

# People's Alcohol Action Coalition

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## **NT Alcohol Framework- a move in the right direction.**

**Tuesday 16/4/04**

The Peoples Alcohol Action Coalition (PAAC) today welcomed the opportunity to comment directly on the Northern Territory Alcohol Framework Interim Report with the project team, describing it as a potential watershed in the struggle to reduce alcohol related harms in the community of Alice Springs.

“This is a well researched, comprehensive discussion paper into alcohol that clearly suggests a range of worthwhile strategies. While having reservations about some issues, we believe that if the progressive components are adopted by government it will make a big difference,” said Dr John Boffa, spokesperson for PAAC.

“The most important aspect of the proposed Framework is that for the first time it is positing that the Northern Territory aims to both reduce alcohol related harms *and* to reduce the per capita consumption of alcohol to the national average level. Both of these aims need to be clearly articulated to avoid the fiasco that occurred during the Alice Springs alcohol trial where both the Liquor Commission and the chair of the Evaluation Reference Group did not believe that the reduction in alcohol consumption was a key goal of the trial.”

“Anyone who thinks that we are going to have a big impact on the reduction of alcohol related harms in the Northern Territory without having a major impact on the per capita consumption of alcohol is living in a fantasy land created by ideological blinkers. Such views which have been prevalent amongst senior public servants and government ministers over the years are a major reason why we have repeatedly failed to address the massive alcohol problem that we have in the Northern Territory. At last, it seems that government is going to accept that we need to get serious about reducing our per capita alcohol consumption towards the national average.”

“Instead of Territorians being known as “Bloody good drinkers” with one

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of the highest per capita homicide rates in the world we need to become known for getting tough on alcohol related violence as we make the transition to being 'good average drinkers'. This represents a huge cultural change for the Northern Territory. The Framework makes important recommendations as to how the whole community can be supported in making such a big change in attitude and behaviour."

"The Framework also recognises the success of the recent Alice Springs alcohol trial in reducing harms in particular the significant reductions in assaults, admissions to the sobering up shelter, selected presentations to both the Emergency Department at Alice Hospital and the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress and other indicators. This puts to rest the myth that has been propagated by some that the trial was a failure."

"The Framework recognises that price is a major determinant of consumption and provides the evidence to support a trial of a minimum pricing benchmark such as the 90cent per standard drink benchmark proposed by PAAC last year. This would address the problem of product substitution to other forms of cheap grog, such as cask port, that prevented the Alice Springs alcohol trial from having a bigger impact on alcohol related harms. It also recognises the relationship between the total hours of take away sales, per capita consumption and alcohol related harms suggesting that further reduction in take away trading hours are required."

PAAC supports the majority of the proposals in the Framework and believes that it represents the best chance the Northern Territory has ever had to address the ongoing epidemic of alcohol related harms. We hope that the Northern Territory government will have the courage to implement the Framework," Dr Boffa concluded.

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