



Police Federation of Australia

The National Voice of Policing

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The Secretary
House of Representative Standing Committee
on Indigenous Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submission to the Inquiry into the Harmful Use of Alcohol in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities

The Police Federation of Australia (PFA) represents the professional and industrial interests of in excess of 58,000 Australia police officers across state, territory and the federal police jurisdictions.

We note that the Northern Territory Police Association (NTPA), a Branch of the PFA, has made a submission to this Inquiry. The PFA supports that submission and wishes to make the following further points from a national perspective.

In a submission to the then Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs Inquiry into the Northern Territory (National Emergency Response) Bill 2007 and Associated Bills we pointed out that in indigenous communities, law and order (which includes alcohol related issues) needed to be addressed by a coordinated multi-agency response which includes Police, Health, Education, Welfare, Housing, Planning and Infrastructure. Police stationed in regional and remote areas strive to provide a safe and secure environment in which other agencies can also safely provide their services.

In 2007, we also suggested that dedicated and permanent police services in each community allows for trusting relationships to be formed, a consistent policing approach to law and order (and alcohol) issues, and provide community stability. Alcohol related issues will not be able to be resolved effectively without those relationships having been formed. This model, we argue, not only applies in the Northern Territory, but right across Australia. You will never have safe and sustainable communities while rivers of grog flow in and through them. It is police

officers and staff from other agencies that are at the front line of dealing with the effects of alcohol abuse in these communities.

The PFA is convinced that the Australian community appreciates that law and order and community safety are fundamental to the successful functioning of society and to family and community well-being.

It is well known that one of the flow-on impacts of alcohol abuse is domestic and family violence. It is important therefore that we have a strong focus on the safety of women and children in these communities and whilst they don't provide permanent sustainable solutions, the development and support of Safe Houses, Women's Refuges and facilities such as sobering up shelters are vitally important. However, they are not the sole responsibility of police. Police cannot arrest the community out of these alcohol related problems. In line with the NTPA submission, the PFA agrees that more attention needs to be given to the "supply side" of alcohol consumption.

Whilst we support the notion of personal responsibility, state, territory and the federal parliaments, together with the alcohol industry, need to play a major role in the future. Placing a police officer at the front door of every hotel and bottle shop is not a long term sustainable solution to a whole of community problem.

The NTPA outlines a series of options at points 88 and 89 of their submission in relation to the "distribution of alcohol" and "alcohol pricing and taxing". We believe that at the very least, there needs to be a full, frank and public debate about the pros and cons of those issues in particular and that our parliaments and the industry itself need to play a major role in that debate.

In the lead up to the 2013 federal election the PFA produced a submission to all political parties "2013-2016 National Leadership for a Safer Australia – The Police Federation of Australia's pre-election document". In that document, under the heading 'Alcohol Management Plans', the PFA said –

Many Indigenous communities, particularly in the Northern Territory and Queensland, have developed Alcohol Management Plans to reduce the incidence of alcohol-fuelled violence, severe health problems and poverty in their own communities. The Australian Government should strongly support these initiatives.

These Alcohol Management Plans should remain in place and attract strong support from the Australian and State and Territory governments. The notion that communities with extreme levels of unemployment and a lack of industry, employment and education opportunities should have open access to alcohol or seek to profit from the supply and distribution of alcohol is unacceptable and counter-productive.

A variety of tools like the Banned Drinkers' Register, the drug and alcohol focused SMART Court, the Alcohol and Other Drugs Tribunal, the retailers' accord, the Safe and Sober Program and crime prevention and community development programs can together help to address the

serious problems of alcohol-related violence and other crime affecting Indigenous communities.

The PFA stands by our view as expressed in that 2013 document and would be pleased to appear at the Committee if requested.

Sincerely yours

Handwritten signature of Mark Burgess in black ink.

Mark Burgess APM
Chief Executive Officer

18/4/14