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Mr Michael Thorn
Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education

Dear Dr Boffa and Mr Thorn

Thank you for your correspondence of 9 August 2016 and for allowing me the opportunity to respond to the key issues of both the People's Alcohol Action Coalition and the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education.

As you are aware, alcohol abuse is a complex issue in the Northern Territory and it is certainly an area in which the Country Liberals Government has had a major focus on improving.

Given the vast nature of your questions, I will answer them numerically to ensure you receive a thorough response to each of the points you raised.

1. Do the Country Liberals support the reintroduction of the Banned Drinkers' Register in conjunction with scanning of photo identification cards in all licensed venues?

The Country Liberals do not support the reintroduction of Labor's Banned Drinkers Register (BDR). The BDR was a policy failure which made life difficult for many Territorians in an attempt to tackle the alcohol problems of the minority.

Under the BDR, the same people were being taken into custody over and over again. For example, while the BDR was in operation during the 2011-12 financial year, 431 people had eight or more protective custody episodes. In one example, one person on the BDR was placed into custody 117 times in 12 months, which is once every three days.

Labor's failed BDR did not impact on the number of alcohol-related emergency department presentations. Under the BDR alcohol related presentations reached a seven-year peak. Department of Justice crime statistics showed that the BDR failed in the stated goal to reduce violent assaults. Under Labor's BDR, in the December quarter of 2011, there were 1108 assaults where alcohol was involved across the Territory. In comparison, in the December quarter 2012 (no BDR), the number of alcohol fuelled assaults had dropped by 5.9 per cent across the Territory.

Under Labor, alcohol consumption grew to record levels and the rates of public drunkenness increased to a level where Territorians were afraid to venture out in our communities after dark. Placing an individual on the BDR did not stop problem drinkers drinking or accessing alcohol; there was nothing to stop third-party sale of alcohol and problem drinker's still accessing alcohol through friends, or purchasing alcohol in licensed venues.

The BDR did not reduce alcohol consumption and the data shows that. For example, in 2011 when the BDR was introduced:

- Cider consumption jumped from 80,031 litres to 101,444 litres in 2012;
- Sprints consumption increased from 684,522 litres to 721,282 litres in 2012;
- Wine consumption rose from 491,703 litres to 508,653 litres in 2012.

During the Country Liberals term of government we have introduced a range of measures to address problem drinking and anti-social behaviour, including Alcohol Protection Orders (APOs), Temporary Beat Locations (TBLs) and Alcohol Mandatory Treatment (AMT). These measures have seen a decrease in emergency admissions and significant reductions in alcohol-related crime.

Under the BDR there was no treatment pathway to help problem drinkers with their addiction. The Country Liberals Government is focused on breaking the cycle for addicted problem drinkers.

The AMT program is an important means of intervention for Territorians who are struggling to overcome substance abuse and are heading down a destructive path towards addiction, crime and violence. The AMT program directs problem drinkers unlikely to voluntarily seek help into treatment.

The Northern Territory Government has invested more than \$100 million over four years to provide medical treatment to up to 800 of the Territory's worst problem drinkers annually.

These people are assisted on the path to recovery, ensuring they and their families can get their lives back on track.

In Labor's *Family and Sexual Violence Policy* Labor says it will withdraw \$20 million a year from alcohol treatment. This is a reckless and short sighted approach to social policy which will result in adverse health outcomes, increased family violence and more crime.

A re-elected Country Liberals Government will commit to enhancing the AMT effectiveness by prioritising AMT requests for interpreters as well as looking at providing more beds and encouraging more voluntary admissions for people withdrawing from substance abuse by making under-utilised beds available.

Our plan will also look at expanding after-care programs to provide greater rehabilitation support to ensure achievements during AMT extend well after the initial three-month phase.

Unlike Labor's BDR, the Country Liberals APOs directly target serious problem drinkers and take them off the streets. Introduced in December 2013 by the Territory Government, these laws give police the powers to ban a person from buying, consuming or possessing alcohol if they are charged with an offence attracting a jail term of six months or more whilst affected by alcohol. An order also bans a person from attending licensed premises.

APOs are aimed at tackling the dangerous cocktail of alcohol consumption and serious crime. APOs complement the AMT program which is aimed at giving chronic alcoholics the help they need to kick the habit. Together, these measures represent a comprehensive package to target different types of alcohol problems within our communities.

Labor has said it will abolish TBLs if it wins government- this decision would be detrimental to the social fabric of our communities throughout the Territory. TBL's at off-licence premises give Police the ability to identify those persons subject to Alcohol Orders and equally importantly give Police the ability to identify whether a person intending to purchase alcohol has a lawful place to consume that alcohol.

Under the Country Liberals, TBLs will be retained across the Territory to reduce anti-social behaviour in regional centres. TBLs have demonstrated measurable success in reducing problems with antisocial behaviour. Alice Springs used to be the knifing capital of Australia under Labor. Medical authorities now report decreased emergency admissions and police acknowledge that TBLs have reduced crime.

