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# *people's alcohol action coalition*

## **PAAC**

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### **PAAC: LCOMV-2025 001; Alice Springs s113 Notice Proposed Variations**

The People's Alcohol Action Coalition (PAAC) is grateful for the opportunity to comment on the Commission's proposed variations to a number of Alice Springs liquor licences.

As the Commission is aware, PAAC is a community-based advocacy group which works towards reducing alcohol-related harm through a number of strategies. These include: developing and proposing constructive legislative and policy reforms to the sale of alcohol; advocating for controls on public consumption; advocating for the responsible service of alcohol; and promoting healthy lifestyles.

We acknowledge the Commission's efforts in responding to complaints from Mr. Owen Cole and from the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (CAAC), and in undertaking its own investigation in relation to these matters. We share their concerns, our members having observed, in particular, the congregating of large numbers of persons, some clearly intoxicated, in the vicinity of the Coles and Yeperenye shopping centres, and also intoxicated persons on or near to a number of licensed premises in the town. PAAC has passed on its concerns to Licensing from time to time. By way of example, on 15<sup>th</sup> March last, a PAAC member sent PAAC's Policy Co-ordinator a photo of a man, passed out and apparently intoxicated, on a path near the outside wall of the Gap View hotel, with a large 'Gap View Hotel' sign visible. This was sent on to Licensing.

On 16<sup>th</sup> April Ms Holly Sowerby advised by email:

'Please be advised the investigation into this matter has been finalised. Upon review of the CCTV footage from the Gap View, it has been established that the male person of interest (POI) was removed from the premises at approximately 15:45 hours. He remained outside of the premises until Police collected him at 17:06 hours.'

The male began exhibiting obvious signs of intoxication at 15:39 hours and was removed by staff approximately 6 minutes later. Therefore, we have determined there is nothing to suggest the licensee has not complied with the provisions of the Liquor Act 2019 (the Act) or that there is sufficient grounds to proceed to a complaint pursuant to section 160 of the Act.'

Mr. Mark Wood from Licensing had previously advised by email on 18<sup>th</sup> March that the Gap View was not required to have security personnel on duty at that particular time.

We have thankfully seen some significant reforms in recent years, including the two take-away free days, reduced trading hours, adjustments to the Banned Drinker Register, one purchase per person per day, voluntary limits on volume (albeit quite high), and a consistent PALI presence at take-away points of sale.

The success of these and other reforms is reflected in data such as that pertaining to alcohol-related domestic assaults and alcohol-related emergency department presentations.

We also note that per capita consumption in central Australia is now, pleasingly, below the national average<sup>i</sup>. Unfortunately, the removal of the Minimum Unit Price provisions from the *Liquor Act* earlier this year may result in an increase in sales and consequential harm, but this remains to be seen.

It is nevertheless clear that there is a need for additional measures to reduce alcohol-related harm and anti-social behaviour of the kind described in the Notice, and generally to improve the social amenity of our town.

We note the comments in the Notice on secondary supply and also the licensees' views; the latter are not new. We concur with the NT Police, and also with the Commission's inference on secondary supply or sly grog running, set out in paragraphs 49 to 55 inclusive. While sly grog sales are clearly an ongoing problem, we accept the view of NT Police that most alcohol sold illicitly in and around Alice Springs is very likely locally purchased. The wholesale sales data and wastewater reports are very useful tools in making such assessments. PAAC has also recently noted the efforts of SA and NT Police in the cross-border area, where there appears to have been an increased focus on and success in intercepting the movement by road of liquor, tobacco and illicit drugs.

We will address the Commission's proposals in the order in which they appear in the Notice dated 20<sup>th</sup> November 2025.

**1. Full-strength alcohol only with a full meal 1130 to 1500 hours on a Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.**

- A. PAAC supports the Commission's aim of reducing levels of intoxication on premises through requiring the purchase of a full meal, however defined, in order to obtain full-strength liquor during prescribed hours, and prior to the opening of take-away outlets at 3 p.m. We note that in a submission in January 2011 to the (then) NT Licensing Commission on proposed alterations to the conditions of on-premises licences PAAC sought:
- 12 noon opening Monday to Friday;
  - light and mid-strength alcoholic drinks only between 12 noon and 2 p.m. Monday to Friday, unless the customer is consuming a substantial meal; and
  - no restrictions on full-strength alcohol for purchase at the bar from 2 p.m.
- B. At that time, we argued that a 12 noon opening time was warranted, so as to:
- i) send a message to the community that drinking in the morning hours is to be strongly discouraged; and
  - ii) to intervene in the practice of customers heading from bars to bottle shops as soon as the latter opened (in those days, 2 p.m.)
- C. We maintain that part of our position which relates to a 12 noon opening time and ask that the Commission give consideration either to implementing this condition, or to a condition that specifies simply that no alcohol may be purchased on premises before 12 noon. PAAC still believes that there is merit in sending a message to the community that drinking alcohol in the morning is unacceptable. It could be argued that to apply this condition only on three days of the week may cause confusion and annoyance to customers, particularly visitors to Alice Springs. A simple and clear solution would be to implement this measure from Monday to Friday.

