

Bar owners back proposal for new licensing system

By ANNETTE
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BAR and restaurant owners are hopeful that an end to the costly quagmire of Hongkong's licensing system is in sight.

The *South China Morning Post* revealed yesterday that Urban and Regional Services officials are believed to back measures to speed up the process.

The most popular proposal is a one-stop-shop which will effectively form a central vetting panel and a joint inspection group from the three bodies which approve applications — Fire Services, Buildings and Lands, and Urban or Regional Services.

The manager of the American Pie restaurant in Lan Kwai Fong, Julie Alsheimer, said: "I definitely support proposals to speed up the process.

"We opened in September 1991 and we are still waiting. We have the approval, we are just waiting for the paperwork.

"It is difficult to run a

business and to operate under these conditions and I know that other restaurants have had similar problems. At the moment I would advise newcomers to try to find an already established restaurant with its licences intact."

Ms Alsheimer said the main problem came from inspectors pointing out just one problem at a time rather than handling them all together.

A group of 17 proprietors formed the Restaurant and Licensed Premises Association (RALPA) in March to lobby for changes to the licensing system.

RALPA spokesman Ted Thomas said: "This is exactly the direction we want to go in and if we see the Government is working with us we are more than happy to work with them.

"The two things we would like to see first are the one-stop-shop and provisional licences while the application is being processed, and we feel they can run in tandem to help streamline the system."