

NORTHERN TERRITORY LIQUOR COMMISSION
DECISION NOTICE

MATTER: APPLICATION FOR GENERAL RESTRICTED AREA
OVER WATHUNGA [2025] NTLiqComm 38

FILE NO.: LC2025/042

APPLICANT: Residents of Wathunga

AREA: Wathunga (South West Island)
Sir Edward Pellew Group
NT 0852

LEGISLATION: Part 8 Division 3 of the *Liquor Act 2019* (NT)

HEARD BEFORE: Mr Russell Goldflam (Chairperson)

Professor Phillip Carson (Health Member)

Ms Katrina Fong Lim (Community Member)

DATE OF HEARING: 22 October 2025

DATE OF DECISION: 20 November 2025

Decision

For the reasons set out below and in accordance with s 177 of the *Liquor Act 2019* (NT) (**the Act**) the Northern Territory Liquor Commission (**the Commission**) has determined to declare a general restricted area (**GRA**) over the island of Wathunga (**Wathunga**) situated on land owned by the Wurralibi (No. 2) Aboriginal Land Trust (**the land trust**).

1. In accordance with s 172 of the Act, the Commission will declare the GRA by *Gazette* notice specifying that:
 - a. The boundaries of the GRA are indicated by the yellow line in Annexure One to this decision notice, which depicts the entirety of the island of Wathunga (also known as South West Island) in the Sir Edward Pellow Group in the Gulf of Carpentaria approximately 59 km NE from Borroloola and covering an approximate area of 83 square kilometres. The family outstation within the GRA is located at Latitude -15.689020 and Longitude 136.688210.

- b. Other than in accordance with a permit issued under s 201 of the Act (**a liquor permit**) that has not been revoked or suspended, the following are prohibited in the GRA:
 - i. The bringing of liquor into the area;
 - ii. The possession of liquor in the area;
 - iii. The consumption of liquor in the area; and
 - iv. The sale, supply and service of liquor in the area.
 - c. The Director of Liquor Licensing (**the Director**) must consult with the residents of the GRA and have regard to the Wathunga Community Alcohol Management Plan (**the Wathunga CAMP**) approved by the community on 10 September 2025, and as may be varied from time to time¹ when considering:
 - i. an application for a liquor permit;
 - ii. the conditions of a liquor permit, including the places at which liquor may be possessed and consumed by the permit holder;
 - iii. suspension of a permit; or
 - iv. revocation of a permit.
 - d. The Director may on their own initiative, provided they have taken reasonable steps to consult with the residents of the GRA, suspend a liquor permit of a resident of the GRA for a period of up to six months with immediate effect.
 - e. The declaration of the GRA expires in 99 years.
2. By way of compliance with s 178 of the Act, the Commission has determined to publish information about the GRA by posting this decision notice on the Commission's website, and by sending a copy of this decision notice to:
- a. Wurralibi Aboriginal Land Trust
 - b. Northern Land Council
 - c. NT Police
 - d. Attorney-General and Minister for Tourism and Hospitality
 - e. Minister for Alcohol Policy

¹ Exhibit One, pp 16 to 25

- f. Alcohol Policy, Northern Territory Department of Health
 - g. Office of Aboriginal Affairs, Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet
 - h. Harm Minimisation Unit, Northern Territory Department of Health
 - i. National Indigenous Australians Agency
3. The declaration of the GRA will take effect on the date of publication of the *Gazette* notice referred to above.
 4. The Commission requests the Director, the Director of the Harm Minimisation Unit and the residents of the GRA take reasonable steps to erect signs where a road or other customary route enters the GRA warning the public of the GRA in accordance with s 181(2)(a) and (b) of the Act.

Reasons

Introduction

5. Wathunga, also known as South West Island, is on Yanyuwa country at the mouth of the Macarthur River. A family outstation at the north end of the island has five main permanent residents, with at times up to 30 people staying or visiting there. No-one lives elsewhere on the island. Mabunji Resource Aboriginal Corporation, which is based in Borroloola, provides essential services to the Wathunga community.
6. The relevant history, circumstances and legal issues pertaining to this matter are similar to those set out in the decision of the Commission dated 19 June 2024 to declare a General Restricted Area for Itchy Koo Park.² It is unnecessary to now repeat the detailed consideration of those matters set out in that decision.

The Application

7. On 10 September 2024, Mr Samuel Evans, a resident and traditional owner of the area, submitted an application on behalf of the residents to apply for a declaration that Wathunga be declared a General Restricted Area. On 10 September 2025 an additional four community members signed their endorsement of the application and the Wathunga CAMP. On the same day the same persons also signed a petition in support of the application and the Wathunga CAMP.

