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OPINION

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EDITORIAL

Sensible and flexible should be the guide to bar applications

Dullsville Perth seems like a long time ago. In fact the city has come so far since that tag was applied that it is high time the description is retired for good.

Take a walk around Perth now and you can see why.

Inner-city living has brought more people into and around the CBD and the suburbs on its fringes, many of the laneways are alive with coffee and chatter and Northbridge has been significantly cleaned up and revived.

One of the significant contributors to the transformation has been the relaxation around alfresco life and small bars.

When the small bar revolution — and it was seen as a change of that magnitude — kicked off, there were some who warned that all manner of anti-social behaviour and drunkenness would result.

But guess what?

The sky did not fall in. It seems we are actually grown up enough to act responsibly after all.

Which makes even more puzzling the revelation of the red tape which was dragging down a bid to set up a new small bar in Northbridge.

The West Australian reported yesterday that Perth doctor Sam Winfield lodged a liquor licence application in June for a William Street property where he hoped to create Perth's first natural wine store and bar.

WA Police had recommended that it only be approved with more than a dozen conditions.

These included the requirement for two security guards at the entrance on Friday and Saturday nights, no takeaway liquor to be sold and for staff to carry click counter devices to count patrons.

Dr Winfield said the small and sophisticated venture would be like nothing we have in Perth.

Far from being a "big liquor barn", no wine would sell for under \$20 a bottle, and he had agreed not to sell takeaway beer.

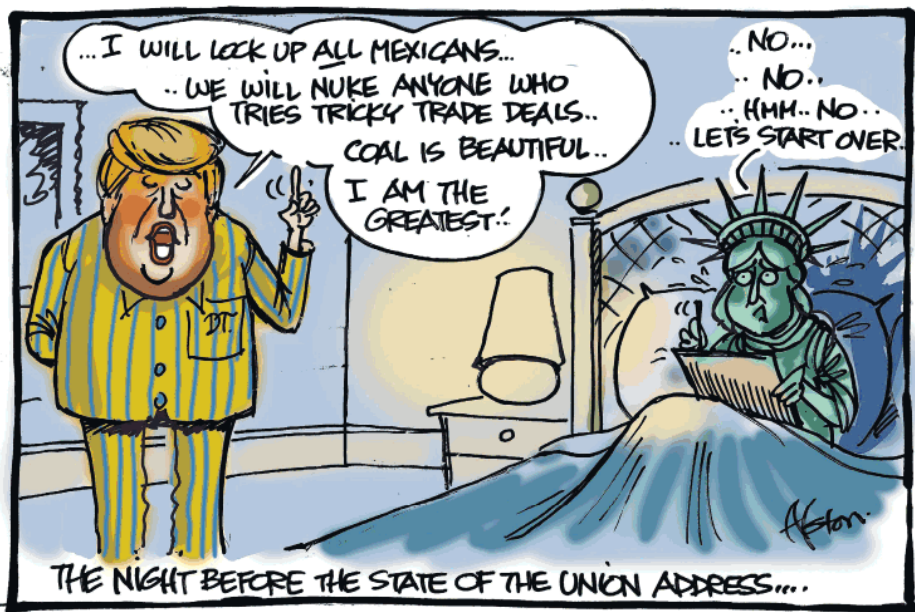
He had the support of Tourism WA and local wine producers and there had been no objections from the local community.

The West Australian does not advocate doing away totally with scrutiny of such ventures.

But surely it is exactly the kind of business which should fly through the approvals process.

After the article ran there was a positive development yesterday with the news that the licence had been granted.

This newspaper believes it was some much-needed recognition that common sense should be the main guiding principle in such matters, not one-size-fits-all blanket rules.



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Demanding public has focus on business chiefs

■ Gary Martin

Consider this. The chief executive of BMW turns up to the company's annual shareholder meeting in a BMW. Of course. After all, it is important that the chief executive flies the company flag, walks the company talk and demonstrates that he or she stands for what the company stands for.

We as consumers long ago began to expect — no, demand — this sort of public display of commitment.

We expect the boss of West-Bix to eat at least three bricks for breakfast. Because if he did not, why should we buy the company's products. In the same vein you expect Andrew Forrest to be bullish about the prospects for iron ore and articulate this regularly to fellow investors in Fortescue Metals Group, the consumers of the company's shares.

Are you ever surprised at Qantas chief executive Alan Joyce's unwavering enthusiasm for the aviation business? Of course not. But our expectations of chief executives taking a public stance are soaring more quickly than a Qantas jet.

More and more so, we expect today's corporate leaders to tell us what they stand for. And it extends far beyond endorsing their products or company.

In this fast-moving world, where disruption of the status quo is increasingly the norm, we look to our leaders to help inform our decision-making.

It may be a decision on whether to buy one company's product over another's. It might be a decision on a



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political or broader societal issue. It may be as simple as deciding whether to join a company as an employee.

Either way, we want to know what today's chief executive stands for. It doesn't always have to be a black and white view, but it needs to have more colour than 50 shades of grey.

Which is why we are increasingly interested in their views on matters such as same-sex marriage, or corporate tax rates and the minimum wage, or government policy on immigration, or whether Australia should become a republic.

Corporate Australia's gradual acceptance over the past decade that corporate social responsibility reporting needs to be on an equal footing with the profit and loss statement is fast morphing into a need to put a human face to the company's corporate social responsibility.

For some leaders this has been an easy transition (or at least it has appeared that way).

Former Wesfarmers managing director Richard Goyder has been widely and rightly lauded for setting the standard in terms of chief executives weighing into societal issues. Joyce is another to have raised his head above the corporate parapet.

Part of their motivation will have been to enhance their companies' brand, and some of it driven by personal reasons. No doubt another

motivator was the realisation that informing us what they stand for has become their duty.

As always, public expectation will quickly exceed what is reasonable. Sound bites on every issue soon lose their relevance. Responsible and appropriate views are required, and they need to be well argued and delivered with consistency.

With public trust in politicians at long-term lows and a tsunami of largely irrelevant and hysterical views flooding us via digital channels, we are increasingly looking for an alternative voice of reason.

Not always to agree with, but to assess and help us make a better sense of the world.

This is true despite the fact the public's trust in the corporate sector has largely evaporated.

Part of the recovery job will be for the chief executive to re-engage with the public on issues that are relevant to the public, in the same way as the intelligent business leader will set about instilling a workplace culture where every employee feels valued.

It is a significant responsibility for today's bosses and requires some brave moves. It is also a significant time commitment because it drags them away from the traditional notion of "managing the business".

But as much as employees demand to know what their chief executive stands for, those outside the business want an understanding that the corporate leadership megaphone is no longer as monotone as the profit and loss.

■ Professor Gary Martin is chief executive officer of the Australian Institute of Management WA