

28 June 2017

Alcohol Policies and Legislation Review
c/o NT Department of Health
PO Box 40596 Casuarina
NT 0811

Dear Sir or Madam

Submission to the Review of Alcohol Policies and Legislation, NT

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this review of legislation on alcohol policies in the Northern Territory. As has been reiterated many times, the Territory bears the cost of extremely high consumption rates and its' residents, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal experience high levels of acute and chronic alcohol-related illness and injury and unacceptably high alcohol-related mortality.

Published research

As a social anthropologist with a long research history in alcohol and other drug use, particularly among Aboriginal people, I have undertaken considerable field-based research in the Territory and contributed many research publications for both professional and lay audiences over the years. I have also produced practical resources designed to mobilise Indigenous communities to take action over their alcohol-related troubles, and others designed to assist frontline workers in their interactions with Indigenous patients in primary care settings. I have recently been informed that the Australian Government Department of Health will be reprinting these (as they had been out of print) and will make them available through National Mail & Marketing. They will also be available electronically. I draw your attention to them here:

- *The Grog Book. Strengthening Indigenous community action on alcohol*
- *Giving Away the Grog. Aboriginal accounts of drinking and not drinking*
- *Talking about Alcohol with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients. A brief intervention tool for health professionals.*

Licensed clubs in remote communities

Recently I was a contributing author to a review of licensed clubs in discrete remote Aboriginal communities in the NT that was commissioned in 2012 by FaHCSIA/NT Department of Justice. This review (*Managing Alcohol Consumption – a review on licensed clubs in remote Indigenous communities in the NT.*, Bowchung 2015) has recently been released by your government, a decision which has been welcomed by all contributors to this research. Making alcohol available legitimately in remote communities has always been a contentious enterprise since the practice began in the mid-1970s, and is one that is fraught with anticipated and unanticipated problems as well as having some beneficial aspects. The Report is long and its findings complex, and so I draw your attention in particular to **Chapter 4** of this report, 'Evidence about good practices in managing licensed venues in Aboriginal communities: a literature review'. This chapter makes suggestions about the precautionary steps that should be taken and the social conditions that are

necessary within a community before any decision is made to inaugurate a licensed club. I think it is important to note that no such preparations were made in the past and that the clubs have developed in a largely *ad hoc* manner across the Territory. This background is documented in my published Discussion Paper *Lessons from a history of beer canteens and licensed clubs in Indigenous communities* (CAEPR Discussion Paper 290/2014)

<http://caepr.anu.edu.au/Publications/DP/2014DP290.php>

The Licensing Commission

I have had many dealings with the various formulations of the Territory's Liquor (or Licensing) Commission over the years from its inception, and was surprised and taken aback that the previous government saw fit to abolish it. I urge the Review to consider the extremely valuable role that the Liquor Commission has played overall, particularly in its capacity to conduct hearings out bush that allow ordinary members of the public, and residents of Aboriginal communities, to contribute to and witness the discussions. Hearings are essential and should be reinstated immediately. In the early years of the Liquor Commission the Director appointed a special female researcher whose job it was to liaise with Aboriginal women and ensure that their voices were heard when discussions were held about licensing decisions. Up until that time and often since then, licensing hearings have been dominated by men and the views of women, many of whom were non-drinkers, were simply not heard. Perhaps it is time to reinstate such a position.

A new Licensing Commission would benefit Indigenous communities greatly by expanding its brief to matters beyond simply *monitoring compliance* with the terms of the Liquor Act, so that it could also provide better outreach support to remote communities, especially those managing liquor sales in various ways. My research mentioned earlier identified gaps in the provision of on-going support and advice to communities about choosing club managers; managing boards of governance of clubs; trouble-shooting issues before they become unmanageable; and the appropriate and equitable distribution of funds raised from the social clubs. A specialist unit of the Liquor Commission would arguably develop skills in these issues and be able to make a valuable contribution.

Yours sincerely

Maggie Brady (Dr)
Honorary Associate Professor
Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
Australian National University
Canberra ACT 2602
Maggie.brady@anu.edu.au
02 6125 4796 (w)

