



Mr Trevor Riley
Chairperson
Alcohol Policies and Legislation Review
Department of Health
PO Box 40596
Casuarina NT 0811

Dear Mr Riley,

Alice Springs has been subjected to arguably the most severe alcohol restrictions of any town in Australia over the past 20 years.

As an elected representative of Alice Springs for over 11 years; the Member for Araluen for the last 7 years; a counsellor of the Alice Springs Town Council from 2004-2008; the former Northern Territory Minister for Alcohol Rehabilitation; and resident of Alice Springs for almost 25 years, I believe I am more than qualified to provide advice on alcohol policy in Alice Springs.

In my past and present capacities I have formally presided over decisions in Alice Springs relating to:

- 2pm opening of take away liquor outlets
- The after 6pm sale of fortified wines
- The banning of cask wine
- The Banned Drinkers Register
- The rolling out of the Temporary Beat Locations (TBLs) or Point of Sale (POS)
- Alcohol restrictions during footy carnivals and other special events
- The allocation of liquor licenses
- The buying back of liquor licenses
- Alcohol restrictions imposed by the Federal Government's "intervention" or Emergency Response
- Voluntary Alcohol restrictions for private residences
- The roll-out and impact of the Basic Card in Central Australia
- The full rollout of Alcohol Mandatory Treatment in the Northern Territory

Temporary Beat Locations (TBLs) or Point of Sale (POSies)

Without doubt, the single most successful alcohol policy we have seen in Alice Springs over the past 20 years has been the TBLs or POSies. This involves Police standing outside of take away liquor outlets checking people's identification and proof of residency. TBLs were introduced by the former Labor Government in 2012. They have been enormously successful in limiting the sale of alcohol to people who have no legal place to drink alcohol.

Through the vigilant practice of TBLs we have seen a 16% reduction in alcohol consumption in Alice Springs. This success is unparalleled.

For any Government to consider withdrawing or reducing the use of TBLs in Alice Springs is ludicrous.

The Northern Territory Police Association has publicly complained that staffing the TBLs is a waste of Police time and skills. They have complained that policing the TBLs is "boring".

My view, and I suspect the view of most Alice Springs residents, is that the Police should be proud and enthusiastic to continue to implement the all-time, most successful strategy for curbing alcohol consumption and alcohol related crime and anti-social behaviour in Alice Springs.

The Labor Government promised in the 2016 election campaign to keep TBLs in place in Alice Springs. It is the responsibility of this Government to honour this election commitment.

Already we have seen a stepping away from this position by the Chief Minister since winning Government. The vernacular now used by the Chief Minister, is that the use of TBLs is a "Police decision" and that with the re-introduction of the BDR the TBL's might be reduced.

This will not wash with the Alice Springs community. People know that the Government promised to keep the TBLs in place. Any retraction from this position will be seen as a broken promise by the Gunner Government.

Floor Price for Alcohol

In effect, Alice Springs has had a floor price for a number of years. The take away liquor outlets in Alice Springs formed an agreement in about 2013 to not sell heavily discounted alcohol. For example in Alice Springs the Coles and Woolworths liquor outlets do not have the nation-wide "30% off" wine deals. There are no alcohol bargains to be had in Alice Springs. We pay a premium for all alcohol.

Alice Springs does not need a floor price for alcohol.

A floor price would make our cost of living even higher for Alice Springs residents. The suite of existing alcohol reduction strategies, plus the addition of the BDR, will make a floor price unnecessary.

The Labor Government has promised that they will not introduce a floor price. I can only assume that they will honour this promise.

Consistency of alcohol strategies throughout the Northern Territory

The whole of the Northern Territory, except Darwin, has been subjected to extreme alcohol restrictions for many years.

Darwin has escaped the personal and public imposition of the extreme Government alcohol policies implemented elsewhere. This is clearly unfair and illogical when you consider alcohol is no less of a problem in Darwin than in other parts of the Territory.

It is time that Darwin led by example and a fairer and more consistent alcohol policy is developed for the whole of the Northern Territory.