If TBLs are abandoned under Labor at bottle shops in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Katherine; alcohol-related crime, domestic violence and hospital admissions will increase.

Country Liberals will give Police more resources to tackle alcohol-related crime and violence. A re-elected Country Liberals Government will employ 105 additional Police Auxiliary officers to enhance community safety, including attendance at bottle shops, with search and arrest powers. This will enable 70 frontline police officers to be redeployed.

The Country Liberals are also currently exploring options in relation to utilising facial biometrics to enforce Alcohol Orders in the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory Police are trialling a biometric identification system which utilises facial recognition technology to assist identifying persons for a range of policing activities. Similar technology could be used to identify persons subject to an Alcohol Order at the point of entry for an on-licence premise and at the point of sale for an off-licence premise. Once identified, the licensee would then be able to refuse entry to the licensed premise or in the case of an off licenced premise, refuse to sell alcohol to the person subject of an Alcohol Order.

The introduction of a facial recognition program would be a complimentary measure to the current effectiveness of TBL's. By expanding the reach of alcohol harm minimisation measures from off-licence premises to also encompass on-licence premises, we would significantly limit the ability of a person on an Alcohol Order from gaining access to alcohol through lawfully available means.

The Country Liberals Party is committed to providing better treatment and care across the Territory to reduce anti-social behaviour associated with public drunkenness and substance abuse. The Country Liberals support initiatives that change people's lives and help them kick the habit. The BDR never produced the kind of results the Northern Territory is seeing now.

The Country Liberals not only have a plan that effectively supports Territorians battling substance issues but also ensures a safe and productive lifestyle is maintained for all Territorians.

2. Do the Country Liberals support the introduction of a minimum price for alcohol equivalent to the existing minimum price of takeaway full-strength beer, currently at approximately \$1.30 per standard drink?

The Country Liberals are committed to working closely with key stakeholders to put measures in place that reduce alcohol-related antisocial behaviour. We continue to advocate the importance of self-responsibility and encourage each community to drive local solutions to local problems.

The Country Liberals have worked closely with key industry groups to implement Liquor Accords in Casuarina, Darwin City, Palmerston and Tennant Creek. Liquor Accords are agreements between licensed premises, the Northern Territory Police Force, local councils and Licensing NT, where venues identify voluntary conditions to support community and social amenity.

The liquor accords also put in place restrictions surrounding the sale of takeaway alcohol – specifically targeting cheaper, high-volume packaged liquor products such as cask wine.

Liquor Accords are a voluntary agreement between licensees and stakeholders with the objective being to improve community safety, security and general amenity of the local area, by reducing the adverse impacts of public intoxication in the community by preventing and reducing alcohol related harms.

Strategies implemented under liquor accords include but are not exclusive to limiting purchase and promotion of cask wine, bottled wine, spirits and higher strength beer and recording and reporting of suspicious sales or behaviour to Licensing NT and Police.

For example, the Tennant Creek Liquor Accord, implemented in January 2014, provided for restrictions on higher strength beer, bottled wine and spirits. These voluntary restrictions implemented by licensed premises under the accord resulted in a significant decrease in all categories of crime and anti-social behaviour. Advice from the NTPS has been that there was a 50% reduction in the first year of the restrictions and a further 50% reduction on that in the second year.

It is initiatives like this that see local stakeholders heavily involved in addressing issues on a local level which results in a far more effective outcome with a sense of community ownership and achievement. Through these initiatives the Country Liberals Government is empowering communities to work collaboratively to address their own unique alcohol-related issues to the benefit of all Territorians.

While the Country Liberals do not currently have the intent to implement any constraint on pricing (ie 'floor price' for alcohol) – under the NT Code of Practice for Responsible Promotion and Service of Liquor there is restriction in place in relation to 'advertising or promotion' in that liquor licensees cannot advertise a product where the price is so low that it will, in itself, encourage the excessive consumption of alcohol and intoxication.

The Department of Business, Licensing NT is currently undertaking a review in consultation with stakeholders of the Code of Practice for Responsible Promotion and Service of Liquor-On Premise Consumption which is expected to be presented to the Territory Government for consideration prior to the end of 2016. The Code of Practice for Responsible Promotion and Service of Takeaway Liquor is also currently under development by the Department of Business, Licensing NT.

3. Do the Country Liberals support the development of a response to the final report of the Select Committee on Action to Prevent Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders and its 26 recommendations, including funded action to prevent, diagnose and manage FASD in the Northern Territory?

The Country Liberals Government remains committed to implementing policies and initiatives that reduce the levels of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder within our communities.

Since the Select Committee on Action to Prevent Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder final report *The Preventable Disability* was released in February 2015, much work has been going on behind the scenes.

A tool for diagnosis of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder is currently under development; however it is important to note that a diagnostic tool is only a small component of potential actions.

Actions underway consist of preventative measures, harm minimisation, assessment of cognitive and physical development, and implementation of multi-disciplinary and cross-sector management plans.

