



# State accused of going soft on grog violence

**Alison Sandy**

PREMIER Anna Bligh has been accused of going soft on booze-fuelled violence after refusing to wind back pub and club trading hours.

The initiative was the key plank of a parliamentary inquiry into the issue, launched following *The Courier-Mail's* Punch Drunk investigation.

It had widespread support from front-line workers, fed up dealing with constant bloodshed every Friday and Saturday night.

But licensees have welcomed the State Government announcement of a two-year trial to ban problem patrons, make free water mandatory and boost police numbers during peak times as part of pilot projects at Townsville, Gold Coast and Fortitude Valley entertainment precincts.

The Government also proposed better supervised taxi zones and more support services.

Ms Bligh said the trial would be evaluated and if it didn't work, trading hours would be revisited.

"We'll have a really good look at it, but if it doesn't work, we



won't hesitate to move on those hours," she said.

The Queensland Police Union said the funding wasn't enough and expecting an already "overstretched" workforce to work overtime wouldn't work.

"If Anna Bligh was fair dinkum about reducing alcohol-fuelled violence, she would have reduced hotel hours and increased police numbers by adding additional new police, not asking existing police to work harder," Police Union president Ian Leavers said.

"Other than asking hotels to give out free glasses of water, there is not one single new initiative."

The State Government will spend \$4.2 million on the plan, but will then look to licensees to shoulder much of the cost in subsequent years.

The Queensland Hotels Association said licensees would be prepared to do that.

"This is representative of a government that is listening to both industry and the community and we think these measures will be effective," chief executive Justin O'Connor said.

"It's not about money ... \$4 million a year for extra policing for extra security measures is a small amount.

"I'm sure if these measures work, which we're confident that they will, it won't devolve into an issue of who's going to pick up that relatively small amount of money."

Opposition Leader John-Paul Langbroek said the Government had proposed a Band-Aid solution to the issues.

Mr Langbroek, whose own electorate of Surfers Paradise contains one of Australia's rowdiest nightclub strips, said he was undecided on the merits of earlier closing times for licensed venues.

A moratorium on extended trading hours at suburban venues will remain until 2013.