

Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory

An alliance of the CLC, NLC, CAALAS, NAAJA and AMSANT

MEDIA RELEASE

APO NT urges reconsideration of Alcohol Protection Order Bill

7 November 2013

APO NT has called on the Government to postpone passage of the Alcohol Protection Orders Bill in order to properly consult and to consider the evidence, Jonathon Hunyor, spokesperson for the Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT (APO NT) said today.

“It is clear the NT Government is rushing through this legislation without proper evidence and without properly considering how it will affect people in the Territory,” said Mr Hunyor.

“APO NT members agree with the NT Government that there is a dire need to address harmful effects of alcohol in the community, but we want to see a scheme to reduce harm that is evidence based and will deliver results,” said Mr Hunyor.

APO NT has a range of concerns with the Bill, as highlighted by our member organisations, NAAJA and CAALAS. These include that the Bill:

- **ignores health experts** on effective ways to reduce alcoholism. An alcoholic will not stop drinking because they are placed on an APO;
- will result in **more encounters with Police**, and more alcohol dependent people being sent to jail;
- **gives Police far-reaching powers** usually reserved for courts;
- gives Police these powers **not just for serious offences**, but for almost all criminal offending;
- applies where a police officer believes the person was ‘affected by alcohol’ at the time of the alleged offence which **sets a very low threshold**;
- contains process for reconsideration and **review of orders which is inadequate**;
- does not establish a tracking system, such as the BDR, so there is **no effective system to track people** subject to an APO; and
- has unintended consequences. An APO prohibits a person from entering or being in licensed premises. **Many local supermarkets in the NT are licensed premises**. This may leave many people in regional and remote areas, particularly those on Basics Cards, with nowhere to do their shopping.

“It is obvious that these Alcohol Protection Orders will disproportionately affect Aboriginal people in the NT who are already far more likely to have encounters with the justice system, and to be targeted by police”, said Mr Hunyor.

“We should be investing in evidence-based, culturally relevant therapeutic treatment, not criminalising a social problem”, said Mr Hunyor.

“Alcohol issues won’t be addressed simply by giving police more powers. We need police and governments to work with our communities. Aboriginal people are speaking out, and it is time the Government listened to what the community wants.”

“We call on our Chief Minister to delay passage of the Bill and to consult with experts and the community about the best ways to address alcohol related harm in the NT”, said Mr Hunyor.

APO NT also calls for comprehensive measures to address grog in the NT. Examples of these measures were discussed at the APO NT Grog Summit in Alice Springs in July 2013, including:

- reducing supply as a circuit breaker;
- addressing underlying issues and treatment, and Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders; and
- introducing more community-based approaches to address alcohol related harm.

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