to rest, and two young men behind bars, commentary was misdirected towards the blight of excessive alcohol consumption in our community. ‘The problem with this argument,’ says Julia Quilter, Associate Professor of Law at the University of Wollongong tells me, ‘is that says there is an assumed relationship between alcohol and violence, and that simply isn’t backed up by the scientific literature … Those who become aggressive when they drink are generally people who already have underlying problems with anger management, and quite often also have substance abuse issues.’

In fact, Australians are drinking less than they did 40 years ago. According to the data released by the Australian
Bureau of Statistics, in 1970 there was an average 13.1 litres of alcohol consumed per person, but in 2012–2013, the average was 9.9 litres of alcohol for every person aged 15 years and over per year. It was the lowest level of consumption recorded in over 15 years.

Sitting opposite me in a bar in the violence hotspot of the CBD are three young men aged around 21. John is studying design and is on a sport scholarship at his university, competing at the national level. Ben is in his second year of engineering, and Mike is about to join the Australian Navy. All three performed well at school and continue to perform well in their studies, hold casual jobs and are well liked by their peer group. They are also drinkers.

On average, these young men drink approximately 3 to 5 standard drinks a week, but can have up to 12 or 15 if they’re attending a larger, all-night party. They usually opt for beer or sometimes on those bigger nights, they have beer and spirits. They prefer to go out and drink socially, rarely drinking alone at home, and they always mix food with alcohol. ‘It’s just better for you to have food in your stomach with alcohol,’ one says. ‘It’s not worth doing that to your body,’ another agrees, ‘It makes you feel so sick if you don’t eat first.’

These young men believe that they have a good understanding of the effects of alcohol and have developed
a more mature relationship with it. ‘It’s different when you’re 18. Alcohol is suddenly available to you and so you don’t always know your limits.’

‘You definitely know when you’ve hit them though!’ jokes one of the others. They are slightly embarrassed by it now, but the boys do admit to the mindset of ‘drinking to get drunk’. The guys say that turning 18 and being allowed to drink coincided with starting a gap year, or starting their first year of university – a time when they felt in control of their own lives, living less restrictive schedules and meeting new people. Alcohol is not only a new experience for experimentation – it also becomes a social lubricant to help young people navigate new situations. ‘I can talk to people without alcohol, but having a drink makes it easier, and when you go to an event where everyone else is drinking, they’re in a completely different headspace so having a drink helps you to interact with people better,’ says one of the guys. The others nod along in agreement.

However, even when they were 18, these boys and their peers were not the wild, aggressive young drinkers the media often portrayed them as. ‘We had a four-way 18th at my house,’ says John, ‘Four of us were turning 18 around the same time so we just decided to do it all together.’ While such a party would probably conjure up images of a damaged house, drunken teenagers passed out in pools of vomit and parents left in despair at the state of the youth, this party was far from it. ‘We hired bouncers to make sure
everyone was safe and there were no gatecrashers and we had parents there who were cooking food for everyone. We bought enough alcohol for everyone to have a couple of drinks without getting smashed. Everyone had a great time and my house was left damage-free.’

As they seek qualifications for their future careers, these men want to make good impressions on their future employers, and they know that social media is a big part of this. ‘When I go to an award nights for my sport, there’s always alcohol being served, but there are also photographers, and all the pictures get put up on Facebook,’ says John. ‘How bad does it look if I’m at a university funded award night for my sport and I’m totally hammered? No one would take me seriously in my sport or my work.’ Mike agrees with a laugh, ‘Well, you know what kind of reputation the defence force has with bad behaviour and social media! I don’t want to get caught up in anything like that. If there are photos of me online, they’re there forever, and I don’t want bad ones to come back and bite me. Best policy is just not to let it happen in the first place.’

