

# **Why you should vote “Yes” for extended weeknight shopping hours**

This referendum question is about how the choice and convenience of extended weeknight shopping hours will benefit the community. The community benefits when a majority of people in the community are better off – be it through an improved economy, more jobs, improvements to their lifestyle or having our lifestyle made easier.

The proposal to allow weeknight shopping is a progressive, forward looking approach to meeting the needs of modern families. It is about building a better future and making Western Australia a better place to live.

## **Choice and convenience for shoppers**

The community benefits from more choice in where and when to shop at a time that is convenient to everyone. More choice and convenience means that a wider range of goods at more competitive prices will be available at a time convenient to busy people, at the same time creating increased employment opportunities for our young people and others in the community.

Our society is changing and there is a demand for extended shopping hours from busy families where both parents work, through to shift workers like nurses who would just like the convenience and choice that extended shopping hours would bring.

## **Balancing work and family**

Balancing work and family commitments is a major challenge for families. This is particularly so for working women with families. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics the proportion of families with both parents working has now increased to 57.5%. The employment rate for women aged 15-64 is about 64% and has grown substantially over the past two decades. For mothers with children under five years old, the employment rate is now 45%. These are social trends that any policy on shopping hours should take into account.

Many families would prefer to have the option to do their shopping, at the retail outlet of their choice, with the added convenience of being able to do so after 6.00pm. Western Australia's retail trading hours regulations, as they apply to the Perth metropolitan region, unfairly discriminate between retailers by forcing general retail shops and larger outlets to close at 6.00pm but allow other specialty outlets, some small businesses and those located in designated tourism precincts to open later.

More choice and convenience means that busy, cash strapped families can choose where to shop in order to better manage their weekly budget.

## **Lower prices**

The community pays a cost penalty as a direct result of the current shopping hours restrictions. According to the Australian Consumers Association, smaller food and grocery stores which remain open on weeknights were generally 4% more expensive than average whilst the major supermarkets that are prevented from opening extended hours were up to 4% cheaper than average.

There is no evidence to suggest that extending shopping hours causes retail prices to rise.

It is more likely that retail prices, as demonstrated by the Choice survey, are higher in Perth than in other markets because the shopping hours law here reduces competition by denying all retailers the opportunity to trade at the same time as their competitors.

## **More jobs and employment opportunities**

More choice and convenience will mean increased employment. The evidence from elsewhere in Australia shows that retail employment usually increases after extended shopping hours are introduced. Since shopping hours were extended in Tasmania in December 2002, Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data shows that total employment in the Tasmanian retail trade industry has increased by 2.5%.

Allowing all retailers the option of staying open later on weeknights, where they choose to, will increase the number of hours available to part-time and casual employees.

This is particularly beneficial to students and others with a preference or need for part-time work.

There is no reputable evidence to demonstrate that small business is damaged by giving the community greater choice and convenience in shopping hours. In fact the latest edition of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) publication, *Small Business in Australia*, demonstrates that there has not been any significant decline in the number of small retail businesses in New South Wales and Victoria following the introduction of more consumer friendly shopping hours.

The number of small retail businesses in New South Wales increased by an average of 237 a year over the five year period to 2000-01 whilst in Victoria small retailer numbers increased by 162 each year.

The number of retailers relative to population has remained constant over the past 25 years despite the progressive expansion of shopping hours across the country. ABS data shows that the number of small retailers continued to grow by an annual rate of 2.1% over the period 1983-2001.

Opponents of extended shopping hours argue that more hours will result in a loss of market share by smaller retailers. Again, evidence from other States does not support this. For example, the independent store chain IGA has increased its market share in Victoria by 36% between 2000 and 2003.

There is no reason to expect that the experience of extending shopping hours in the Perth metropolitan region would be any different to the rest of Australia.

No retailers will be forced to open on Sundays or at anytime when they do not wish to be open. Retailers will open where it is in their interest to do so and they wish to meet the demands of their customers. Western Australia's laws protect retailers from being forced to open at particular times.

### **Better customer service**

More convenient hours means that shopping will be a less stressful experience for the community in not having to meet the six o'clock curfew, having more time to consider what to buy, shorter checkout queues and more available parking spots thanks to a lower concentration of people shopping at peak times.

More choice and convenience will still allow you to shop at retailers who are now open after hours but will also allow you to shop in stores that can't open because of restricted shopping hours. Giving the community the choice and convenience of being able to shop after 6.00pm on weeknights will not damage the important small business sector, rather it will provide increased opportunities for many small businesses to better meet the needs of their customers. Currently, small business franchisees located in shopping centres and who offer a wide range of value added and home meal replacement products are unfairly locked out of the market after 6.00pm when the centre closes.

When given the opportunity to shop at all retailers who choose to open after normal business hours, consumers will decide for themselves. The only certain thing is that consumers will continue to shop where prices, product, service and location suit them best.

### **Growth in tourism**

Tourism is an important industry for Australia. It brings in over \$70 billion a year, \$51 billion from domestic tourism and \$21 billion from international tourists. 14,000 (26%) of all retail jobs are in the tourism sector. One noticeable trend in

recent years is that “shopping for pleasure” has become an important activity for both domestic and international visitors.

The Western Australian Tourism Commission has called for trading hours reforms in Western Australia as it believes this will better meet the requirements of visitors to the State. Longer opening hours, both on weeknights and Sundays, will improve Perth’s attractiveness as a tourism destination and provide further economic benefits. In Western Australia it is estimated that seven million tourists (local, interstate and international) spend about \$4 billion on their trips to and within Western Australia.

Extended weeknight shopping hours will increase the choice for people who need to shop after business hours, increase the range of products available and ensure that consumers can get the best value for money. Extended weeknight trading hours will generate more jobs and improve Perth’s attractiveness as a destination for domestic and international visitors.

### **A better future for Western Australia**

The community benefits from greater choice and convenience and more competition and jobs.

A Gallop Labor Government is committed to implementing the shopping hours decided by the people at this referendum.

If you, your family and friends want or need the freedom to shop at the outlet of your choice on a weeknight, you must vote YES in the referendum.

**Only a YES vote to both referendum questions will provide the most benefit to our community.**