

THE COMMISSION HAS DETERMINED TO APPROVE THE APPLICATION BY THE ALICE SPRINGS TOWN COUNCIL FOR THE DECLARATION OF A PUBLIC RESTRICTED AREA, APPROVING IN EFFECT WHAT IS COMMONLY REFERRED TO AS THE DRY TOWN APPLICATION.

THE DECISION OF THE 3 HEARING COMMISSIONERS WAS YESTERDAY RATIFIED BY THE FULL 9 MEMBER COMMISSION.

WE HAVE DONE SO AFTER LENGTHY CONSIDERATION, PUBLIC CONSULTATION, FORMAL HEARING AND SATISFYING OURSELVES AS TO THE MERIT OF THE DECLARATION AND POTENTIAL IMPACTS.

WE CONSIDERED:

- 22 WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS;

- 13 ORAL SUBMISSIONS AT HEARING;
- INFORMATION PROVIDED BY 30 INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED IN ALCOHOL-RELATED ISSUES OR POSSESSING EXPERTISE IN THESE MATTERS;
- RELEVANT STATISTICAL DATA PROVIDED BY POLICE, HEALTH AND RACING, GAMING & LICENSING STAFF.

THIS IS A HALLMARK DECISION IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY. CONSUMING LIQUOR IN A PUBLIC PLACE WILL BE PROHIBITED WITH PENALTIES RANGING FROM:

- HAVING LIQUOR TIPPED OUT (AS PROVIDED BY THE EXISTING 2KM LAW);
- AN ON THE SPOT FINE OF \$100.00 THROUGH AN INFRINGEMENT NOTICE;

- COURT ACTION THROUGH THE ISSUE OF A CONTRAVENTION NOTICE RESULTING IN A FINE OF UP TO \$500.00; AND
- THE COMMITTING OF CERTAIN OFFENCES COULD RESULT IN THE OFFENDER BEING DEALT WITH BY THE ALCOHOL COURT WHICH HAS THE POWER TO MAKE PROHIBITION ORDERS OR TO PROVIDE THE OPTION OF REHABILITATION OR PRISON.

PROBABLY THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ISSUE THE COMMISSION HAD TO ADDRESS WAS THE LIKELIHOOD OF DISPLACEMENT, IN TERMS OF WHERE PEOPLE WOULD DRINK IF PUBLIC AREAS ARE DECLARED "DRY". THERE IS A BODY OF OPINION THAT CONSIDERS A RESTRICTED AREA DECLARATION (IF ENFORCED) WILL RESULT IN DRINKERS MOVING TO TOWN CAMPS OR PUBLIC HOUSING RESIDENCES TO CONSUME ALCOHOL.

THE CONCERN IS THAT DRINKING AND ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR IN PRIVATE AREAS WOULD BE LESS VISIBLE AND HARDER TO RESPOND TO AND WOULD THEREFORE REDUCE THE SAFETY OF THOSE RESIDENTS IN TOWN CAMPS AND PUBLIC HOUSING, ESPECIALLY WOMEN AND CHILDREN.

AFTER DISCUSSION WITH POLICE, HEALTH AND LICENSING THE COMMISSION HAS SATISFIED ITSELF THAT COMPLEMENTARY MEASURES WILL BE PUT IN PLACE, IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE "DRY TOWN" INTRODUCTION THAT ADEQUATELY ADDRESSES THESE CONCERNS. THESE MEASURES INCLUDE:

- INCREASED POLICE RESOURCING AND RESPONSE CAPABILITY;
- POLICING OF THE TOWN CAMPS, INCLUDING AN ONGOING NIGHT PATROL;

- ACCESS TO PHONES OR OTHER MEANS OF COMMUNICATION TO POLICE AT TOWN CAMPS;
- ASSISTANCE TO TOWN CAMPS AND RESIDENTS OF PUBLIC HOUSING SHOULD THEY WISH TO BECOME “DRY”;
- AN EDUCATION AND AWARENESS STRATEGY TO ENSURE INFORMATION OF THE “DRY TOWN” IS WIDELY MADE AVAILABLE;
- A STRONG EVIDENCE OF COMMITMENT OF THE TERRITORY GOVERNMENT, ALICE SPRINGS TOWN COUNCIL AND OTHER AGENCIES TO ASSIST AND SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE “DRY TOWN” AND COMPLEMENTARY MEASURES.

TO GIVE TIME FOR THESE MEASURES TO BE INTRODUCED, THE COMMISSION HAS

DETERMINED A COMMENCEMENT DATE FOR THE PUBLIC RESTRICTED AREA OF 1 AUGUST 2007.

THE IMPACT OF THE "DRY TOWN" DECLARATION WILL BE MONITORED AND A REVIEW WILL BE CONDUCTED 12 MONTHS FROM ITS INTRODUCTION.

THE AREA DECLARED IS SMALLER THAN THE ENTIRE MUNICIPAL BOUNDARY APPLIED FOR BY THE ALICE SPRINGS TOWN COUNCIL. THE COMMISSION HAS POWER TO DECLARE ALL, NONE OR PART OF THE PUBLIC RESTRICTED AREA APPLIED FOR. IT IS THE COMMISSION'S VIEW THAT THE SMALLER AREA IS MORE APPROPRIATE, MORE EASILY DEFINED BY WAY OF ROAD SIGN POSTS AND MORE READILY POLICED. IT ALSO EXCLUDES THE MORE ISOLATED PICNIC SPOTS USED REGULARLY BY

THE PUBLIC. THE COMMISSION HAS BEEN ADVISED THAT ALL RESIDENTIAL AREAS WITHIN THE MUNICIPALITY ARE INCLUDED IN THE DECLARED AREA.

IN ADVISING OF THIS DECISION THE COMMISSION ADDS A CAUTION OVER EXPECTATIONS THE DRY AREA WILL NOT IN ITSELF REDUCE ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION NOR WILL IT ADDRESS UNDERLYING CAUSES OF ALCOHOL ABUSE.

IT IS ONLY ONE OF A RANGE OF MEASURES THAT WILL BE INSTRUMENTAL IN REDUCING PUBLIC DRUNKENNESS AND RELATED ALCOHOL PROBLEMS IN ALICE SPRINGS.