



Grog superstore no forgone conclusion



**View from
the Fields**

with **JAMES PURTILL**

I'm a little sceptical of the reasoning in a column published this week, "Super grog shop will not happen" (April 10).

I know it's not cool to pass opinion on an opinion piece about an article published in your own newspaper, but my name was mentioned and I feel obliged to point out a couple of hollow arguments.

First, some background.

Last Friday we published a story on a proposed liquor store at the site of the old skate park on Hannan Street.

It would be bigger than any other liquor store in town.

With a floor space of about 1200sqm it ably qualifies as a so-called "liquor superstore".

Superstores are the places that have been getting some bad press lately.

Several proposals in different parts of the State have been knocked back by the Licensing Commission on the grounds these areas already have liquor problems and there are no shortage of liquor outlets.

Now the column.

It makes a few points: One, the police will oppose the liquor licence.

Every application the police oppose is denied by the Commission, ergo no liquor store.

Two, the police are wrong to oppose the liquor licence.

There is no causal relationship between the number of liquor outlets in a town and the problem of alcohol-related violence.

Three, the liquor store would be good for the town.

The run-down old skate park is an eyesore and a new business would mean jobs and a better selection of booze.

All these points are wrong.

For the first one, yes, the police are likely to oppose the liquor store, but they do not always win.

The Department of Racing, Gaming and Liquor website shows six licences were granted in February.

Also, and it's not really fair to point this out, but the day after the column ran, news broke that Dan Murphy's had been given the go-ahead for an alcohol superstore in Kwinana, despite police opposition.

It's true the police opposed the last application for a big liquor store licence in Kalgoorlie-Boulder and it went down before the Commission, (Boulder Road, November).

But the column seems to suggest this was all down to some murky cabal of "well-established local venues" that are flogging cheap grog to the disadvantaged.

So, to get this straight, the police are protecting the business of the local venues flogging cheap grog to the disadvantaged.

It gets better.

The police are completely wrong to think there is a causal relationship be-

tween the number of liquor outlets and drunkenness.

Not only are the police wrong, but several eminent university professors are wrong.

A few who spring to mind are Associate Professor Peter Miller, of Deakin University and director of the National Drug Research Institute at Curtin University, Steve Allsop.

In January, Associate Professor Lisa Wood, from the University of Western Australia, published a study that found proximity to a liquor outlet is associated with high levels of harmful drinking.

I know, I know, university reports are not everything, and every debate should have room for a bit of cavalier opinion.

I'm just pointing out the science.

A new liquor store will make jobs, but then so will other kinds of business that potentially do less harm.

Wage work and a choice selection of single malt may not be the only considerations. All this distracts from the larger issue of the social causes of drunkenness.

A lot of research suggests one of the major causes is boredom and a lack of social things to do outside of drinking.

This makes sense.

The sad irony is that the old skate park was once one of those social places outside of drinking.

If you go there now you will find a carpet of pigeon droppings and a bottle of tawny port sitting on a cinderblock.