# Holding Woolworths to account for preying on vulnerable communities

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### Desperate for profits, Woolworths are building their business off the back of misery

In Darwin, Woolworths – the corporate giant that owns Dan Murphy’s – are [desperately forcing](https://www.afr.com/companies/retail/woolworths-dan-murphy-s-under-fire-over-first-darwin-store-20191211-p53izz) their liquor barn on an area already suffering some of Australia’s highest levels of alcohol harm.

Legal proceedings are continuing as local Indigenous groups, FARE and other objectors attempt to prevent a Dan Murphy’s bottle shop being built within walking distance of three Aboriginal communities.

Trying to force Darwin’s largest bottle shop next to these vulnerable communities is a desperate and unethical move and further damages Woolworths’ corporate brand. A brand already tainted by other scandals – [wage theft](https://au.finance.yahoo.com/news/woolworths-bws-dan-murphys-035736723.html) and [plying problem gamblers](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-06-20/woolworths-pokies-and-free-drinks-in-pubs/11227484) with free alcohol.

But Woolworths are so desperate to fatten their Dan Murphy’s business [ahead of the planned sale](https://www.smh.com.au/business/companies/day-zero-for-woolworths-as-it-embarks-on-10b-pubs-and-pokies-spinoff-20191213-p53jqc.html) that it’s willing to build its profits off the back of misery.

https://vimeo.com/378761091

## The community voice

Recently, local Indigenous and public health groups gave powerful evidence at a NT Liquor Commission hearing in Darwin.

Ms Helen Fejo–Frith lives in one of the affected communities and has been a Bagot resident of 21 years. She told the Commission they already have an entrenched problem with alcohol-related family violence in the area. She explained that there are parents who are not looking after their children because of alcohol and their children are then going hungry.

Their arguments were accepted by the NT Liquor Commission, which rejected Woolworths’ application.

In its decision, the Commission stated:

*“... the short-sighted decision to establish the outlet so close to these vulnerable communities will provide harmful drinkers with easier access to the cheapest alcohol in Darwin. We find that there will be a significant increase in consumption by problem drinkers*”.

But Woolworths has put its corporate reputation in jeopardy by pursuing this matter – a move that has been labelled unethical by community groups concerned about a rise in alcohol harm in Aboriginal communities.

## Stop the harm from alcohol

FARE’s mission is to stop the harm from alcohol, and for a number of years, we’ve helped local councils and groups defend themselves against Woolworths.

That’s why FARE’s Director of Policy and Research Trish Hepworth attended the Woolworths AGM on Monday to directly ask Woolworths Chair Gordon Cairns why Woolworths are imposing a Dan Murphy’s liquor barn upon a vulnerable community.

https://youtu.be/Fr6VCok2s0g

Putting on his glasses and reading from a pre-prepared statement, