

# Rally to seek two-year delay in bar smoke ban

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**Ng Kang-chung**

Bar owners are calling on staff and patrons to join them next Sunday to protest against a ban on smoking in nightclubs, bars and mahjong schools set to come into force in July.

They claim the ban could force more than half the city's 1,000 or so bars and clubs to close, because smokers are their major clients.

The owners want the government to postpone the ban for two years, saying their businesses have already been hit hard by the economic downturn. Next Sunday's protest, with the theme "no smoking, no job", is a

fresh bid by the sector after a failed attempt last week by legislator Albert Chan Wai-yip to move a private member's bill seeking to push back the implementation of the ban.

Legislative Council president Tsang Yok-sing ruled that Mr Chan's attempt breached a ban on lawmakers introducing bills related to "government policy".

The Hong Kong Bar and Club Association, which is organising the protest, expects a turnout of at least 2,000 people. Chairman George Tsai said: "We have been hit by the financial crisis and the swine flu. The July 1 smoking ban is set to be the last straw.

"Many bar owners have reported that business turnover has dropped by up to a third in recent months. We understand that more than half of the bars and pubs could be forced to close if the smoking ban is imposed."

He also blamed the drink-driving measure introduced in February, under which police can carry out random checks on drivers to see if they have drunk alcohol.

A bar usually hired about 10 people, he said, meaning that if 500 closed, as many as 5,000 people could be thrown out of work.

Bartender Candy Wong, who works at a pub in Causeway Bay, said

she was worried she could lose her job if the ban is introduced.

"Business is already bad. The boss just recently cut our pay by 20 per cent. I don't want to lose my job," Ms Wong said. "A friend of mine who got sacked idled away three months at home before she could get another job at another bar. And she is paid much less than before."

Lillian Chan Yun-lin, convenor of the Entertainment Business Rights Concern Group, said: "We are not against anti-smoking measures. We also care about people's health. We only want the government to give us more time to adapt."