

Why you should vote “Yes” for Sunday shopping

This referendum question is about how the choice and convenience of Sunday shopping 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 Sunday 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.

Consumers who want or need to shop on a Sunday at a general retail shop, larger supermarket or department store, in a location convenient to where they live, are prevented from doing so by the restrictions. This denies them choice. More convenience and choice means that in many cases retailers and major shopping centres closer to where you live will be open on Sundays.

For many people, shopping is an important recreational and pleasurable activity. Our shopping centres are often the hubs of our communities, where people meet to relax and socialise. Allowing these facilities to open will better meet both the social and the shopping needs of our community.

Many family members have work, sporting or other commitments on Saturdays and the option of Sunday shopping will provide more choice and convenience for families and others in the community, who have difficulty fitting shopping into their busy schedules. Those who wish to keep Sunday as a time for the family or the pursuit of other leisure, social or religious activities will still be able to choose to do so.

Allowing Sunday shopping acknowledges the reality of the modern world we live in, with continually changing work patterns and the increasing numbers of busy, two income families.

There is no evidence that extending shopping hours will adversely impact community participation in sporting activities. The 1994 statutory review of the Retail Trading Hours Act, using data from the WA Ministry of Sport and

Recreation, found that sport participation rates had actually increased following the introduction of Saturday afternoon trading. It was found that the level of registered sports participation in Western Australia had grown from 226 persons per 1000 in 1984 to 372 persons per 1000 in 1993, five years after the extension of Saturday afternoon shopping.

More jobs and employment opportunities

Extending Sunday shopping hours will bring greater choice and convenience to the thousands of young West Australians who look to the retail sector for part-time and casual employment opportunities. This includes people who are still at school, at university and/or are actively involved in sporting activities or other recreational pursuits.

Sunday shopping will make Perth more attractive to tourists. Tourism is a major driver of our economy. Tourism creates thousands of jobs, provides facilities and contributes to our lifestyle.

Extending Sunday shopping hours will bring significant community benefits through the creation of part-time jobs for those whose lifestyle or family responsibilities mean they cannot work normal hours, as well as for young people seeking their first work experience and older workers using part-time employment as a transition to retirement. Woolworths Ltd estimates that it would employ over 1000 additional employees and Coles Myer Ltd another 600 full time equivalent jobs if their businesses were able to open on weeknights and Sundays in the Perth metropolitan region.

The economic benefit to the community from an increase in employment opportunities is not limited to more jobs in retail. Evidence from the rest of Australia and overseas shows that extended shopping hours and the increased economic activity that accompanies it leads to more jobs across the economy.

There is no evidence that this increase in jobs will be offset by a decline in the number of people employed by the small businesses currently trading seven days a week. 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%.

In other States where shopping hours have been extended, ABS data shows that the number of people employed by small retail businesses in New South Wales increased by an average of 1.5 per cent each year over the five years to 2000-01, while in Victoria employment by small retailers increased by an average of 3.4 per cent per year. Nationally, employment by small retailers increased by an average of 1.9 percent each year over the five years to 2000-01.

Evidence from other States indicates that 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 the experience of Sunday trading in the Perth metropolitan region to be any different to the rest of Australia.

A stronger economy

More convenient shopping hours and more choice of goods and outlets will make all retailers better able to compete for disposable income. It is sometimes wrongly argued that consumers only have so much disposable income to spend, and that extending retail trading hours will simply mean that the same amount of money is spent but over a longer period.

Other parts of Australia that have implemented extended shopping hours have experienced higher retail sales. Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows that retail sales growth in Western Australia has lagged behind the rest of Australia in recent years despite the state's booming economy and population growth.

Western Australian retail turnover has increased by an average of 5.8 per cent each year over the past five years. This is the lowest rate of growth of all states and well below the national average growth rate of 6.9 per cent.

A fairer marketplace

At the same time as the current Sunday shopping restrictions deny choice and convenience to the broader community so do they unfairly discriminate between retailers.

Western Australia's retail trading hours regulations, as they apply to the Perth metropolitan region, unfairly discriminate between retailers. The laws prevent general retail shops and larger outlets from opening on a Sunday, unless located in either of the Perth CBD or Fremantle tourism precincts, but allow some small businesses and larger specialty outlets, such as hardware stores, garden nurseries, pharmacies and bookstores, to open seven days a week.

As shop owners pay rent seven days a week, why shouldn't they be given the choice as to whether they can open weeknights and Sundays? It's their business and livelihood.

It is unfair that some businesses can trade whilst others are forced to remain shut.

It is unfair that a retailer can open in the Perth or Fremantle central business districts whilst a Harvey Norman franchisee in Osborne Park cannot.

It is unfair that a large hardware store can open anywhere in the Perth metropolitan region whilst a variety store selling the same products cannot.

It is unfair that a retailer with three or less outlets can apply to open but one with four cannot.

It is unfair that a store with ten or less staff working can apply to open but one with eleven cannot.

Around 2000 small businesses in Western Australia are presently held back from increasing their sales and generating more jobs, simply because they are located in shopping centres in the Perth metropolitan region and are therefore unable to open on Sundays.

In fact, the major opponents of extended shopping hours are those who are already able to open 7 days a week, but do not want other retailers to be able to do likewise.

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.

Community benefit

Perth does have the population to support Sunday shopping. In terms of population and retail market size, Tasmania and South Australia are both smaller than Western Australia. The fact that these two states have benefited from Sunday shopping without suffering undue consequences suggests that Perth's experience will be no different.

It is now nearly 20 years since ER Kelly said in his 1986 report to the "Western Australian Government Inquiry into Retail Trading Hours in Western Australia"

“It appeared to me that such a law [restricting Sunday shopping] could only be justified if it demonstrably saved the community from some serious and clearly perceived harm, or conferred some almost universally approved benefit.

At the end of the Inquiry I am satisfied that the present law in Western Australia serves none of these purposes. It gives an advantage to some retailers over others; it protects some retailers from competition from other retailers. It creates obstacles to competition in an area in which the community is best served by competition.”

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 Sunday, you must vote YES in the referendum.

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