

Sydney's Inner-West micro-brewery tasting bars and development approvals, fact-based or not? An appraisal of documents submitted to Council for development approval

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Introduction and Aims: High alcohol outlet density is associated with increased alcohol-related harms. Micro-brewery tasting bars have proliferated in Sydney's Inner-West Local Government Area, where outlet density is high. The Inner-West Council are responsible for development approvals. We aimed to review development application (DA) documents submitted to the Inner-West Council for micro-brewery tasting bar and assessed the social and environmental impact statements for reference to alcohol-related harms.

Design and Methods: DAs for micro-brewery tasting bar licences submitted to Inner-West Council between January 2010 and May 2020 were reviewed. Social Impact and Environmental Effect Statements were qualitatively appraised against a content framework, noting the presence or absence of local alcohol-related social, crime and health data and peer-reviewed published evidence.

Results: Nineteen DAs were submitted on behalf of nine micro-breweries (mean 2.1 DAs per micro-brewery). All applications were approved by the Inner-West Council. All applicants submitted an Environmental Effect Statement, only two submitted separate Social Impact Statements. Six applicants briefly referred to social impact in the submitted Management Plan. All applicants stated that the proposed social and environmental impact as minimal and claimed community amenity would be positively affected. Four applications requested permission to increase patron numbers and/or extended operating hours.

Discussions and Conclusions: Applicants failed to comment on the potential harm of increased alcohol outlet density, expressing a view that micro-brewery tasting bars would exert a positive effect on the area. Such claims were neither evidence-based nor challenged by Council and all applications were approved.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Findings highlight Council's lack of consideration of potential alcohol-related public health harms.

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