## **2. On-premises screening: Todd Tavern, The NT Rock Bar, Bojangles Saloon and Dining Room, and Uncles Tavern (the nominated licences)**

- A. PAAC has advocated strenuously, through numerous submissions and directly with relevant Ministers in both the current and previous NT governments, for the Banned Drinker Register (BDR) to be used on premises. As the Notice succinctly states in setting out the history and application of the BDR, a person who is on the Register is prohibited from purchasing, possessing or consuming alcohol for the duration of the order, and therefore ‘to permit people to drink at a pub when they have been banned from drinking alcohol undermines the effectiveness of the BDR scheme.’ This is a perverse situation. PAAC has raised this point over many years, and we also note Coroner Armitage’s recommendation for an on premises trial of the BDR, <sup>ii</sup> and its rejection by the current NT Government.
- B. PAAC’s position remains that the BDR should be used generally at all licensed premises, or at the very least trialled as per Coroner Armitage’s recommendation. We are nevertheless encouraged by the Commission’s proposal to vary the nominated licences ‘in the public interest’ through requiring the use of iPads in a manner that is now well established elsewhere, and to enable the exclusion not only of those on the BDR, but also persons who are subject to a bail condition, court order, banning notice, exclusion order or other relevant provision.
- C. The proposed screening, however, would only apply to four premises on three days of the week and only prior to 1500 hours. Given that there are often intoxicated people departing or hanging around in the vicinity of these premises when they leave on other days, we query whether it is acceptable that persons on the BDR, or subject to another of the listed exclusion orders, should be permitted entry at any time. The level of intoxication in public places complained of by Mr. Cole and by the CAAC, by PAAC members, and also by the Commission’s Chairperson, suggests to us that those who are banned should be consistently refused entry no matter the time of day or day of the week.

- D. Insofar as the Gap View Hotel is concerned, we would prefer that it be included. As stated in the Notice, it is three kilometres from the CBD and is therefore not considered to be a contributor to daytime anti-social behaviour in the main town area. We have seen, however, what happened in the earlier iterations of what were then called Temporary Beat Locations. As soon as one take-away outlet was left unattended, people who would otherwise not be served due to their residential status, would flock to that outlet. We are concerned that problem drinkers will attempt to make their way up Gap Road in search of easier access to a drink, or travel towards town from the Gap View once under the influence of alcohol.
- E. We strongly suggest that if the proposed screening method goes ahead, it should be rigorously monitored. If it does transpire that there is a shift to other premises, which we expect may well be the case (whether the Gap View or elsewhere), then ID screening should, finally, be introduced to all licensed premises.

### **3. Variation of conditions, nominated licences and Lasseters: Practices relating to disturbances.**

- A. PAAC believes that the proposed licence condition, or something similar, is reasonable, despite its somewhat general terms. PAAC has recently looked at this South Australian provision. We have also had some discussions about it with NT Police, whom we understood to have similar concerns to PAAC members about the behaviour of (often intoxicated) persons on or around licensed premises. PAAC believes that licensees should bear some responsibility for offences, disturbances and so on arising from activities on or near their premises, and also to ensure public order and safety. It has often been said that it is a privilege and not a right to hold a liquor licence; that a liquor licence is not a licence to print money. This is reflected in the wording of s3(1) of the *Liquor Act*, which sets out its primary purpose.
- B. A licence condition such as the one proposed may cause licensees to take more care in relation to the responsible service of alcohol and monitoring of patrons' consumption and behaviour. PAAC does not believe that such a provision would be particularly onerous; rather it

could serve as a reminder to licensees to act in a responsible manner, which indeed they should as holders of a licence to sell alcohol. We believe it would be fair and reasonable to include such a condition in all Alice Springs liquor licences, and indeed all NT liquor licences.

#### 4. RSA

- A. We note the Commission's comments at paragraph 82 of the Notice, and agree that 'anti-social behaviour in particular and alcohol-related harm' cannot be addressed simply through licence variations. PAAC does believe that, from our own observations of customers on or around licensed premises, that there is either, on a generous interpretation, a poor understanding of the meaning of 'intoxicated' as defined in s5 of the *Liquor Act*, or, more likely, a disregard for the rules that govern service to customers. In our submission, more needs to be done to discourage irresponsible service.
- B. We are aware that Licensing inspectors do visit premises quite regularly, and they are no doubt doing their best. There are nevertheless ongoing reports of highly intoxicated patrons in and around premises. These people are either being served a lot of alcohol on premises, or their mates are buying for them over the bar. Whatever the case, we would suggest that the number of Licensing inspectors needs not only to be retained, as suggested in paragraph 82, but increased. It may be that more frequent visits, combined with the proposed variation relating to disturbances, will persuade licensees to practice more responsible behaviour. It does not inspire confidence to read the details about the failure of the Rock Bar to comply with regulations about the service of food, and rather, apparently operating as some sort of 'beer barn.'
- C. We agree that RSA training should include information about Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. Perhaps it should also include an explanation of alcohol-related problems in the region, and an overview of what has been done to try to address these, and why. The supply of free finger food is commendable and should continue, but we note our earlier comments about a preference for no morning trading.
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For further information or to advise of any hearing, please contact:

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18<sup>th</sup> December 2025

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<sup>i</sup> Clifford S, Wright CJC, Chikritzhs T, Livingston M. Regional Variation in Alcohol Consumption in the Northern Territory: An Update. *Drug Alcohol Rev.* 2026 Jan;45(1) :e70055. doi: 10.1111/dar.70055. Epub 2025 Oct 27. PMID: 41146432.

<sup>ii</sup> *Inquests into the deaths of Miss Yunupiju, Ngeygo Ragurrk, Kumarn Rubuntja and Kumanjayi Haywood* [2024] NTLC 14