

Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory

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

MEDIA RELEASE

Communiqué

GROG IN THE TERRITORY: SUMMIT OUTCOMES

On Friday 16 November 2012 a summit on alcohol policy and its impact on Aboriginal people and communities was held in Darwin, sponsored by the Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the Northern Territory [APO NT]. The summit was attended by around 150 people.

The forum heard from a number of speakers from Aboriginal communities and organisations across the Territory including: Anyinginyi Health Service, East Arnhem night patrol, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, CAAPU, CAAPS, Borroloola, Tiwi Islands, Ntaria, Beswick, Bagot community, SAF,T, Jilkminggan and Katherine. There was also a presentation from representatives from Fitzroy Crossing.

The summit heard also from expert speakers including Professor Peter d'Abbs from Menzies School of Health Research; Associate Professor, Ted Wilkes from the National Indigenous Drug & Alcohol Committee; Professor Dennis Gray from the National Drug Research Institute; David Templeman, CEO of the Alcohol & Other Drugs Council of Australia; Donna Ah Chee, Acting CEO of Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, Doctor John Boffa, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress; Russell Goldflam, People's Alcohol Action Coalition and Michael O'Donnell, Chair of the NT Alcohol and Other Drugs Tribunal.

We ask for all levels of government to heed our warnings about the risks of allowing more alcohol to flow into remote communities.

The key messages delivered throughout the summit, included:

- That NT has unacceptably high rates of alcohol related harm.
- Aboriginal people in the NT have a long history of fighting for alcohol restrictions right across the NT and we are now at a *critical point* in this journey.
- Aboriginal families are most affected by the destructive impacts of alcohol, including domestic violence, suicide, and removal of children from their families in high levels.
- Aboriginal people need to secure our future and our culture by keeping our children safe, healthy and strong.
- Evidence shows that Aboriginal people must be in control of developing and implementing strategies to tackle alcohol issues and associated problems for them to be effective.
- Alcohol restrictions can provide necessary breathing space for Aboriginal communities, but are only one part of the solution.

Aboriginal participants made a number of key resolutions about action to be taken in their communities:

- To promote truthful and productive conversations about alcohol within our own communities;
- To draw strength from our successes;
- To draw strength from the importance of spirituality and culture;
- To ensure our communities get access to relevant data and evidence regarding alcohol impacts and policies;
- To ensure that community consultation processes are not dominated by drinkers but give voice to women, non-drinkers, elders and particularly children; and
- To take harm reduction as the key principle guiding alcohol policy.

Aboriginal summit participants called on both levels of Government to:

- Involve our people in all levels of decision-making regarding alcohol policy, program development and resourcing in the NT;
- Acknowledge that our people live in two worlds – one of traditional culture and another of contemporary society;
- Acknowledge that our people must be supported to develop solutions to tackle issues around alcohol related harm;
- Empower our people to resolve their own disputes and conflicts;
- Acknowledge the importance of our spirituality and culture in healing alcohol-related harm;
- Base alcohol policy on evidence not politics;
- Ensure that Police work with communities and develop strategies to ensure better relationships with Aboriginal people rather than engaging simply in law enforcement;
- Ensure community-specific cross-cultural training for non-Aboriginal staff, including nurses, doctors, teachers, and police officers;
- Complete the current study into on licensed clubs before considering further policy reform;
- Bring back a system (such as the Banned Drinkers Register) to restrict the supply of alcohol to problem drinkers without resorting to criminalisation;
- Implement population level supply reduction measures as a ‘circuit breaker’ for problems in our communities;
- Provide significant new resources into early childhood programs as an absolute priority;
- Expand government support for community-based recovery strategies, similar to strategies used in Fitzroy Crossing; and
- Expand and invest in existing rehabilitation programs and infrastructure before considering new options.

The outcomes of the summit will be followed up with Government through nominated delegates.

For further information contact Sarah Barr on 0487 341 117.