

**SUBMISSION TO EDUCATION AND HEALTH STANDING  
COMMITTEE**

**FOR**

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

**COMPLIED BY  
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This report outlines a response, specific to the townsite of Kununurra, to the Education and Health Standing Committee Inquiry into the adequacy and appropriateness of prevention and treatment services for alcohol and illicit drug problems in Western Australia.

I am a Senior Sergeant and the Officer in Charge of Kununurra Police Station and have been so since 18 September 2008. I have previously served as Officer in Charge of Subiaco and Mount Magnet Police Stations, and as a patrol inquiry officer at Kalgoorlie, Busselton and Ongerup.

## **BACKGROUND**

Kununurra is a townsite situated approximately 100 kilometres south east of Wyndham and 40 kilometres west of the Western Australia – Northern Territory border. The population of Kununurra is listed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as – 7775 (ABS acknowledge that these figures may be 20% under reported), 47.7% of Population are aboriginal, 3310 are under 18 years of age, 62% of those are aboriginal, 1910 juveniles are in the 0-9 years age group.

Kununurra has experienced 4.8% growth each year for the past two years and it is expected that the population will double in the next ten years. The Ord River Expansion scheme will see \$414 million spent in the next two years, and funding of over \$149 million for infrastructure upgrades at the Hospital, High School, Airport and TAFE facilities.

Kununurra, as with all of the Kimberley is affected by two seasons, the wet and dry seasons. The wet season sees a large influx of indigenous persons into Kununurra from outlying communities such as Kalumburu, Oombulgurri, Warmun, Port Keats and other Northern Territory communities. This is usually so they can access essential government services during times of heavy rain and flooding experienced in the wet season.

In the dry season there is a large influx of tourists, approximately 100,000, according to the Kimberley Development Commission, who base themselves in Kununurra to visit surrounding tourist locations in the East Kimberley. During the dry season indigenous persons generally return to their respective communities.

The abuse of alcohol is prevalent in the Kununurra Community, particularly amongst, but not restricted to, indigenous persons. Drug abuse is generally in the form of cannabis use, there is not an apparent high level of abuse of other prohibited drugs.

### **EFFECT OF ALCOHOL AND DRUGS IN THE KUNUNURRA COMMUNITY**

Police data shows that there has been a significant increase in offences over the past twelve months and conservatively eighty per cent of these offences are alcohol or drug related in one form or another. Some offences are directly related to alcohol and drug abuse, these are generally person related offences such as domestic assaults, driving, anti-social behaviour, and disorderly offences.

Other offences that are indirectly linked to alcohol and drug abuse are property related offences such as burglary, damage, theft and graffiti offences. Predominantly these offences are committed by aboriginal juvenile offenders, who as a result of family or social circumstances offend, out of boredom, to get money to buy food, and because these behaviours are becoming normalised within the community. The typical offender profile for Kununurra is a Juvenile aboriginal male between the ages of 8-14 years.

The two major concerns for Police in Kununurra are juvenile related crime and domestic related assaults. There are currently 35 recidivist domestic violence victims, case managed by the joint DCP-Police co-located Domestic Violence Hub.

A victim becomes a recidivist once six or more incidents are recorded in their name, or other indicators place them at risk. Of the 35 cases managed in Kununurra, seven are high risk, eight are medium risk, ten are low risk and ten have partners that are currently incarcerated.

Types of alcohol fuelled Domestic violence injuries observed are stabbings with knives or sharp objects, woundings with broken alcohol bottles are common, and assault occasioning bodily harm with other objects such as sticks, tree branches, metal bars etc.

Kununurra has a “Night culture” where numerous kids roam the street at night to either amuse themselves, get away from violence, or an unsafe home environment. This culture also impacts on school attendance, low numeracy and literacy rates in the community, and low employment opportunities later in life and serves to introduce them to the Justice System, through offending and contact with Police.

Other effects of alcohol abuse observed in Kununurra are Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). Described as a continuum of permanent birth defects caused by maternal consumption of alcohol during pregnancy, FASD includes, but is not limited to fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS). According to Ord Valley Aboriginal Health Service (OVAHS) rates of fetal alcohol syndrome are high in Kununurra.

Symptoms of (FAS) are growth restriction, facial abnormalities, central nervous system damage, and heavily impaired cognitive ability. These symptoms are displayed in several children that are currently subject of a youth at risk initiative facilitated by Police.

Notwithstanding the impact alcohol abuse and resultant offending has on individuals, there is a greater cost to Government and the community as a whole. Demands are placed on resources in Police, Health, Corrective services, Education, Department of Community Protection and Local Government to combat the problems that evolve from such abuse.

## **STRATEGIES TO COMBAT ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE**

The challenge for Police and the community is to break the cycle of offending and dispel these normalised behaviours through education and other community based programs.

With respect to domestic violence the strategy already in place is the co-location of Police with DCP to case manage individuals through a co-ordinated, structured response and support framework, as required by the specific circumstances of each case.

There is currently a Section 64 application before the Director of Liquor Licensing to implement liquor restrictions in Kununurra and Wyndham townsites. The Application is seeking to impose the following restrictions;

1. Packaged liquor may only be sold Monday to Saturday from 12 noon to 8pm.
2. The sale of packaged liquor on Sunday is prohibited.
3. The sale and supply of liquor for consumption on premise is prohibited before 12 noon except where it is sold ancillary to a substantial meal or lodger.
4. Beer and Ready-to-Drinks (RTDs) sold as packaged liquor are limited to 3.5% alcohol content or less between 12 midday and 5.00pm.
5. Specified packaged liquor may only be sold in the following quantities:
  - a. Beer is limited to 30 cans maximum, each can no greater than 375ml, per customer, per day.
  - b. Ready-to drinks (RTD's) are limited to 24 containers maximum, each no greater than 375ml, per customer, per day.
  - c. Spirits are limited to one 750ml bottle maximum, per customer per day.
  - d. Wine, port, moselle and musket in containers of 750ml or less is limited to two maximum, per customer, per day.
  - e. Casks are limited to a maximum of one per person, per day.
  - f. The sale and supply of liquor is only permitted to a person who is present at the time of purchase on the licensed premises conducting the sale, unless approved in writing by the Director of Liquor Licensing.
6. Where a packaged liquor product is available from a manufacturer in a non-glass container, licensees are prohibited from selling the product in a glass container.

