

30 June 2017

## **LNAC Submission on Northern Territory Alcohol Policy and Legislation Review**

### **Introduction**

The Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation (LNAC) wishes to make a submission on the Northern Territory Alcohol Policies and Legislation Review.

Its basis for preparation of this submission is:

- its firsthand knowledge of both the causes and impacts of alcohol consumption within the Darwin and Palmerston communities.
- its contribution to research into the issues surrounding alcohol consumption, its causes and its impacts.

The underlying LNAC position on the review of policy and legislation in this space is that the time has passed for looking only at the impacts of alcohol consumption. Historically solutions have been based on placing the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff by reducing supply or restricting access. It is time now to move the ambulance to the top of the cliff, to look through with increased scrutiny and purpose to the reasons why that alcohol consumption occurs, and how effective strategies may be established to reduce the demand for alcohol where that demand leads to harm.

It is the LNAC view that activities identified in the discussion paper, such as restricting access to alcohol or designating areas as alcohol free may have apparent or short term impacts but do not address the base issue of the causes of alcohol consumption beyond recreational access.

Indeed, it is the LNAC view that implementing these policy initiatives may well serve, to a significant degree, to drive demand underground and encourage such activities as black market supply, production of home brew and population shift to areas of easy supply (such as away from community and into Darwin). In the longer term we suggest they will be counterproductive and will do very little to raise the standard of living for indigenous territorians.

While the perceived anti-social behaviours are occurring in the public eye there will greater focus on sensible conversations around what is the root cause of the problem and how to address that particular issue, as opposed to how to address the symptom.

This view is based in part to the findings of LNAC research undertaken since 2011 and reported under the title "MESSAGE IN THE BOTTLE: A SURVEY OF DRINKING PATTERNS AND ATTITUDES ABOUT ALCOHOL POLICY AMONGST DARWIN'S HOMELESS" a copy of which is attached.

It is not our intention to repeat the conclusions of that research here but to draw your attention to the document in the hope that any review will take into account the views of those likely to be impacted on the most.

## Current Issues and Possible Solutions

Specific issues not obviously covered in the discussion paper include the following:

### **Problem**

Prior application of Alcohol Policy has been perceived as racist, pointless and unfairly targeting indigenous people. Unless and until it is seen to be applied equitably and fairly across all community groups it will lack effectiveness

### **Solution**

Involve potentially impacted groups in policy formulation in order to develop policies that will carry weight e.g. emphasis on harm minimisation as an imperative as opposed to alcohol control. Development of forms of identification that are readily available to all sectors of the community and will be accepted by those groups.

### **Problem**

Many indigenous drinkers would like to stop drinking. While providing assistance to return to community would appear to support this, in point of fact the communities do not effectively provide positive support to assist the process.

### **Solution**

Provision of better support systems readily available for people who are giving up drinking, both in Darwin and in community, including support systems to keep them safe once sober. Providing a rehab facility without accommodation and outreach support upon exit is only encouraging relapse.

If funding was available Community elders could take these people out bush to keep them safe and implement activities like hunting, gathering and re-learning survival skills

### **Problem**

There is no referral system in place to allow cross discipline case management of individual client needs to keep them safe. Indeed, many providers in the community services space have the ability to cooperate or collaborate but privacy issues prevent them, and the level of understanding by the client does not facilitate gaining appropriate information sharing approvals within relevant time frames.

### **Solution**

Provide a fast track information sharing tool for community service organisations at both commonwealth and territory level to enable service providers to supply a range of case management support services with demand reduction as the imperative.

### **Problem**

A significant percentage of drinkers are not interested in giving up and will find alternative mechanisms for satisfying their demand. This may, in itself lead to increased crime (theft) or a decline in health (Production of low quality home brew). Reference is made to injuries that orthodox medicine fails to manage effectively. More commonly, alcohol is a self-medication for grief over the loss of multiple loved ones - either through natural death or suicide, or the loss of children to child protection authorities or to the family of estranged spouses

### **Solution**

Put in place processes to address those underlying issues. There has to be social and economic value in treating the problems causing medication by drinking where that treatment reduces short term impacts such as inappropriate social behaviour, hospital presentations or criminal acts, and long term impacts such as declining in general health, increased incidence of liver and kidney disease and diabetes and reduced engagements with the judicial system.

**Problem**

Problem drinkers engaging in antisocial behaviours including public nuisance and humbugging around “hot spot” locations.

**Solution**

LNAC is able to employ, if funded Larrakia Ambassadors, to be engaged at shopping centres to engage with problem drinkers on humbugging, showing respect as in the past, rather than outside Security Companies getting paid to simply move people on.

**Positives from the Discussion Paper**

The LNAC supports any strategy which has the potential, over time, to reduce demand other than by regulatory means. We are concerned about the intergenerational reliance on alcohol and other drugs, and any program which supports improved health outcomes and, ultimately, improved standards of living, is worthy of investment.

This includes:

- families as first teachers,
- peer support programs,
- school based education,
- recreation and image focus to encourage healthy lifestyle choices,
- mentoring and role modelling (Mary G, Sporting figures, public figures),
- diversionary activities,
- life skills education,
- provision of accommodation that encourages responsible attitudes and healthy lifestyles,
- improved access to a greater range of outreach services (funded by reduction in long term costs associated with poor health and antisocial behaviours)