For these men, getting their licenses played a large role in shaping their drinking behaviours. Recently being placed on their full NSW licenses, the boys are allowed to have 1 to 2 standards, while still being legally allowed to drive. ‘Knowing I can enjoy one drink and still get myself home safely makes a huge difference. Before I had
my license, I had to rely on family members to pick me up at all hours of the night. Because my family can’t be expected to wait up for me every night I choose to go drinking, I wasn’t able to go out as often as I wanted – maybe once a week instead three or four times. I felt a desire to drink a lot more on those one nights when I didn’t have my license because there was a good chance I wouldn’t be going drinking again until the next week, so I wanted to consume a lot more to make the one night “worth it” for me,’ Ben said. For these young men, their cars are a source of pride. They spend a lot of their time and money keeping their cars in mint condition and as full licensed drivers, prefer to spend their money on their cars instead of booze.

As they work through their degrees and embark on other journeys, time has also become a commodity that these boys don’t want to dedicate solely to drinking. Sport plays an important role in the lives of these young men – especially for John who is currently studying on a sports scholarship. ‘I train most weekends so I can’t afford to be suffering from a hangover or wasting time in the pub when I should be practising on the water,’ he says. ‘I want to perform well in my sport and I’m usually representing my university, and occasionally the country, so I can’t let them down over a couple of beers.’ Being a competitive athlete also has its advantages when it comes to alcohol and physical control. ‘I think because I get my physical
release through training and competition, drinking does not release that physical inhibition in me. It’s more of a relaxant than a physical stimulant,’ he says.

So how does drinking affect this group? ‘We’re usually a happy, relaxed group when we’re drinking,’ they say. While they have witnessed the occasional fight, their general experience of drinking in licensed venues has been positive. I ask them about how alcohol impacts on their views of themselves as men and their expression of masculinity. They look slightly perplexed. ‘Ah, I’ve never really considered that,’ one says while the others shrug in agreement. ‘For us, alcohol can help create that party mood – but I have seen other guys who become more obnoxious and arrogant when they drink. They appear to develop a sense of entitlement, but it’s usually no big deal, they just like to talk themselves up a bit.’ They conclude that some people get that extra confidence boost which can make them a little more self-assured and cocky, but it’s usually harmless and not just specific to men.

I ask them about their experiences growing up ‘male’ and the role that alcohol played in forming their male identity. Again, it appears to be something they haven’t really considered. ‘I find that the guys who are struggling with their masculinity are usually the ones who are underachievers. They don’t have a great job or an active hobby or something to look forward to each day. They want to be more successful and be performing better, but
they’re not, and when they drink, their insecurities start to show and they can’t internalise them.’

Between January 2013 and December 2013 in the Kings Cross and Sydney CBD, the number of alcohol-related assaults was 420.6 per 100,000 people. The number of non-alcohol-related assaults was 313.1 per 100,000 people. Of course, alcohol is a contributing factor in many assault cases, but the discrepancies between alcohol-fuelled and non-alcohol-fuelled assaults demonstrates that the relationship between alcohol and violence is not as strong as the government has said. As David Rolph, Associate Professor of Law at Sydney University said, ‘You need to assess what the problem is – and if you act with haste and pass legislation, you risk not dealing with the real problem.’

So had the government got it wrong? It seemed that by enforcing lockouts and early closures for all patrons, many of whom are not violent, antisocial or aggressive, the message that there is an inherent link between alcohol and aggression is reinforced, and that this link applies to all drinkers.

When examining the history of Kieran Loveridge and Shane McNeil, I can’t help thinking that the government, like the media, have missed a crucial point. The causes of alcohol-fuelled violence appear to in fact stem from their history of dysfunction, poor education, juvenile delinquency and substance abuse experienced by an individual.
‘The primary findings the judges have made in the trials of these cases are two things,’ Dr Quilter says to me, ‘first, the offender has an abuse relationship with alcohol and drugs. They tend to binge drink and use recreational drugs. The second thing is, they have a history of mismanaged anger issues.’

This anger, is what colours their world, and it will always find an outlet. The heavy focus on one-punch hits by the media has relegated the issue of domestic violence to the background. Implying that private violence is a lesser sin than public violence. McNeil’s attack on his partner has been used only as background to buttress the public outrage over his very public attack on Daniel Christie.

