



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Racing, Gaming and Liquor**

Your Ref :

Our Ref : L45/15/06

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The Principal Research Officer
Education and Health Standing Committee
Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

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Dear Sir / Madam

INQUIRY INTO THE ADEQUACY AND APPROPRIATENESS OF PREVENTION AND TREATMENT SERVICES FOR ALCOHOL AND ILLICIT DRUG PROBLEMS IN WA

As Director of Liquor Licensing, I am responsible for the administration of the Western Australian *Liquor Control Act 1988* ('the Act'). In exercising that independent statutory authority, amongst other things, I am accountable for administering the Act consistent with its objects, which include the minimization of harm or ill-health caused to people, or any group of people, due to the use of liquor.

In recent years, there has been growing interest by WA communities, particularly in remote locations of the State, in seeking the assistance of the Director of Liquor Licensing to address harm being caused in their communities due to the use of liquor. At present, there are now liquor restrictions in all communities in the area of the State north of 20° south, as well as in communities in the Pilbara. There is also an inquiry currently underway in the Mid-west Gascoyne area.

In this respect, under section 64 of the Act the Director of Liquor Licensing has the authority to act in the public interest to impose restrictions on the sale of liquor from licensed premises so as to address alcohol related harm in any part of the State.

There is also a mechanism in the Act whereby the Minister for Racing and Gaming may make regulations declaring an area of the State a restricted area thereby prohibiting or restricting the bringing in, possession of, and or consumption of liquor in that area. Restricted area declarations are currently in place for Wangkatjungka, Oombulgurri, Jigalong, Juwulinypany and Noonkanbah. This agency is also working with the communities of Mungullah, Ngumpun, Kadjina, Koorabye and Yakanarra in respect of possible restricted area declarations.

In addition to these legislative mechanisms, there is also a system of voluntary liquor accords in place throughout the State whereby licensees, the Police, and other local agencies agree on a set of voluntary liquor restrictions. Because these accords are voluntary, their success depends on the will of the licensees to collectively abide by them.

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While liquor restrictions in regional towns are useful in the short term as a circuit breaker, they are not a long term solution to the problems being experienced in some communities. For example, in late 2007 I imposed liquor restrictions on the licensed premises in Fitzroy Crossing. Since then, those restrictions have been monitored and today the most recent evaluation was published.

The Drug and Alcohol Office contracted the University of Notre Dame to evaluate the impact of the restrictions and develop three reports: one at six months post restriction, one at 12 months and one at 24 months. These reports were commissioned by the Drug and Alcohol Office to provide an independent assessment of the issues related to the restrictions in Fitzroy Crossing and surrounding communities.

While the quantitative and qualitative data presented in the 12 month report suggests continuing health and social benefits of the restriction for the residents of Fitzroy Crossing and the Fitzroy Valley communities, it also indicates that there has been an increase in demand for alcohol and other drug and mental health services and that the existing services are struggling to meet the demand. In the Executive Summary of the 12 month report, it is stated that *"...gaps in support services that are needed to enable the social reconstruction of the Fitzroy Valley continue to hinder the community. There continues to be a state of under-investment in the people of the Fitzroy Valley. This gap requires the resourcing of community based organisations operating at the coal face of community development, cultural health, mental health (counselling), education, community safety (Policing) and training, to build on the window of opportunity that the restriction has created."*

Fitzroy Crossing and the experience in that community is not an isolated case or unique. When conducting inquiries under the Act, stakeholders frequently express concern and fear about the introduction of liquor restrictions without supporting alcohol and other drug and mental health services. They also raise concern about the provision of other community services in respect of education; sport and recreation; employment; and justice.

With the growing awareness and empowerment of communities to address their alcohol and other drug problems that I am encountering in my capacity as Director of Liquor Licensing, I can only anticipate that there will be increasing demands placed on government to deliver more alcohol and other drugs education, prevention and treatment services, as well as services that support social reconstruction. In this regard, government must identify and implement long term solutions that will address the underlying social issues.

Yours faithfully

Barry A Sargeant
DIRECTOR GENERAL

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