

## **7 What makes a club run well?**

*'The committee and the people's rules, helping each other, communication, responsibility, working together. A strong committee makes the difference.'*

Survey respondents were asked two questions on what they perceive makes a club run well:

1. 'Can you tell me what has made the club run well or badly in the past?'
2. 'What do you think is important for the club to run well?'

There were several very clear themes in their responses. Overall there was a tone of pride in their club and their achievements in running it: *'Since the club has been here people have been happy. It's been a good club. In the beginning there wasn't any grog. The Europeans bought the grog. Then we have made a club here that has our rules.'*

### **7.1 The attitude of the drinkers**

There was a lot of feedback that a key determinant of how a club runs is the attitude of the drinkers: *'Trouble makers can ruin it.'* and *'The attitude of people when they are drunk is important, no matter what kind of manager you got. If drunk people act silly...'*

It is difficult to determine how drinkers' attitudes are formed – it seems that the way they are treated at the club is at least part of it. However it may be that communities and families have their own norms. It is easy for a club to develop a repressive culture that aims to force drinkers to behave – and this has reverberations for the feel of the whole club. The previous section on banning gave great detail on banning regimes, and clearly all the clubs have them. But our researchers observed that there is an ingredient beyond that, which is about how the patrons and staff perceive the club, and the extent to which there is mutual respect and liking. To some extent this changes as the managers change. However it is likely that the patrons and community have their own, more stable, set of attitudes about the club.

### **7.2 The importance of the manager**

Many survey respondents identified having a good manager as key to having a good club. They specified having someone who likes Aboriginal people, and is prepared to listen. However they also want someone who can be strong and enforce the rules. The point was also made that the manager needs to be consistent, and that trouble arises when the rules are inconsistently applied.

The manager's role in relation to the rules for the club raised considerable comment. Survey respondents felt that the manager should implement the rules of the club, but should not have a role in making those rules. They believed that the best process is

for the committee to make the rules, and for the rules to be stable. They recognise that most managers don't stay for more than a few years, and they do not want the club changing every time the manager changes: *'Every manager has to listen to the committee, they're the boss of the club not the manager. Some managers don't understand that. He's there to hold the license, not make the rules.'*

There were several comments that indicate that through their history clubs have had managers who have created problems through favouritism, with practices like allowing traditional owners and other important people in the community to drink after closing time; and paying them with either money or alcohol: *'The managers are manipulative - I've heard after hours drinks for committee members - who can I put in my pocket?'* Some clubs have also had problems with managers defrauding the community and stealing money. (This problem is certainly not limited to clubs.)

Other survey respondents highlighted the power a manager has in the community: *'It's hard to get rid of a manager who you don't like, people are afraid to criticise as they might get banned.'* The manager is often the licensee or the nominee for the license. This gives them a great deal of control over a highly valued asset. They can, if so inclined, close the club for considerable periods. If a manager chooses to gather power within a community they are well placed to do so.

Most clubs employ their managers directly. They are on a wage, and some have incentive payments related to the way the club is running (as far as we are aware the incentive payments are *not* related to turnover). There is considerable lack of transparency over how the managers are managed. The club committee generally has the responsibility for supervising them, but there is potential for this to be ineffective because of the power the manager has over the club through being the licensee or nominee.

However two clubs employ the Arnhem Land Progress Association (ALPA) to run the club and take responsibility for employing and supervising the manager. This arrangement creates some checks and balances, as the manager receives supervision from the head office of ALPA, and there are processes in place to monitor the propriety of corporate and financial behaviour. ALPA also takes responsibility for the training of committee members in governance matters. Committee members in these communities still reported feeling that they had control of their club. They did not appear to feel that having an additional stakeholder in management meant that they had lost control.