Dr Quilter’s argument highlights a disturbing trend in the exposure and management of serious crime in our social and judicial systems. The public is baying for judgement, especially of people who have been vilified in the media as dangerous criminals, and yet we struggle to respond to the larger social problems that encourage some people to become violent. Though the number of alcohol-related assaults have been decreasing, domestic violence has continued to rise. In 2013, there were 28,291 domestic assaults recorded, and one woman each week dies at the hands of her partner or ex-partner. If we want to see Shaun McNeil serve time for his assault on Daniel Christie, why are we not equally as desperate to see him serve time for
assaulting his partner Sonya Walker and for other men in violent relationships to be brought to justice?

The Newcastle Solution was put in place for inner Newcastle venues after a Liquor Administration Board Decision to reduce alcohol-related anti-social behaviour in 2008. The Newcastle 3.30am closure measures, combined with 1.30am lockouts, resulted in a 37 per cent drop in assaults, according statements in a January 2014 media release from one of Australia’s leading researchers on alcohol and violence, Professor Kypros Kypri from the University of Newcastle's School of Medicine and Public Health. ‘Certainly the number of hours in which premises remain open is associated with increased harm,’ he writes in the report. The Newcastle Solution proved to be a successful mechanism for crowd control and curbing anti-social behaviour in Newcastle, and when implemented in Sydney, it also had a positive effect on reducing alcohol-fuelled assaults.

The irony, however, is that the solution legislated specifically to target one-punch assaults, has not reduced them. But it has reduced minor assaults and the number of non-fatal hospital admissions. ‘At this point, we are cautiously pleased,’ David Faktor tentatively tells me. As the Public Affairs Manager at St Vincent’s Hospital, which is located at the epicentre of the alcohol-fuelled violence, he is dealing with the statistics everyday. In 2012 there were 529 per 100,000 cases of alcohol-related violence, compared with 421 a year later.
Problematically, pre-loading and binge drinking have not been factored into the Newcastle Solution. If anything, early closures are likely to encourage increased levels of pre-loading and binge drinking. While liquor outlets state-wide are being forced to shut at 10pm, pre-loading is an activity that starts much earlier in the night and generally in the home when bottle shops are still open. Friends also gather at each other’s houses to pre-drink, often stocking up on alcohol in the days preceding. Early closures of bottle shops and licensed venues are only likely to encourage people to pre-load, trying to fit in as many drinks as possible before leaving the house, as Loveridge demonstrated.

‘Everyone goes out later at night, we’re not interested in hitting the bars until 11pm, midnight,’ my friend Rachel tells me when I ask about her drinking habits, ‘but all the early closures really limit the amount of time we can spend out, so of course we drink before hand. That way we don’t have to worry about spending the few hours we have waiting at the bar instead of enjoying the night.’ Another friend, Mike, agrees, ‘It’s almost like a race, – you know everything is going to close early and you want to have a great night, so you try to compact it all and have as many drinks as possible at home where you know they're available.’

However, the most glaring shortcoming of the Newcastle Solution, as Dr Quilter points out, is that it is not preventative. It deals with trying to manage alcohol-related violence at the point where people are drunk in bars and
fighting on the streets. ‘Effective management of this issue really needs to start at the beginning,’ she says. Psychologist Jo Lamble agrees, ‘It needs to start at school when children are shaping their identities and understanding of the world.’

The importance of education is a discriminating factor between Kieran Loveridge and Shaun McNeil, and their peer group. After multiple court appearances as a juvenile, there appears to be no records of active intervention and assistance given to Loveridge. A lack of communication between the courts, his school, the authorities and his family have seen Loveridge slip through the cracks of society, and despite his last ditched attempts to rehabilitate himself, he had not been given the resources or the mechanisms by which to extract himself from his life of crime and anger.

