

2 Introduction

Licensed clubs⁵ have been present in a small group of remote Indigenous communities in the Top End of the Northern Territory (NT) since the 1980s and 1990s. In the NT there are currently eight clubs that have licences to operate in remote communities. These are in Wurrumiyanga (Nguiu), Wurankuwu (Ranku), Milikapiti and Pirlangimpi on the Tiwi Islands; Gunbalanya in East Arnhem, Beswick (Wugularr) and Kalkarindji in the Katherine region and Peppiminarti in the Daly River region. At the time of this research (2013), Ranku was not trading. Over the last twenty years there have been clubs in other communities both in Central Australia and other locations in the Top End. However, for a range of reasons these no longer operate (Brady, M., 2014).

Since the establishment of the current clubs there have been some regulatory changes, however each club has developed its own practices and place in each community. This study is the first that has been conducted on these clubs since 1998. It has its genesis in the changes in the regulation of alcohol in the remote Indigenous communities in the NT that occurred as part of the Northern Territory National Emergency Response (NTNER) in 2007. The NTNER created 'Prescribed Areas' through the federal legislation (*Northern Territory Emergency Response Act 2007*). Through this legislation it became an offence to possess, consume, sell or transport alcohol in these 'Prescribed Areas' without a relevant license or permit (In fact many communities had used the 'Dry Areas' legislation to choose to be 'dry' for many years prior to 2007.)

Communities with licensed clubs were exempt from a part of these conditions, in that they were allowed to keep their clubs. However the changes created uniform regulation covering seven of the clubs declaring that there would be no take away alcohol, and determining the days of trading, opening hours and alcohol beverages that could be sold. These changes came into effect in October 2007. One of the clubs surveyed for this study, Kalkarindji, was exempt from these conditions because it was not in a 'Prescribed Area'.

The *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Act 2012* sets out a continuation of the alcohol restrictions in 'Prescribed Areas' (now called 'Alcohol Protected Areas'), but encompasses a change of focus from a universally imposed measure to a measure designed to respond to individual circumstances of specific communities. To achieve this goal communities have been given the opportunity to create an Alcohol Management Plan (AMP).

An AMP provides a strategic framework for action and community driven strategies that are based on the principles of harm reduction. Within this environment, some

⁵ The word 'clubs' as a general description for the group of outlets is not strictly correct. Two of the outlets have tavern licenses, and are not legally 'clubs' at all. However for simplicity we have used 'clubs' to describe the group of eight outlets throughout this report.

communities have expressed interest in establishing their own licensed social clubs to serve alcohol.

As a pre-cursor to responding to community requests for licensed social clubs, the then NT Department of Justice and the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) commissioned this study in April 2012.

An initial draft report for the study was completed and submitted in June 2013 to the then NT Department of Justice, which in turn distributed the draft to members of a project advisory group for comment. At this stage, the process of finalising the report effectively 'stalled', as a result of government restructurings and shifts in policy priorities following a change of government in late 2012. In 2014, comments and criticisms of the draft report were collated, and the consultants asked to prepare a final draft. This report is the result.

The study has two aims:

- Appraising harm levels associated with the operation of licensed social clubs in communities as compared to communities without such clubs; and
- Identifying what the best practice social club models would look like, and how these can best support responsible drinking which contributes to managed alcohol consumption and reduction in levels of alcohol related harms.⁶

Its objectives are to explore the following issues:

- *what factors need to be in place for an effective well run social club;*
- *what factors contribute to / need to be in place to ensure responsible drinking practices and safe communities;*
- *a comparison of the incidence of alcohol related injury and harm in communities with a social club to those of residents from dry communities;*
- *best practice models of licensed social clubs that:*
 - *promote the community amenity beyond being a source of liquor supply and incorporates other recreational activities for the community on non-alcohol trading days;*
 - *develop mechanisms which allow individuals greater control over drinking, encourage responsible drinking and contribute to safe communities;*
 - *promote good governance and transparency of operations, including code of conduct;*
 - *club committees are democratically elected and provided appropriate training for directorship responsibilities; and*
 - *ensures all residents share in the benefits⁷.*

⁶ Drawn from the Request for Tender, D12-0083, Objectives and Purposes

⁷ Ibid

The study achieved these objectives through implementing three key strategies. The first was to conduct a literature review of good practice in licensed clubs in the mainstream, and to examine both the history of licensed outlets in remote Indigenous communities in the Australian context, and how access to alcohol is managed in remote Indigenous contexts internationally. The literature review is at chapter three of this report. The second was to conduct a survey in all eight communities with clubs. This survey focused on accessing both community residents' and service providers' perceptions of their clubs and their impact on their lives and organisations. The third was to access alcohol consumption, assault, health, and sobering-up shelter data in order to assess and compare alcohol related harms in communities with clubs with other communities in the NT

This study has been guided by the Licensed Social Club Research Advisory Group, which has membership from the following organisations:

- NT Department of Justice (until September 2012)
- NT Department of Health
- (then) Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA)
- Aboriginal Medical Services Association of the Northern Territory
- Aboriginal Peak Organisations, Northern Territory
- NT Police
- FaHCSIA Research and Evaluation Committee

The report presents four key areas:

- A description of the methodology;
- Alcohol consumption and drinking practices in communities with clubs;
- Comparison of alcohol related harms in communities with clubs and the rest of NT remote Indigenous communities; and
- How clubs operate in terms of service of alcohol, managing their patrons, governance and their relationships with the wider community.

Each chapter ends with a 'Key findings' section, and these are brought together in a 'Key findings and Conclusions' chapter at the end of the report.