### **7.3 The importance of security staff**

Table 7.1 also makes it clear that almost half of survey respondents felt that security staff are key to running a good club. It was well recognised that security staff need to be there to control drunks, and it was acknowledged that this is not an easy job. There

was considerable feedback that it helps if security staff receive training: *'Security should be stepping up a little bit more - wear uniforms, get training, otherwise subject to family influences.'*

As cited earlier (Section 5.5,) people prefer that security guards are low key, and speak quietly to people. In two communities there was some feedback that security in the club can be rough and disrespectful: *'Security staff mishandle people, they are rough and inflame the situation, then they get punched and it's more trouble. They need to talk politely to people.'* Feedback suggests that this relationship between security and patrons seems to function to introduce a sour note to the club, and people from these communities were far less likely to comment that their club was a happy, relaxed place in which people meet to socialise and have fun.

#### **7.4 The role of the club committee**

Many survey respondents recognised that their club committee plays a key role in how well the club runs. They specified that a strong committee is needed – people who can enforce a strong set of rules: *'Working well when the committee is strong and willing to send a message we will not tolerate that type of behaviour.'* The functioning of club committees is discussed in more detail in the chapter on 'Legal and Governance Structures'.

#### **7.5 Rules**

Both rules on opening hours and rules governing behaviour were identified by respondents as being important in the running of a good club. These issues are discussed in more details in chapters four and six.

#### **7.6 Food**

It is important to note that it is a license condition of all the clubs that hot food be available. There was a great deal of feedback that having good food available is important in creating an atmosphere where people are enjoying themselves – not merely drinking their beer: *'Important thing is food, hot and spicy, eat as well as drink - no problem then.'* It was clearly felt that the availability of hot food makes the club more of a night out: *'Runs well because you can watch football on TV, play pool, darts, and there is nice food, hot food.'*

There was also some indication that eating food and drinking is something that people learn. It is a move away from a culture of drinking to get drunk:

*We didn't used to have a bistro - only started recently. It's made it better to have a feed at the club and drinking as well. Some people don't eat there - go home and have a feed. But it's no good sitting and drinking beer when you're hungry. Now people are happy to spend some money on food, and some on*

*beer. I'm getting that habit now - eating and drinking. I'm alright with that as long as I have a good yarn.*

Some managers reported that they had tried to sell food, and it was wasted because nobody bought it. As one manager put it – *'People are here to drink, not eat.'* However other clubs had a different experience. It seems that clubs that sell hot food such as casseroles do create a market: *'We have hot food - try to do hot stews, casseroles, foods - sometimes hot chips & wing dings but we try to make it healthy, stomach filling food. They often put their name down for food before they buy beer.'*

One club had a reputation for selling good food, and non-drinkers would go to the club to get food, and then go home. However when that manager left the turnover in meals decreased markedly. So it appears that the quality of the food is very important. Several managers of the clubs that do sell food commented that people would often buy it at the club, but take it home to eat after the club closed. In this way the club becomes a takeaway food outlet for the community.

The point was also made that the food should not be too expensive. One club was charging \$30 for a meal, which was well beyond what most people were prepared to pay.

## **7.7 Entertainment**

Several survey respondents felt that to run well the club needs to provide entertainment. This too functions to lessen the focus on drinking. People can have a good time playing pool and darts. Several of the clubs also run dancing competitions, meat raffles and fashion shows. Some managers made the point that planning and running such entertainment is expensive, and since the change to trading hours enforced by the NTNER most of the clubs are making much less profit.

Survey respondents reported that having entertainment gave the club a happy feel: *'They play music, they have bands, sometimes they have little corroboree, makes the club real happy. Make people really happy, laugh, enjoying themselves. Sometimes the club go right up to 8 o'clock and then it closes and everyone comes out real good.'*

One manager commented that he had received censure from other organisations in the community when he ran such entertainment, as they felt he was trying to entice people to the club. Far from encouraging people to drink, it creates an environment in which they don't focus solely on drinking.

## **7.8 Good relationships with other organisations in the community**

Some of the managers interviewed commented that it is important for their club to have good links to other organisations in the community. They need to communicate well to make sure systems like banning people, and 'no work, no club' can be properly run. It is also important to have good channels of communication with the police.