So where does the responsibility lie? How does our society create Kieran Loveridge and Shaun McNeil? It seems apparent to me that preventative measures need to start at the beginning, right at the root of the problem. For many, this process starts during their time at school. Speaking with teachers and representatives from the educational sector, problematic students who come from troubled backgrounds are a constant struggle. Australian schools have strict protocols in place and are in constant communication with the Department of Community Services (DOCS) and the police. All teachers are mandatory reporters and required by law to report any
instances of violence, substance abuse, self-harm or reports of trauma and violence in the home.

While the O’Farrell government was investing funding into implementing the Newcastle Solution, schools and refuges that are working with children at the ground level are having their funding cut. The teachers at disadvantaged schools tell stories of students who carry weapons, are violent towards staff and fellow students, as well as themselves, and children finishing the school day only to go home to a household of substance abuse. The cycle of dysfunction is hard to break.

During his time as Premier, the Gonski Review of the education system stated that an investment of 6.5 billion dollars was needed to maintain effective functioning of Australian schools. In October 2012, a few months after Thomas Kelly died, the O’Farrell government slashed 1.7 billion dollars of funding from the NSW education system. Public schools, often the hardest hit, lost 201 million dollars from their budget.

Current NSW Premier, Mike Baird, announced in May 2014, that education will be cut by a further 240 million dollars over four years. While the system is being drained of resources, the Newcastle Solution has been used as a band-aid to create the illusion of doing something rather than addressing issues of deprivation, social inequality and abuse. Many students spend their school years in facilities that are disadvantaged and not always fully equipped, and
they do not become perpetrators of violence like Kieran Loveridge and Shaun McNeil. Even in schools that are limited by funding, the students who are processed as being at risk, are given case files with the Department of Education, with the Department of Community Services and with the police. Education is one part, and in conjunction with a range of other social factors, needs to be the focus of policy and funding.

On November 4, 2013, Kieran Loveridge was sentenced to four years gaol for the attack on Thomas Kelly. Kelly’s family were outraged at the minimal sentence and expressed their shock to the media waiting outside. Mrs Kelly said outside the courts that any sentence ‘would never have been enough, but four years? It’s a joke, a joke, an absolute joke and we are horrified.’ The police initially charged Loveridge with murder, a charge that carries a lengthier sentence; however, he was convicted of manslaughter, receiving a reduced sentence. Watching the Kelly family struggle to come to terms with the case on the nightly news left me stunned. Why did Loveridge receive, as the media argued, such a lenient sentence, especially considering his past of violent acts and disobedience?

‘When dealing with young offenders, the judicial system is more focused on rehabilitation and reintegrating the person back into society as a functioning person,’ explains Thomas Spohr, president of the Young Lawyers Association.
of NSW. The law, he continues, is inclined to give younger offenders the benefit of the doubt, with the hope that there is still time for juveniles to reform. Loveridge’s criminal past includes multiple court visits for assaults and violence, in which he received good behaviour bonds and probation. On November 14, 2013, Loveridge’s sentence was increased from four to nearly 14 years, with a minimum sentence of 10 years and two months, after the Director of Public Prosecutions successfully appealed the original conviction.

Like Loveridge, McNeil had never been gaoled before his attack on Daniel Christie; however, as an older criminal, his criminal record involved more serious punishments, like a suspended sentence. ‘It’s important to recognise that a suspended sentence is a gaol sentence, and not just a slap on the wrist,’ Thomas Spohr muses. A suspended sentence is commonly used to alleviate the strain on the prison system and prevent overcrowding. However, a suspended sentence comes with conditions; if an offender breaks the law during their suspended sentence, the original jail term is immediately imposed, along with any additional charges. Through the application of probation, good behaviour bonds and suspended sentences, the court systems were not neglecting the severity of the previous crimes committed by Kieran Loveridge and Shaun McNeil, rather, the judicial system was weighing up the young age of both offenders, their potential for rehabilitation, the pressures their incarceration would place on the prison system and the costs involved.
The Young Lawyers Association of NSW is currently participating in a government enquiry investigating the impact of the Newcastle Solution on Sydney. ‘There are really two options that we’ve been forced to decide between,’ says Thomas Spohr. ‘Mandatory minimum sentences, and liquor licensing legislation.’ Liquor licensing legislation is the more expensive option and would require greater funding. It involves making changes to the way alcohol is served, distributed and managed. They are less likely to inhibit the movements of patrons and the hours in which licensed venues operate. The responsibility to change the behaviours and trends around alcohol is therefore placed on the venues and businesses that sell alcohol, rather than restricting the people who attend licensed premises.

