



Christine Fyffe M.P.

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Liberal MPs Demand More Flexibility

Changes brought in last year under the *Liquor Control Reform Act (Licensing) Bill* have done little other than increase charges while creating more paperwork and headaches for small business owners in the Yarra Valley according to Shadow Minister for Consumer Affairs Michael O'Brien and Evelyn MP Christine Fyffe.

Faced with a 130 per cent increase in their liquor license bill, Peter and Anne Marie Manders of the Warratina Lavender Farm applied for a waiver/reduction, only to be advised by the Director of Liquor Licensing that because their license fee represented less than one per cent of their turnover, they were ineligible.

As a result of the hefty fee increase the Manders' are not renewing their liquor license.

"It is clear that the lack of flexibility and foresight on the part of the State Government has produced this one size fits all system which clearly does not fit all," Mr O'Brien said.

"Small speciality businesses throughout the Yarra Valley cater for families and couples who are looking for a calm and pleasant day out with a glass of wine, not a drunken alcohol binge," Mrs Fyffe said.

Chris Hellenen, owner of Les Chésselles at Mont De Lancey is experiencing similar frustrations.

Ms Hellenen applied to the Director of Liquor Licensing for a fee waiver but was rejected even though she sells minimal alcohol to customers at her restaurant.

Adding insult to injury, Ms Hellenen recently discovered that she met the criteria for the cheaper Restaurant and Café liquor license (\$395) as opposed to the General On Premises license which costs \$795 annually. Rather than reimburse Ms Hellenen, the Department of Justice has informed her that if she wanted to change to a Restaurant and Café license it would be an additional cost of \$170 on top of the \$395 application fee.

"I honestly don't think this Government has any idea how many afternoon teas or products have to be sold by our local businesses in order to come up with \$170 to pay the cost of transferring to another type of license - let alone having to forgo the \$400 that the Director of Liquor Licensing refuses to reimburse," Mrs Fyffe said.

"Labor has again shown they are more interested in revenue raising than helping struggling small businesses," Mr O'Brien said.