The Alcohol and Other Drugs policy unit has also renewed the focus on messaging about the harms of alcohol consumption during pregnancy. Antenatal alcohol screening has become a standard component of midwifery care for Territory women.

Management plans are also being implemented by primary health care workers, medical and mental health specialists, allied health professionals working with children and adults, disability workers, child protection workers and education specialists working with families, schools and communities

At an over-arching level, the Senior Officials Alcohol and Illicit Drugs Working Group, established in December 2015, is working to develop the Northern Territory Alcohol Action Plan which will include a focus on the harms of alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

In December 2015, a Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder interagency network was established in Central Australia to develop a coordinated service response for children, young people and families affected by the disorder. Alcohol and other Drug Services Central Australia is coordinating the network with membership including NTCOSS, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, Paediatricians from Alice Springs Hospital, NPY Women's Council, and Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance NT.

The Country Liberals Government, if re-elected, will continue to look at holistic approaches to improve outcomes for babies and their mothers across the Northern Territory.

4. Do the Country Liberals support the introduction of a risk-based licensing scheme for liquor licensing in the Northern Territory?

The Country Liberals are focused reducing red tape for Territory businesses and would not support the introduction of a process which would contribute to increased bureaucratic red tape in the licensing process, increased cost impact on business, or delays processing of licenses.

The Territory Government is committed to a balanced regulated approach to liquor licenses, which requires each individual application for a new liquor license to be subject to a comprehensive assessment process.

A requirement of this process is that each application needs to be advertised providing an avenue for community input prior to approval of any application for a new license. Community consultation provides an opportunity for the local community affected by the liquor license to identify areas of concern and to provide opportunity for industry to address areas of concern. The Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services are also consulted on applications for new liquor licences, variations to existing licence conditions and restricted alcohol spaces, including private residences and public spaces.

The outcomes of these consultations are considered by the Director General of Licensing during the assessment of each individual application.

When assessing an application for a liquor licence under the provisions of the *Liquor Act*, the Director General of Licensing must take into account the public interest. This includes consideration of harm or ill-health caused by the consumption of liquor, public order and safety, annoyance, disturbance or inconvenience caused to the community, and responsible service of alcohol practices. The applicant for a licence must demonstrate in the application that the grant of the licence will be in the public interest.

Consideration is also given during the assessment of each individual application to the density of liquor licenses in the vicinity of the proposed application, the operational impact of increased alcohol outlets, socio-demographic risks within the geographic area, and the propensity for alcohol-related anti-social behaviour and harm in the vicinity of the proposed application in addition to other considerations as required by the *Liquor Act*.

Based on this assessment the issue of a liquor license may include conditions such as limitations to the kinds of liquor that may be sold, the manner in which liquor may be sold, the containers in which liquor may be sold, and the days on which and the times at which liquor may be sold.

The NT Code of Practice for Responsible Promotion and Service of Liquor is a key harm minimisation measure which requires venues to implement responsible promotion and service of liquor practices. The Department of Business, Licensing NT is currently undertaking a review in consultation with stakeholders of the Code of Practice which is expected to be presented to the NT Government for consideration prior to the end of 2016. The Code of Practice for Responsible Promotion and Service of Takeaway Liquor is also currently under development by the Department of Business, Licensing NT.

It is intended that all of these strategies will work together to minimise any potential increase in harm from additional liquor licenses.

5. Do the Country Liberals support the ban on political donations made by the alcohol industry and their representatives?

The Country Liberals support and comply with open and transparent disclosure of financial dealings of political parties, candidates and others involved in the electoral process in line with Part 10 of the *Northern Territory Electoral Act* which requires candidates, registered political parties and their associated entities, broadcasters and publishers, and certain donors, to disclose information regarding political contributions and electoral expenditure above certain thresholds to the Northern Territory Electoral Commission.

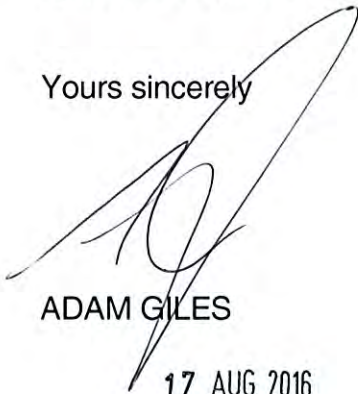
The disclosure scheme requires candidates, registered political parties, their State Branches, local branches/sub-party units and their associated entities, donors and other participants in the electoral process to lodge annual or election period financial disclosure returns with the AEC.

The Country Liberals Government believes the current disclosure rules make for a fair and transparent system.

A re-elected Country Liberals Government looks forward to working closely with the People's Alcohol Action Coalition and the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education to improve outcomes for all Territorians.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to provide you and your members with an in depth look at some of the initiatives of the Country Liberals Government. I look forward to working with you again in the future.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'ADAM GILES', written over a large, light-colored scribble or background mark.

ADAM GILES

17 AUG 2016