Why should alcohol be substantially cheaper in Darwin than in any other part of the Northern Territory? Opening hours for take away liquor outlets should be uniform across the Northern Territory. Why should take away liquor outlets be allowed to open at 10am in Darwin, but 2pm in Alice Springs?

A bold Government should have a consistent and fair approach to Alcohol Policy.

There are problem drinkers everywhere in the Northern Territory. How many people have been killed or brutally assaulted in Mitchel Street in Darwin through alcohol fuelled violence over the past 5-10 years?

Darwin has a serious problem with alcohol related anti-social behaviour. It is only fair that these problems be addressed with the same level of Government control and restrictions that we have seen implemented throughout regional areas of the Northern Territory.

I challenge the Gunner Government to be fair and consistent with their alcohol policy for all Territorians.

Alcohol Mandatory Treatment (AMT)

The very positive aspect to AMT is that it exclusively targets the problem drinker.

The problem with the “supply” strategies” such as the BDR, floor prices, restricted opening hours and limiting the sale of specific types and quantities of alcohol, is that everyone suffers. These strategies penalise everyone.

AMT is a policy that addresses the “demand” for alcohol.

A good suite of alcohol policies will have a balance of supply, demand and harm reduction strategies.

The AMT was a radical policy implemented by the former CLP Government. It was very effective in identifying the most debilitated alcoholics in our community, those finding their way into the justice system because of their drunk and disorderly behaviour. It is expensive, controversial and yet highly compassionate and life changing for many who have been treated under the AMT.

There is an absolute need in our community to look after this small section of population that are unable to look after themselves. We look after people with severe mental illness in exactly the same way. We give the asylum to be treated and cared for until they are well enough to make good decisions on their own.

I support the option of AMT continuing as it is in the Northern Territory. It has proven to have changed people’s lives in a positive, constructive manner. It has saved lives and should continue to be available to those severely affected by alcohol in the Northern Territory.

No Political donations from the Alcohol Industry

The Gunner Government, like previous governments has already been seduced by political donations from the Northern Territory alcohol industry. With alcohol being the most serious social problem in the Northern Territory, this practice must stop.

It is completely unethical that any political party or candidate be sponsored by the alcohol industry.

I would recommend that the Northern Territory Government legislates to ban all political donations from the alcohol industry.

The dubious decision by the Gunner Government to change the regulations reducing the size of alcohol outlets, within days of receiving a planning application from the wholesale liquor giant Dan Murphy’s, is no coincidence. Then the revelation that the Gunner Government has been literally sponsored by the AHA who are of course staunchly against Dan Murphy’s) is again no coincidence.

The unethical practice of Governments being bought out by the big end of town has to stop. The Gunner Government promised to operate with integrity and honesty. This has already gone down the gurgler when it comes to alcohol policy.

With the re-introduction of the BDR, it should make no difference what size the liquor outlet is. In theory, the BDR will prohibit problem drinkers from buying alcohol. Whether the grog shop is 200m² or 2000m² in size should make no difference. It is at the point of sale that the difference can be made.

Conclusion

Most Territorians live in Darwin, and are oblivious to the fact that people outside of Darwin have been living with extreme alcohol restrictions for many, many years. These alcohol restrictions are a part of life and are begrudgingly accepted over time.

Darwin needs to come into line with the reality of living in the Northern Territory and learn to accept alcohol restrictions, like the rest of us.

Overall, I believe alcohol policy in Alice Springs is working. Current alcohol restrictions in Alice Springs should remain. There should be no reduction of the TBLs. There should be no change to other alcohol reduction strategies, including the Alcohol Mandatory Treatment services. As a community we have learnt to adapt to these policies. As a community we accept that alcohol is at the core of our social problems and we accept that it must be addressed through often radical policy.

Attention should always be given to constantly tweaking and checking to ensure that problem drinkers are not finding ways of eluding the system. Alcohol policy in the Northern Territory is like a leaky bucket. As soon as you plug up one hole, it starts leaking out of another hole.

I look forward to a bold and equitable approach to the Northern Territory Government's Alcohol Policy, **without fear or favour.**

Yours sincerely,



ROBYN LAMBLEY MLA
Member for Araluen
30th June 2017