As well as the cost, the challenge is that liquor licensing law is much harder to police and maintain. A 2003 report by the National Drug Law Enforcement Research Fund noted that civil law suits are rarely used against licensees and it is operationally challenging for the police to successfully prosecute as they would need to monitor all licensed venues and shops. The types of licensed premises in Australia are diverse, from bottle shops and bars, to restaurants, hotels and even sporting arenas. One blanket policy would not be applicable to all locations, making it less attractive to the NSW government when compared to the use of lockouts, early venue closures and mandatory minimum sentences. Locking patrons out of venues
within a small geographical area and applying minimum gaol terms to offenders is much simpler than watching the trading practices of a large number of businesses.

While NSW has been working with the new legislations, Western Australia and the Northern Territory have been considering repealing their laws, which use similar methods to target alcohol violence. WA brought in measures to combat antisocial, alcohol-fuelled violence in 2008 in response to pleas for justice from the families of victims of alcohol-related violence.

Previously, WA law had allowed offenders to be acquitted on charges of manslaughter because it could not be proved that a one-punch death was reasonably foreseeable when the assault occurred. The new WA laws focus on a maximum prison term of 10 years for offenders who cause one-punch deaths, to be applied at a judge’s discretion. Six years later, WA is considering repealing the laws. While the option for a 10-year sentence is available, it has hardly been imposed. Since 2008, 12 people have been charged in WA with the one-punch law, the majority of them receiving a four-year sentence.

Similar legislation was passed in November 2012 in the NT, in which an offender who causes the death of a person by committing a violent act became liable to a maximum penalty of 16 years imprisonment. This legislation was also implemented to ‘close the gap’ between a murder charge, which was difficult to prove in a drunken one-punch hit
scenario, and a manslaughter charge, which the media and wider community felt was too lenient.

Like NSW, the governments of WA and the NT experienced mounting pressure from the media and the public to put stronger laws in place to combat alcohol-related violence; however, attitudes have changed as the charges are rarely imposed, and cases of alcohol-fuelled assault continue to occur in both the NT and WA. Steve Robinson, the father of one-punch victim, Leon Robinson in WA, a once vocal supporter of the new laws, has since publicly stated his recent lack of support for the laws because they are not imposed by the system.

Along with the lockouts and early closures, the O’Farrell government added two new offences to the NSW Crimes Act. The first: assault causing death, the second: an aggravated version of assault causing death in which the offender is under the influence of alcohol at the time of the crime. A mandatory minimum sentence was attached to the second offence. NSW has taken the harshest stance on mandatory minimum sentences in relation to one-punch hits, with the minimum sentence being eight years, and the maximum sentence 25 years. Mandatory minimum sentences enforce a set punishment for a crime, regardless of the circumstances. ‘The challenges faced by our society with mandatory minimum sentences, is that they cause a huge backlog in our courts,’ says Thomas Spohr, ‘We’ve
had mandatory minimums for other types of crimes, and they’ve since been scrapped because they leave courts dealing with up to 12 months of backlogged cases.’ And mandatory sentences do not account for the grey areas of a case. It appeared the judge presiding over Loveridge's first trial, Justice Campbell, was trying to account for the range of mitigating factors that led to Kieran Loveridge hitting Thomas Kelly on a night out in Kings Cross, noting ‘I have borne in mind the offender’s relative social disadvantage and the difficulties of his upbringing. I have also taken into account the evidence of his efforts to overcome those disadvantages through education, training and employment. His offending has interrupted those efforts.’

