NT should release findings of Alcohol Mandatory Treatment review and decriminalise drunkenness.

Now that the NT Health Minister Robyn Lambley has come clean and that the purpose of Alcohol Mandatory Treatment (AMT) is to get drunks off the streets, the Government should release the findings of its review of the Alcohol Mandatory Treatment Act that closed four months ago, and get rid of the inequitable offences of breaching either an AMT order or an Alcohol Protection Order.

PAAC spokesperson Dr. John Boffa said it was high time that Minister Lambley released the results of a review of the Act. Minister Lambley told the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly’s Estimates Committee on 11th June:

‘there has always been the allegation that this focuses on Aboriginal people, and we accept that because, as you stated before, the strategy was designed to address the problem of public drunkenness. That was one of the main objectives of the strategy. Unfortunately, that does definitely target Aboriginal people because that is the case in the Northern Territory: Aboriginal people are over-represented in public drunkenness.’ (here)

“So much for previous claims that the AMT scheme was intended to deal with health issues\(^1\). It’s again been made glaringly obvious that the Government’s real aim is simply to create an appearance of order,” said Dr. Boffa.

“It is now very clear in Alice Springs that there has been a major decline in public drunkenness that is unrelated to mandatory treatment, but which has been achieved through a major alcohol supply reduction measure at the point of sale: the Temporary Beat Locations – TBL – strategy by the police. Although there are many concerns about this approach it has made a large difference to violence, alcohol-related hospital presentations and public drunkenness. If this is what AMT was about then there is no need to continue with it in its current form,” he said.

“The closing date for submissions was 14\(^{th}\) February. These have not been made available and we have still not seen any report. It’s time for complete transparency. Meanwhile, the Government should do the decent thing on two counts to reverse its criminalisation of drunkenness through the AMT and Alcohol Protection Order (APO) legislation:

- remove the provisions that make leaving a treatment facility for the third time when under an Alcohol Mandatory Treatment Order an offence; and
- remove the offence of breaching an APO. Penalties include imprisonment even though being issued with an APO is not in itself an offence.
“Like them or not, the TBLs, where police are stationed outside bottle shops in Alice Springs, and also in Katherine and Tennant Creek, checking ID and asking shoppers where they intend to drink, show how supply reduction can bring down consumption and associated harm such as assaults. A Banned Drinkers’ Register coupled with a photo ID system can also have this effect. Charging people who abscond from mandatory treatment or putting additional charges on addicts for breaching APOs and putting them at risk of penalties that include gaol is ineffective, regressive and unnecessary and there are much better alternatives,” Dr. Boffa said.

Comment: Dr. John Boffa: 0418 812 141. Please text if call not answered


Minister Lambley media release 4\(^{th}\) December 2013: http://cstest1.communitystories.net/bitstream/handle/10070/248907/Lambley-041213-Commitment_to_alcohol_mandatory_treatment_continues.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y