One club has become very isolated from other community organisations. There is a lot of mutual mistrust and suspicion. This environment means that the club is less able to play a positive role in community life.

## **7.9 Regulation**

There was also feedback from some staff on the need for the clubs to be regulated by an external body. The need for this was perceived to be around the responsible service of alcohol, but also more broadly around financial management matters. There is a need for a more pro-active approach so that clubs can receive support in working towards providing a responsible service that adds to the overall quality of community life. Most of the clubs do this most of the time. However their history demonstrates that at times they do not, and at these times they need supervision and support. Recommendation 3 of this report deals with this issue by suggesting the creation of capacity with the Northern Territory government to pro-actively work with and assist clubs to operate responsibly and for the benefit of their community.

## **7.10 Physical environment**

In keeping with the general feedback that it was important to make the club a pleasant place where people could relax and enjoy themselves, some people commented that it was good to have a well maintained club, with clean toilets, tidy areas and good gardens. There was also some comment that it was good to have separate areas where people from different groups could sit, and areas both inside and outside. This is supported by findings from the literature review

## **7.11 What makes a club run well – key points:**

- *Clubs run best when they create an atmosphere that encourages patrons to have a good, social time and not focus solely on drinking.*
- *Most clubs employ their manager directly, however two contract ALPA to run them. This arrangement creates some checks and balances and gives more surety that the club will be appropriately managed.*
- *Most managers are supervised by the club Committee. This system is open to abuse, because Managers have a great deal of control over the opening and running of the club. If they so desire, they can exert enormous power because potential critics do not want to be banned from the club.*
- *The strength of the Committee was seen as crucial to running a stable and responsible club.*
- *Committees should be representative of the whole community and have drinking and non drinking members, as well as a range of ages. In some cases there may be a role for non-Indigenous committee members.*
- *Good security is done in a low key manner wherever possible.*
- *The quality of security staff is important, and training helps them to do a good job.*

- *The availability of food is important in a well run club:*
  - *The availability of hot food such as a casserole is important in creating an atmosphere where people are there to have a good time – not only to drink and get drunk.*
  - *When good food is available people will buy it, but the habit of eating as well as drinking is a learned one, and takes time to acquire.*
- *Entertainment such as games, bands, competitions and music are important in creating a happy lively atmosphere where the drinking is not the sole focus.*

## 8 Conclusion

This study examines the operation and impacts of clubs in remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. The findings indicate that the clubs have had a mixed history. Prior to 2007 some of the clubs experienced periods of very high consumption, associated with high levels of alcohol related harm for the community members. This period was characterised by license conditions that allowed extensive opening hours and take away sales. In 2007 opening hours and alcohol sold were brought under centralised control, and all but one club were limited to opening for three hours a day on four days each week. Sales were limited to mid-strength and light beer.

Since 2007 two measures of alcohol related harms (alcohol related assaults and alcohol related hospital separations) in communities with clubs have been declining, and are now comparable to the rest of the NT. This suggests that *when license conditions are tightly controlled*, communities with clubs do not suffer from uniformly higher alcohol related harms than those without clubs.

Over their history clubs in Aboriginal communities in the NT have developed an array of successful measures that manage patrons' alcohol consumption and behaviour. All the clubs are now pleasant places to spend an evening, and offer community members a convivial place to socialise. When alcohol related trouble occurs as a result of drinking at the club, all the clubs have very effective systems of managing the behaviour through rules, security staff and a system of banning people who have broken the rules. This system is also used to control a range of other behaviours (such as not turning up to work) in every community. We note that all of the clubs have developed these systems over time and trial, and they may not be easily replicated.

However the dilemma facing policy makers is not a dichotomy between a dry community where residents don't drink alcohol, and a community with a club where people do drink alcohol. Residents of remote communities access alcohol from a number of outlets – whether they have a club or not. The dilemma is therefore creating policy settings that maximise drinkers' access to environments in which their alcohol consumption is managed.