

NT LIQUOR COMMISSION URGED TO STOP WOOLWORTHS PROFITING FROM ADDICTION AND INCREASING ALCOHOL HARM

Tuesday 26 February 2019: The NT Branch of the Public Health Association of Australia (NT PHAA) and the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) have objected to Woolworths' plans to establish a big-box liquor superstore in the Northern Territory (NT), and are calling on the NT Liquor Commission to reject the application.

NT PHAA and FARE have submitted a formal objection against Woolworths' application to transfer a small bottle-shop licence, enabling the multinational to build a Dan Murphy's at Darwin airport.

FARE Chief Executive Michael Thorn says Woolworths' application is a watershed inquiry for the new NT Liquor Commission.

"We trust that the Commission will reject Woolworths' brazen attempt to undermine the groundbreaking recommendations of the Riley Review of alcohol policy in the NT, which initiated the lengthy process to address the longstanding problems caused by alcohol across the Territory," Mr Thorn said.

The NT PHAA/FARE objection says Woolworths' application should be rejected on three grounds. First, the proposed licence transfer is a blatant attempt to circumvent the moratorium on new bottle shops.

Second, the proposed Dan Murphy's superstore will result in a dramatic increase in the volume of alcohol in Darwin – a community already awash with alcohol.

Third, Woolworths is currently under investigation by liquor and gambling regulators in Qld, NSW and SA for alleged illegal behaviour.

"[Liquor & Gaming NSW is currently investigating](#) more than 50 Woolworths pubs over claims staff illegally provided free drinks to pokie players to keep them gambling, with a former staff member alleging staff were also instructed on how to cover up the practice," Mr Thorn said.

"Woolworths' application for a new outlet in Darwin should only be considered once the outcomes of these investigations are finalised," he said.

Mr Thorn says there are strong grounds for the NT Liquor Commission to reject the application as the licences would not be like-for-like.

"Woolworths' existing license is for a small, BWS convenience store in Stuart Park, while the proposed licence is for a Dan Murphy's superstore 10-times the size; in effect 10xBWS stores in one giant warehouse which would flood the area with cheap alcohol," Mr Thorn said.

The proposed location is a deliberate move by Woolworths to target and exploit vulnerable communities. There is compelling research linking big-box liquor outlets with a range of issues, such as:

- A greater number of people drinking more by taking advantage of discounts and low prices
- The superstore and nearby parks and streets becoming a social drinking destination
- An increase in crime and violence in the surrounding area.

NT PHAA president Dr Rosalie Schultz says the NT community already suffers a disproportionate level of alcohol harm.

“Every week there are two deaths, 52 hospitalisations and 69 assaults, and our road death toll is four times the national average. Alcohol is also a factor 65 per cent of reported family violence and is a major cause of child neglect,” Dr Schultz said.

As a GP and public health physician in the NT, Dr Schultz witnesses the devastation of alcohol and supports families dealing with the breadth of harms, including a range of cancers, cardiovascular disease, liver cirrhosis, mental health problems, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, road trauma and other injury, assaults and family and domestic violence.

“There is also the economic impact on businesses and tourism, with decreased productivity, absenteeism, and ongoing reinforcement of the marginalisation and disadvantage. Alcohol contributes to criminal activity, domestic and family violence and child protection issues experienced directly and indirectly by many of us,” Dr Schultz said.

“Drinkers, their families and the surrounding community are all harmed by alcohol, and greater availability of alcohol will lead to more harm,” she said.

Mr Thorn says Woolworths is not ‘fit and proper’ and should not be allowed to expand in the NT.

“It is a fact that Woolworths is alcohol dependent, exploiting the addictions of vulnerable people and profiting to the tune of \$290 million in alcohol sales in the first six months of the 2018-2019 financial year,” Mr Thorn said.

But with the half year results falling short of market expectations and Woolworths Chief Executive Brad Banducci warning of "[a more subdued consumer environment for the foreseeable future](#)", Woolworths’ reliance on aggressive alcohol marketing to boost its bottom line is likely to intensify.

“We are concerned that this is already the case with Dan Murphy’s advertising its new store in Darwin cinemas before the NT Liquor Commission has even considered the application, Mr Thorn said.

“Make no mistake, if this application is allowed, the benefit would be all for Woolworths. It’s a certainty that introducing the big-box model in the NT would spike the level of harm in Darwin and surrounding communities. Only the NT Liquor Commission has the power to prevent this occurring,” Mr Thorn concluded.

Mr Thorn and Dr Schultz are available for interview.

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