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The Party Bus Problem

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Mr MORRIS (Mornington) — I am pleased to support some legislation which will effectively regulate the party buses. I am delighted to support it, because this is the second time around.

The Liquor Control Reform Amendment Bill of 2007 did not quite cut the mustard in terms of party buses. We had the spectacle of the minister himself moving amendment 14 from the Council to cut out clause 22 of the bill, which sought to regulate party buses.

That occurred because there were genuine concerns from clubs across the state — and rightly so. Had the bill passed into law, members of every Probus club, Rotary club, Inner Wheel club, Country Women's Association, bowling club, croquet club and all those sorts of clubs who decided to come into the city for a theatre night and have a glass of champagne on the bus on the way in may well have found themselves on the wrong side of the law.

Clearly that was not going to work. Those sorts of clubs are generally made up of good and responsible citizens. They are certainly not responsible for the plague of drunkenness and alcohol-fuelled violence we have seen across the state, they are certainly not responsible for the bashings, kickings and beatings we are seeing far too often on Melbourne's streets and indeed on the streets of towns across the state. They are not responsible for any of that, but they were fairly and squarely in the frame when it came to that bill.

This time the government has gotten slightly closer to the mark and we have legislation before us that is reasonable. It is worth saying that when the minister moved the amendment that took clause 22 out of the original bill he foreshadowed revisiting the matter. He indicated that the director of liquor licensing, in his words, was very keen to have additional powers to deal with the problem. It is just a shame that it has taken more than two years to get to there.

The other point I would make is that this bill bears a remarkable resemblance to the propositions put forward by the opposition in 2007. I would also say it appears to have had considerable input from the director of liquor licensing, because it is a far more sensible and practical approach than the minister's first effort.

It is certainly a very urgent piece of legislation. Party buses have been a significant problem on the peninsula for some years; more, I must say, in the Frankston portion of the peninsula than in Mornington and points south, but of course they do attract custom from those parts of the world. It is anecdotal evidence, I know, but it has

frequently been suggested to me that these buses provide a convenient platform for pre-loading.

If anybody does not know what pre-loading is, it is the habit of getting absolutely smashed before you go into a club — so I am told, I should say! I was going to go on to say, and I probably should make the point, that I am told this is because of the cost of drinks in nightclubs. While I have been into nightclubs recently on committee duties, it is many years since I bought a drink at a nightclub.

Party buses have also become a convenient platform for under-18s to get a few drinks into them before they have a night out. They have certainly been associated with a series of ugly incidents. I have had a number of concerned parents contact me or come into the office to talk about unsavoury incidents of kids getting beaten up or even being dumped on street corners in order to avoid further friction — often kids who had absolutely no connection with problems on the bus.

These buses are a problem.

This mechanism is both simple and practical. Basically it is the insertion of an extra provision — proposed section 113A — a sensible definition, a sensible set of rules with the 8.00 p.m. to 5.00 a.m. rule and the application of designated areas picking up the central business district, Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo, Traralgon, Warrnambool and the more active metropolitan centres.

In this form this bill is certainly worthy of support, and I think it will go some way towards placing a regulatory framework around these operations so that when things get out of hand they can be dealt with and dealt with effectively.