



What everyone knows about Alice – the Alcohol Protected Areas and PALIs really work!

Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (Congress) today added its voice to a growing chorus of concerns about the forthcoming end to Alcohol Protected Areas (APAs).

As it stands, the sunset clause in s118 of the Australian Government's *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Act 2012* will take effect on 16 July 2022. At a stroke, many Northern Territory communities, town camps and Community Living Areas will lose their legal protection from alcohol abuse. The 'rivers of grog' will once again flow through our communities.

The effects on the broader community through increased crime, antisocial behaviour and violence will be of great concern.

"Since the Northern Territory Government's alcohol reforms of 2018, we have made really good progress on reducing alcohol-related harm in Alice Springs, and the introduction of the full-time Police Auxiliary Liquor Inspectors (PALIs) at bottle shops has been a big part of this," said Donna Ah Chee, Chief Executive Officer of Congress.

"Alice Springs has become more like a normal country town with much less public drunkenness, fewer alcohol-related assaults and lower numbers of people going to hospital due to the unregulated consumption of take-away alcohol.

"Anyone who lived in Alice Springs through the early 2000s will remember that we were the stabbing capital of the world according to the head surgeon of the Alice Springs Hospital and we had a terrible run of premature deaths attributable to alcohol."

"A lot of hard work and evidence-based policy reforms have helped to turn this around.

"The combination of full-time PALIs and the Alcohol Protected Areas have been very effective, allowing people to continue to drink on licensed premises, but preventing many from buying take-away alcohol and drinking it in uncontrolled circumstances.

"Congress supports the Alcohol Protected Areas because PALIs make them a really good way to reduce alcohol-related problems.

"Put simply, if they didn't work, we would not support them.

"Congress also supports AMSANT, NAAJA, Aboriginal Housing NT, PAAC and others who want the current Bill withdrawn and the Northern Territory Government to amend the *Liquor Act* to allow the APAs to continue for another two years," she said.

“During this time, a thorough consultation process should take place, community by community including town camps, across the Northern Territory. If a place decides they want to opt out after being consulted, they should be allowed to do so.”

The Northern Territory Government’s proposed approach of consulting communities between now and 16 July and asking them to opt-in to restrictions will not work and will lead to a significant increase in alcohol-related harm and crime.

A proper consultation process requires plenty of time and the ability to engage with women, children, the elderly and others who are vulnerable, as well as key Aboriginal organisations. It cannot be rushed as there are more than 400 areas involved.

APAs have been a part of normal life for fifteen years for many communities and have led to considerable health and social benefits. If communities wish to change their status, they should have the right to do so, but only as a result of full and inclusive consultation and a clear and timely process of decision-making.

“We cannot afford to turn back the clock now after so much progress. Unless the Northern Territory acts now, all the hard work and all the gains their reforms have made will be swept away,” she concluded.

Media Contact: Ms Kate Buckland 0408 741 691

Spokesperson: Ms Donna Ah Chee 0418 859 416