Historic Alcohol Reforms Introduced to Parliament

The Minister for Alcohol Policy, Delia Lawrie will today introduce to Parliament new laws to underpin the most comprehensive alcohol reforms in the Northern Territory’s history.

Ms Lawrie said the Alcohol Reform (Substance Misuse Assessment and Referral for Treatment Court) Bill 2011, Alcohol Reform (Prevention of Alcohol-Related Crime and Substance Misuse) Bill 2011 and Alcohol Reform (Liquor Legislation Amendment) Bill 2011 would crack down on alcohol-fuelled crime and anti-social behaviour by turning problem drinkers off tap and mandating treatment to stop the violence.

“Alcohol is the biggest cause of crime in the Territory with 60% of all assaults and 67% of all domestic violence incidents involving alcohol and it costs our community an estimated $642 million a year,” Ms Lawrie said.

“The laws introduce new bans for problem drinkers, mandated treatment, and a Banned Drinker Register at all take-away liquor licences across the Territory to enforce the bans at the point of sale by ID scans.

“The Problem Drinker Bans provide a direct health intervention for problem drinkers without criminalising alcoholism, a response that has been supported by the health sector and the liquor industry.

“The vast majority of Territorians drink responsibly, these reforms target the problem drinker so people who are not banned will only have a minor inconvenience by showing ID at point of sale.

“The Alcohol Reforms provide consistency across the Territory and ensure bans on drinking and take away alcohol can be effective anywhere in the Territory.”

1. Alcohol Reform (Prevention of Alcohol-Related Crime and Substance Misuse) Bill 2011

The Alcohol Reform (Prevention of Alcohol-Related Crime and Substance Misuse) Bill 2011 establishes police-issued banning notices (Banning Alcohol and Treatment (BAT) Notices) to turn the tap off on problem drinkers who are taken into protective custody 3 times in 3 months, or commit alcohol related offences or domestic violence.

“These laws give Police greater powers to intervene and turn off the tap to problem drinkers,” Ms Lawrie said.

“Banned Problem Drinkers may have banning periods reduced if they attend intervention or treatment.

"Breaching the bans will lead to increasing treatment requirements and longer bans and on a third breach referral to the Alcohol and Other Drugs Tribunal (ADT) who will issue appropriate rehabilitation orders.”

The Bill also establishes the ADT, with the power to review police issued bans and to order people with alcohol or drug dependence to attend treatment or rehabilitation, or refer for assessment for income management.
Police, FACs workers, health professionals and family members can also refer problem drinkers to the ADT to seek a ban and treatment order.

2. Alcohol Reform (Substance Misuse Assessment and Referral for Treatment Court) Bill 2011

More than 60% of crime in the Territory is alcohol related and for persons already in the court system, the new SMART Court offers assessment and access to programs for offenders misusing substances.

Ms Lawrie said the Bill followed a review of the existing Alcohol Court and will be more flexible and able to deal with a wider range of offenders.

“The SMART Court will be able to hand down orders for people who have been found guilty of a criminal offence related to alcohol or drug misuse. These orders can include bans from consuming and purchasing alcohol and mandatory treatment,” she said.

“The SMART Court provides an avenue for offenders with alcohol or drug problems to receive positive treatment or rehabilitation as part of their sentence, reducing the likelihood they will offend again.”

3. Alcohol Reform (Liquor Legislation Amendment) Bill 2011

The third tier of the reforms amends the Liquor Act to support the roll-out of the Banned Drinker Register, an ID scanner system, across the Northern Territory to identify problem drinkers and enforce alcohol bans.

The amendments modernise regulation of the liquor industry and introduce tough penalties.

The amendments;

- Allow the Director of Licensing to issue infringement notice for breaches by a licensee thereby providing the Director with the power to act swiftly and appropriately to the full range of the Act;

- Clarify the roles of the Director of Licensing, the Liquor Commission and the Courts in dealing with breaches and removing the potential for a licensee to be punished twice for the same breach;

- Introduce a new offence making it illegal for a person to irresponsibly supply minors with alcohol anywhere in the Territory, with fines of up to $13,300;

- Significantly increase maximum penalties to $33,250 or 12 months in prison for Grog runners or sly grog sellers; and

- Significantly increase maximum penalties to $13,300 for people who ‘book up’ alcohol.

“The Bill will make our licensing system more responsive and effective while deterring elements in the community willing to put profit before other people’s lives,” Ms Lawrie said.

Ms Lawrie said the alcohol reform package was developed through extensive consultation with all sectors of the community and had received overwhelming support through the consultation process late last year.

“For our health, our kids, our community and our economy, the cost of alcohol is too high.”
“These reforms deliver the tools to target problem drinkers and turn off the tap to stop the violence while also providing direct health interventions to turn lives around.”

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