Consultation

8. Section 175 of the Act requires the Director to give notice of a proposed GRA to:

² *Application for General Restricted Area over Itchy Koo Park* [2024] NTLiqComm 25

- a. Any licensee whose licensed premises are in the area – there are no such licensees.
 - b. Any applicant for a licence whose proposed licensed premises are in the area – there are no such applicants.
 - c. Any licensee whom the Director considers may be affected adversely by the proposed restriction – there are no such licensees
 - d. Any local council in the proposed area – the Director notified the Roper Gulf Regional Council and the Northern Land Council.
9. Although not required to do so, Licensing NT also notified the NT Police and the Borroloola Community Health Clinic.
10. None of these stakeholders raised concerns about the application.
11. Section 175 also requires the Director to take reasonable steps to consult with the people who reside in the area. In June and September 2025, Mr Matthew Ah Mat and Ms Surinder Crichton, who are employed by the NT Department of Health as Principal Alcohol Action Officers to assist communities to prepare community alcohol plans, visited the area and consulted with Wathunga community members. The Commission is satisfied that the community members are well aware of the circumstances of the application, and support it.

Director's Report

12. In accordance with s 176 of the Act, on 9 October 2025, the Director provided the Commission with a report (**the report**) comprising:
- a. Application for general restricted area dated 10 September 2025
 - b. Record of Administrative Interests and Information for “South West Island”
 - c. Diagram of proposed GRA area
 - d. Wathunga CAMP dated 10 September 2025
 - e. Residents’ petition in support of the application and the Wathunga CAMP dated 10 September 2025
 - f. “BUSHTEL” community profile for Wathunga

The hearing

13. On 22 October 2025, the application proceeded as a public hearing, in conjunction with the hearing of five similar applications from other Top End communities. Mr Samuel Evans appeared for the applicant. Ms Amber James appeared for the Director. Borroloola police station officer Caleb Walker

attended on behalf of NT Police. Also present from the Northern Territory Department of Health were Mr Ah Mat and Ms Crichton, Ms Ameina Brunker (Director, Harm Minimisation Unit) and Ms Emily McDougall (on behalf of the Director, Alcohol Policy). The Commission thanks them all for their attendance and assistance.

14. The Commission conducted the hearing with a minimum of formality.
15. The Commission admitted the report into evidence, without objection.
16. On behalf of the applicant, Mr Evans informed the Commission that he has been living on his country for 40 years, that Wathunga community members wish to be able to drink quietly at Wathunga. None of them currently has a liquor permit, but community members intend to apply for liquor permits in due course. The community wants signage to be erected notifying visitors that the Wathunga is a GRA.
17. Officer Walker stated that Borroloola police strongly support the application, which will lead the way for other people in the district. Wathunga is a peaceful community and police have not been called out to attend there.
18. The application was also supported by the Director and the Department of Health.

ASSESSMENT OF THE APPLICATION

19. Section 177 of the Act requires the Commission to consider:
 - a. the application;
 - b. the Director's report;
 - c. the public interest and community impact requirements.

The application

20. The Commission finds that the application complies with the requirements for applicants set out at s 174 of the Act. Section 3 of the application ("Consent of the registered owner of the area") is signed by Mr Samuel Evans who the Commission accepts is a traditional owner and resident of Wathunga. As the registered owner of the area is the land trust, the application is in this respect irregular. A similar issue arose in similar circumstances when the Commission considered an application for a GRA over Itchy Koo Park. For the reasons given at [2024] NTLiqComm 25 [41] to [54] in that matter, the Commission now finds that despite the irregularity, the application now under consideration is valid.
21. The Commission now turns to consider the substance of the application.
22. In addition to requiring that an application be in the approved form, s 174 provides that it must include:

- a. A detailed explanation of the restriction being proposed.
 - b. A detailed description of the proposed general restricted area.
 - c. The reasons for the proposed restriction.
 - d. A copy of a community alcohol plan, if any.
23. The Commission is satisfied that the applicant has provided sufficient detail of the restrictions it proposes, and, noting that they are supported by the Director, the Commission considers that those restrictions are appropriate, as reflected in this decision.
24. The Commission notes that its determination of the boundary it has specified is solely for the limited purpose of declaring the GRA. The Commission does not intend or purport to determine, declare or affect the property rights of Wathunga traditional owners' vis a vis the property rights of traditional owners of any neighbouring community areas, or of any other person.
25. The Commission is satisfied with the applicant's reasons for imposing the restrictions that have been proposed.
26. The applicant has prepared and provided a community alcohol plan. GRA applicants are not required to develop a community alcohol plan, but the Commission commends the applicant for having done so, and strongly encourages any future applicants to do so. The Commission accepts the submissions of the applicants, the Director and the Harm Minimisation Unit that the Wathunga CAMP has been developed by the community, has the support of the community, and is strong. The Commission notes that the plan is compliant with regulation 111B(2) of the *Liquor Regulations*, which prescribes that a community alcohol plan must include measures aimed at:
- a. Managing the supply of alcohol in the community.
 - b. Reducing demand for alcohol in the community.
 - c. Reducing harm or risks of harm that may be caused by the consumption of alcohol in the community.
27. The Commission finds that the Wathunga CAMP is fit for purpose and thoughtfully formulated.