7. Licensees to submit returns of alcohol sales data, by product type and quantity to Department Racing, Gaming and Liquor every four months.

It has been argued that tourism will be affected by the proposed liquor restrictions, however with the proposed restrictions, amounts of alcohol over the Health Department of WA, Drink Safe recommended standard drink limit can still be accessed. Liquor restrictions are not a panacea to the problem of alcohol and drug abuse. The Section 64 application forms only one of the strategies to combat this issue in Kununurra, other strategies include;

- Interagency meetings inclusive of, East Kimberley Petrol Substance Misuse Strategy Committee, Youth Hub Network group, MG Corp Social Workers Advisory group, Shire Briefing committee, Strong Families committee, Standby Suicide Response committee, and promotion of Police–Aboriginal relations through Department of Indigenous Affairs and Miriuwung Gajerrong Aboriginal Corporation (MG Corp).
- An active Youth at risk initiative, the C.R.O.C. Program (Community Response for Our Children), the role of the CROC program is to develop an action focused working group to identify and target children at risk and provide alternative methodologies for response to demonstrated behaviours that have either placed them before the judicial system or made them a cause for concern. A longer term strategy for the program will be to build capacity for sustainable partnerships, promote consultation, and a unified approach to juvenile crime issues being experienced in Kununurra. Of the seven recidivist offenders targeted thus far only two have re-offended.
- Operation Alliance - Joint DCP/Police patrols. 85 youths removed from streets over a two week period. Whilst effective this type of operation is not sustainable without specific funding to both DCP and Police to effectively resource this strategy without impacting on day to day business demands.
- Operation Bullseye – targeted use of move on orders. 131 Move on Orders issued for month August. Highest in state bar Perth Police Station.
- A Liquor Accord comprising of key stakeholders in a consultative approach to alcohol use and availability in the community and harm minimisation.

- Targeted curfew checks of offenders, particularly Prolific and Priority Offender management
- Improved Form 6 Applications made to courts to curb juvenile recidivist offender behaviour.
- Joint Police - Shire Ranger patrols to combat littering and anti social behaviour problems stemming from alcohol consumption.
- Close proximity policing with respect to public open spaces near Liquor outlets.
- Youth workers employed at DCP and Shire Wyndham East Kimberley (SWEK) to engage youth.
- Community Discos introduced and held monthly.
- Holiday activity programs introduced. Sunset basketball program run over 7 week period (105 children participated).
- Input sought from indigenous community leaders to address parenting issues and assistance programs.
- Youth Centre commenced in August 2009 (773 children in attendance, Avg 15 per day children attended to Dec 31, 2009)
- Federal, State and local funding obtained for MG Corp Youth workers and Warringarri Chill-Out Space.

## **DIFFICULTIES EXPERIENCED**

Apart from the Hospital, Police are the only 24/7 service provider in Kununurra and historically have inherited other agency tasks after normal business hours. Engagement of other service providers such as Crisis Care, DCP, Counselling services and other NGO providers after normal business hours has a significant impact on Police, particularly with respect to apprehension and detention of juvenile offenders. Long delays are experienced in getting other service providers to assist. These delays remove Police from frontline policing and other tasking commitments.

Chronic alcohol abuse in Kununurra often means that suitable responsible adults cannot be located to take custody of children, or children may be released into an environment where they may come to harm. Often it is safer to detain them at the Police station until a suitable, sober responsible person can be located, rather than

release them back into the community. Whilst this is not acceptable by social standards, it is at times, the best of very limited options.

Diversionsary options are utilised for juvenile offenders, to limit exposure to the court system, however the rate of recidivism is increasing, despite clearance rates well above state targets. There is a lack of consequence for offenders, even when incarcerated they are effectively sent to an environment (Rangeview Detention Centre in Perth) that in most ways is far better than that experienced at home in Kununurra. Escorting juvenile offenders to Perth has significant financial and human resource implications to WA Police.

According to Standby Suicide Response, the East Kimberley has a high suicide rate, and indicators are that intoxication from alcohol use or sniffing of volatile substances occurs in ninety two percent of incidents prior to an attempted or actual suicide.

## **CONCLUSION**

As the Officer in Charge of Kununurra Police Station, I fully support the implementation of Liquor restrictions in the East Kimberley. Similar short term restrictions imposed previously have;

- Provided valuable breathing space for other agencies to engage with clients who are not intoxicated.
- A significant decrease in offending and tasking rates.
- A reduction in hospital presentations.
- A noticeable decrease in anti-social behaviour.
- An increase in monies spent buying clothing and food items instead of alcohol.
- The opportunity for children to be fed prior to the opening of alcohol outlets.

The liquor restrictions along with the other strategies implemented will, I believe, have a significant impact on the problems currently experienced in Kununurra, particularly with respect to domestic violence, juvenile crime, and incidence of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.



Increased provision of other Government and NGO services outside of normal business hours would also assist Police and the community to combat the night culture, improve school attendance, raise educational levels, and subsequent employment prospects of those who presently, by their own admission, have no hope for the future.

Respectfully submitted for your information.

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