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NEWS



# Te Kaha opening at risk

Trading restrictions could dampen the celebration venue owners have been waiting 15 years for

**CHRISTCHURCH**  
Elsie Williams

After 15 years waiting for One New Zealand Te Kaha stadium to open, hospitality venues are finally seeing international bookings roll in for big events – but Anzac Day trading restrictions might cut the celebration short.

Hospitality NZ pushed for a city-wide exemption to let venues trade normally over the opening weekend for the Super Rugby round on April 24-26. But the district licensing committee said this was not possible under the law. Bars must close at midnight on Friday, April 24, the stadium's opening night, and cannot serve alcohol before 1pm on Saturday (Anzac Day) without a meal – unless they obtain individual special licences.

"What we don't want to do is have Saturday morning's paper saying 'Great rugby round, but tourists felt Christchurch was average,'" said Jeremy Stevens, Canterbury branch president for Hospitality NZ.

The \$683 million stadium opens with the Super Rugby round – 10 teams from New Zealand, Australia, Fiji and the Pacific playing five matches across Anzac weekend.

It's the biggest sporting event Christchurch

has hosted since Lancaster Park was condemned in 2011.

The Queensland Reds supporters' club locked in spaces at Dux Central months in advance to the opening for groups of up to 140, for pre- and post-match catchups.

The advance bookings are a welcome sign for Dux Central owner Richard Sinke after years of slow trade and what he called "a pretty tough" January.

Sinke and Masson Lattimore, bar manager at The Loft sports bar, said their venues are also in discussions about becoming "home bars" for different sports team supporters, though nothing has been confirmed. But Stevens said the midnight closure could damage the city's reputation at a crucial moment.

"If we fall short and don't get the stadium opening right, the impact can be massive and quite detrimental to Christchurch as what's currently being perceived nationwide as the place to be right now.

"Having the doors shut at midnight – it's not going to show the city off that well."

Sam MacKinnon, Hospitality NZ's head of advocacy, said the legislation did not allow the flexibility needed. "If you're travelling

from Australia or other parts of New Zealand, excited to visit Christchurch for the opening of the new stadium, and then you're told you've got to leave by midnight – that's going to impact your visitor experience," she said.

The restrictions could also affect Saturday morning trade, Stevens said, when fans wanting a pre-game drink will be told they need to order food. "They've had a big breakfast somewhere, and they go into a pub to have a beer before going to the game – they'll be told no," he said.

Sinke supports Stevens' campaign.

"We want to show our city on its best foot. We should be able to honour our fallen soldiers and not shut the city down."

With each venue required to apply individually for a special licence, each faces potential opposition from police, health authorities or council inspectors. The licence cannot be used as a continuation of trade – it must be for people attending an event at the licensed premises. No applications had been received, a Christchurch City Council spokesperson said.

Stevens said he was "looking into" making an application, and clarifying the criteria for other businesses. He said the cost to apply for

a special licence – of about \$400 – wouldn't put off hospitality businesses, but they would need some confidence of success as the law allowed a limited number of special licence applications per year.

The council's chief alcohol licensing inspector emailed and met with Hospitality NZ, who were seeking advice and clarification around the legislation. The council confirmed a city-wide Special Application for the opening of the new stadium was not possible.

Hospitality NZ is pushing for broader reform of restricted trading days.

A member's bill from Kieran McNulty dealing with restricted trading passed its second reading in Parliament last week and could resolve the issue – but it's unclear whether it will pass before opening night.

In response to emailed questions, McNulty said with two members' days scheduled between now and Easter, it was possible his bill could come into effect in time for Good Friday. Halswell councillor Andrei Moore said he didn't support "telling people what they can and can't do at certain hours of the day", but the event was over a long weekend. "People have got the whole weekend to enjoy."

## Couple undeterred by age gap

But they are 'devastated' officials doubt their relationship is genuine.

Full story on page 4

Carol Essadi's Moroccan husband has repeatedly been denied a visitor visa.  
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