On appeal, Justices Bathurst, Johnson and Hulme, noted that ‘the Respondent in this case was not a first offender. Despite his relative youth, he had prior offences of violence’, which they took into consideration as indicative of his future behaviour, referencing how Loveridge had not reformed after his juvenile crimes.

The police, hospitals and governments are currently positive about the results of the Newcastle Solution – assault rates are down, hospital admissions for assaults have declined and young people are drinking less. However, as many of these authorities have noted, the summer season may entice more people onto the streets of Sydney, bringing about a change to this current trend. During the September
enquiry into the laws, Dr Don Weatherburn, Head of the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research stated that the government needs to wait to have a proper assessment of the success of the new laws. Furthermore, he said the laws were proving to have a greater effect inside licensed venues; there was no notable change to the behaviours of people out on the streets.

While the Newcastle Solution has seen a reduction in alcohol-related violence, it is not an answer to the systemic social problems that cause angry young men to wander the streets, intent on damage. For perpetrators like Kieran Loveridge and Shaun McNeil, no number of early closures, lockouts or mandatory minimum sentences would have prevented them from turning up in Kings Cross, angry, pumped full of alcohol, and looking for a fight.

The Newcastle Solution needs to be developed, with policy expanding to address the root causes of alcohol violence – tackling the issues of family dysfunction, childhood exposure to alcohol abuse, gaps in education, the culture of pre-loading and issues of anger and aggression. As Dr Quilter explains, preventative action is the best way for managing these cases of violence. The lockouts and early closing times of venues and bottle shops have resulted in a rise in the number of people attending nighttime venues outside Kings Cross, and with this migration of partygoers, comes the potential for the problem of alcohol-related violence to move into
the non-legislated areas. These measures also have the potential to increase the already alarming pre-loading and binge drinking cultures of young Australians, as they attempt to consume as much alcohol as possible before attending the restricted venues.

The Newcastle Solution may have gone some way to appeasing the public concern surrounding one-punch hits, but there are no policies offering strategies to deal with the more insidious and difficult challenges of social dysfunction that lead to this kind of violence in the first place. There are no set rules for combating social violence, though preventative action that targets young people long before they are able to drink and build powerful bodies they are unable to control is a good start.

For now, a calm has spread across Sydney. The media, having successfully campaigned for action, has moved on to other stories, like homegrown terrorism and the national budget. The politicians have heralded the success of the Newcastle Solution in dropping the rates of assault and alcohol consumption. But beneath the surface, anger continues to burn.

As long as we refuse to address this deep anger, we run the risk of seeing another young man on a collision course with another unsuspecting victim. And we may wonder: what kind of protection will the Newcastle Solution offer them?
In the two years since these infamous attacks, the debate surrounding the legislative measures has continued. In Kings Cross, foot traffic has dropped 84 per cent and as of September 2014, 35 businesses closed their doors. Redevelopment plans have been put into play with developers looking to turn the hotels and establishments into swanky new apartment blocks. Even the more popular venues, like World Bar, have been sold and negotiations for repurposing the space have begun. Meanwhile, Kieran Loveridge has returned to court on appeal, his legal team looking to have his sentence reduced. They argue that the circumstances of his background were not properly considered, and as Loveridge's lawyer, Philip Boulten SC pointed out in court, there has not been a prevalence of one-punch deaths by young offenders within the community that has required a message of deterrence to be sent by the judiciary. The courts disagreed and Loveridge was sentenced to thirteen years and eight months in jail.

Just three months later in October, a 21 year-old man was placed into an induced coma after being the victim of a drunken one-punch hit outside a fast food venue in Bondi.

Alexandra Potter graduated from the UNSW with a degree in Media and Politics. In 2011, she undertook an internship with the Justice and Police Museum as a writer, conducting research and writing exhibition content.