

# ***people's alcohol action coalition***

[www.paac.org.au](http://www.paac.org.au)

12<sup>th</sup> May 2013

## **Drunk with Power: NT Government's misguided policy road to prison**

As concerned Alice Springs residents prepare for a crisis rally on grog problems on Monday, the NT Government continues its reactionary approach to alcohol policy. The Alcohol Protection Order (APO) scheme, announced on Friday, will see at least some drunkenness re-criminalised, with police able to charge people for breaching orders when they may not have been convicted of any other offence.<sup>1</sup>

“The cat is out of the bag. This APO system has a criminal basis, with fines or incarceration as the final options. Despite election promises, it is not a health approach with treatment as the destination. The lack of beds in the pledged prison farms that will never materialise won't be an issue, because at least some of the most severely alcohol-dependant people will probably end up in gaol and not in treatment anyway,” said PAAC spokesperson Dr. John Boffa.

Licensing Minister Dave Tollner says his Government will introduce APOs for those charged with offences where alcohol is alleged to have been a factor.<sup>2</sup> If a person then breaches the APO - including by being in possession of alcohol or by just being on licensed premises, even drinking water - they will have committed a new type of offence punishable by fines and a possible six months' imprisonment.

“True to form, the Government hasn't yet produced the APO legislation, just as it hasn't released the *Alcohol Mandatory Treatment Bill*,<sup>3</sup> despite an undertaking by Chief Minister Adam Giles to allow time for public comment,” said PAAC spokesperson Dr. John Boffa.

“APOs will not stop people buying grog, because this Government got rid of the NT's Photo ID requirement last August. Its tactic is to allow people who are charged with an alcohol-related offence full access to buying and drinking alcohol, and then have police try to find and apprehend them when they breach their order. This is setting addicted people up to fail with gaol on the cards when they do so – not treatment but imprisonment.”

This will turn the clock back to the days before the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, with people who are addicted to grog vulnerable to incarceration. The NT Government has found a novel way to increase the prison population in a jurisdiction that already has the highest imprisonment rate in Australia, and to put more stress on the already over-worked police, courts and legal services. This is a hugely expensive approach to dealing with grog problems, many of which could easily be prevented through supply measures, and Australian taxpayers will largely foot the bill.

“Be very clear that will not stop drunken offending because it will not prevent people from buying alcohol, which the previous BDR system did to a large extent, along with court prohibition orders. Both mechanisms were supported by the Photo ID system. The Government is scared to evaluate the BDR properly, because it might find that it worked, but it’s happy to criminalise drunkenness through the back door in a clumsy, unworkable manner. This will have police required to chase people down, and, in the Minister’s words: ‘drag them’ to police stations to be charged with breaching APOs. It’s wilful blindness masquerading as policy,” concluded Dr. Boffa.

Speakers at the PAAC Grog Crisis Rally on Monday (details below) will include: Central Land Council Chairman Morrie Ryan, Deputy NT Opposition leader Gerry McCarthy, NT Criminal Lawyers’ Association President Russell Goldflam, PAAC’s Dr. John Boffa, William Tilmouth, President of the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress health service, representatives of NPY Women’s Council and local Native Title holders.

**Comment: Dr. John Boffa: 0418 812 141. Available Sunday and from 6:30 a.m. CST Monday.**

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-05-10/new-alcohol-powers-for-police/4683052>

<sup>2</sup> [New Powers for Police to Crack Down on Booze Crimes](#)

<sup>3</sup> [PAAC Alcohol Mandatory Treatment critique. Updated 10.05.13](#)

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***RALLY and PUBLIC MEETING TO DISCUSS GROG ISSUES  
BAD GOVERNMENT POLICY + POOR PLANNING = CONTINUING  
ALCOHOL CRISIS***

**WHERE: ALICE SPRINGS TOWN COUNCIL LAWN  
WHEN: 12 NOON MONDAY 13<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2013  
BARBEQUE LUNCH**



**Please come and support PAAC in seeking sensible alcohol policy –  
including supply reduction.**

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