



MEDIA RELEASE

BOUND AND GAGGED – NSW LIQUOR LICENSING SILENCES COMMUNITY OBJECTIONS

24 August 2017: New South Wales communities are being robbed of the opportunity to object to or complain about liquor licence applications, by an unfair, complex and outdated regulatory system.

In its submission to Liquor and Gaming NSW's *Evaluation of the Community Impact Statement requirement for liquor applications*, the state's leading alcohol policy coalition, the NSW and ACT Alcohol and Policy Alliance (NAAPA) has called for sweeping changes to current liquor licensing processes.

Dr John Crozier, co-chair of the National Alliance for Action on Alcohol (NAAA) Committee and Chair of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons Trauma Committee says the Community Impact Statement (CIS) requirement for liquor applications should be a requirement for all liquor licence applications, but in its current form, is broken and not fit for purpose.

"NAAPA, and communities across NSW have long argued that the current alcohol licensing processes in this State leave them effectively locked out. Their voices are silenced and their hands tied by a system that unequivocally favours the alcohol industry," Dr Crozier said.

Among its seven recommendations, NAAPA says the Government must improve public awareness, engagement and community input into these processes, and ensure that community members can have a greater say.

Dr Crozier, a trauma surgeon who has been involved in a number of community efforts to challenge liquor licence applications, argues that one simple and effective way to achieve greater public awareness and community input would be for the Government to broaden its definition of 'local community'.

"At present, concerned communities and citizens are neither consulted nor made aware of liquor licence applications that will negatively impact them, because they don't live within 100 metres of the proposed development. That is unfair and unnecessarily restrictive," Dr Crozier said.

NAAPA has also recommended an important change that would place the onus of proof onto applicants, instead of community objectors.

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education Chief Executive, Michael Thorn says it should be up to the applicant to demonstrate that a liquor licence will not contribute to further harm.

"We need to restore fairness and logic into the current Community Impact Statement system and one of the most effective ways to do so is to place the onus of proof on the party with both the financial interest, as well as the potential to cause harm to the community," Mr Thorn said.

NAAPA has again repeated its calls for the establishment of an independent Community Defenders Office (CDO) to help individuals and communities navigate and interact with the complex liquor licensing system.

Mr Thorn says the CDO would be modelled on the [Alcohol Community Action Project](#), and would consist of both an advisory service to provide communities with free and timely access to skilled personnel, together with a central information service.

“The establishment of a Community Defenders Office would remove a number of barriers that currently prevent communities from engaging in liquor licensing decisions, providing them with the skills, experience and knowledge they require. The lesson from the Alcohol Community Action Project is there is an unmet demand and need for such a service that can be successfully met with a modest investment by the New South Wales Government,” Mr Thorn said.

Dr Crozier and Michael Thorn are available for interview.

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The NSW and ACT Alcohol Policy Alliance (NAAPA) is an alliance of health and community organisations active across NSW and the ACT that has been formed with the objective of promoting action to reduce alcohol-related harms. The Coalition of NSW and ACT organisations has been formed to lobby and campaign for alcohol policy reform to reduce alcohol-related harms across the two jurisdictions. www.naapa.org.au

