

Ban proposal for Lan Kwai Fong

BY SUSIE WELDON

DRINKING in the streets of Lan Kwai Fong may be outlawed if a proposal before the Liquor Licensing Board is accepted.

The proposal, to be discussed by board members next Thursday, would make Lan Kwai Fong a special zone in which both the sale of alcohol in shops to under-18-year-olds and drinking outdoors were illegal.

The ban on outdoor drinking would also apply to legitimate customers of bars, board member Daniel Wong said.

The move comes after High Court Justice "Kemal Bokhary's interim report into the Lan Kwai Fong New Year's disaster in which 21 people died said the problem of under-age drinking in the district should be examined.

But the proposed alcohol

ban has run into opposition from legislators, the Lan Kwai Fong Association and a counselling group for young drinkers who questioned the wisdom of clamping down on one area. Wong said making Lan Kwai Fong and D'Aguilar Street a special zone was preferable to outlawing purchases of alcohol by minors throughout Hongkong.

Currently under-18s cannot buy alcohol in bars, but can buy it from shops and supermarkets.

"Our major concern is Lan Kwai Fong because that is a special area. There is no other area with such a high density of bars in Hongkong," Wong said.

Outlawing all alcohol purchases by under-18s would not be popular as it would affect "people in housing estates who send their children out to buy beer for the family's consumption", he said.

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Liquor ban proposal

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Wong said if the board accepted the proposal, the new legislation would have to go before the Legislative Council.

But Lan Kwai Fong Association vice-chairman Barry Kalb described the idea as "unreasonable" and "ridiculous", saying there was no reason to single out the area.

"The same problem exists in Wan Chai and Tsim Sha Tsui," he said.

Kalb said all sales of alcohol to under-18s should be made illegal throughout Hongkong.

A representative of the Kelly Support Group - an anti-drugs and alcohol counselling body for young people - agreed it was un-

fair to single out Lan Kwai Fong. "There are many many blackspots (for under-age drinking) - including Wan Chai, Tsim Sha Tsui and all 7-Elevens throughout Hongkong," the representative, known as Mary, said.

"To target Lan Kwai Fong is not the way to address the issue - it's how these kids are getting the alcohol."

Legislators Dr Huang Chen-ya and Dr Yeung Sum, whose constituencies include Lan Kwai Fong, were also enthusiastic about the proposal.

Yeung said the area should not be singled out and the ban would be difficult to enforce.

Police would not comment on the proposal.