Whether issuing the licence is in the public interest

28. To determine whether the declaration of the GRA is in the public interest, the Commission is required to consider how the issue of the licence would advance the following objectives set out in s 49(2) of the Act:
- (a) minimising the harm or ill-health caused to people, or a group of people, by the consumption of liquor;
 - (b) ensuring liquor is sold, supplied, served and consumed on or in

licensed premises in a responsible manner;

- (c) safeguarding public order and safety, particularly when large numbers of people would be attracted to licensed premises or an area adjacent to those premises;
- (d) protecting the safety, health and welfare of people who use licensed premises;
- (e) increasing cultural, recreational, employment or tourism benefits for the local community area;
- (f) promoting compliance with this Act and other relevant laws of the Territory;
- (g) ensuring each person involved in the business conducted at licensed premises receives training suitable to the person's role in the business;
- (h) preventing the giving of credit in sales of liquor to people;
- (i) preventing practices that encourage irresponsible drinking;
- (j) reducing or limiting increases in anti-social behaviour.

29. Having considered each of these objectives, and having particular regard to the contents of the Wathunga CAMP, the Commission is comfortably satisfied that it is in the public interest to declare the GRA.

Whether the issue of the licence will have a significant adverse impact on the community

30. To determine whether it is satisfied that the declaration of the GRA will not have a significant adverse impact on the community, the Commission must consider the matters set out at s 49(3) of the Act, which are:

- (a) the risk of undue offence, annoyance, disturbance or inconvenience to persons who reside or work in the vicinity of the proposed licensed premises or who are using, or travelling to or from, a place of public worship, a hospital or a school;
- (b) the geographic area that would be affected;
- (c) the risk of harm from the excessive or inappropriate consumption of liquor;
- (d) the people or community who would be affected;
- (e) the effect on culture, recreation, employment and tourism;
- (f) the effect on social amenities and public health;
- (g) the ratio of existing liquor licences and authorities in the community to the population of the community;

- (h) the effect of the volume of liquor sales on the community;
- (i) the community impact assessment guidelines issued under section 50;³
- (j) any other matter prescribed by regulation.⁴

31. The Commission is satisfied that the declaration of the GRA will have a modestly beneficial impact on the community, having particular regard to the s 49(3)(d) and (e) matters. If the declaration were not made, the interim alcohol protected area would continue, and the Wathunga traditional owners and other residents would justifiably feel frustrated and disempowered. Conversely, issuing the GRA is a gesture of respect and acknowledgement to the Wathunga community. Noting that the regulation of liquor on Aboriginal land in the Northern Territory has in recent years been subject to various statutory changes, the Commission considers that the declaration of the GRA will provide a measure of certainty to the community regarding the management of alcohol into the future.

The liquor permit scheme

32. Part 8 Division 6 of the Act establishes a permit scheme administered by the Director, who determines applications by persons to bring liquor into a GRA, possess or control liquor in a GRA, and consume liquor in a GRA. The Director also has the power to revoke a liquor permit, and pursuant to this decision, will also have the power to suspend a liquor permit for up to six months.
33. This decision requires the Director to administer the permit scheme for the GRA in consultation with the community and in accordance with the community alcohol plan.

Expiry

34. Section 172(3)(c) of the Act provides that the declaration of a general restricted area must specify when the declaration expires. If the law clearly authorised the Commission to decline to fix an expiry date for a general restricted area declaration, the Commission would not have fixed an expiry date in this matter. The Commission has specified an expiry date in the distant future.

Warning of general restricted area

35. Section 181 of the Act provides:

- (1) The Commission must take all steps it considers necessary to warn the public of a general restricted area at:

³ In the view of the Commission, no such guidelines are currently in force.

⁴ There are no such "other" matters prescribed by regulation.

- (a) The places where a road or other customary route enters the general restricted area; and
 - (b) The customary departure locations for any vessels or aircraft travelling into the general restricted area.
- (2) The warning must state the following:
- (a) the details of the declaration;
 - (b) a summary of the offence against section 173;
 - (c) any other matters the Commission considers appropriate.

36. As requested by the applicant, the Commission has determined that warning signage should be erected. The residents of Wathunga have the option to provide input into the design of the signage, provided that the details specified at s 181(2) of the Act are included.

The objects of the Act

37. Section 3(4) of the Act provides that in performing its function to decide whether to issue the licence, the Commission must have regard to the primary and secondary purposes of the Act. The Commission considers that making the GRA declaration together with the conditions it has determined to impose, is consistent with the purposes of the Act.

NOTICE OF RIGHTS

38. Section 31(1) read with section 60(3) of the Act provide that the decision set out in this decision notice is reviewable by the Northern Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal (**NTCAT**). Section 94(3) of the *NTCAT Act 2014* provides that an application for review of a reviewable decision must be lodged within 28 days of the date of the decision.

39. In accordance with section 31(2) of the Act, the persons who may apply to NTCAT for a review of this decision are the applicant, the Director, the Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Health and the Commissioner of Police.



Russell Goldflam

CHAIRPERSON
NORTHERN TERRITORY LIQUOR COMMISSION
26th November 2025

On behalf of Commissioners Goldflam, Carson and Fong Lim

Annexure One

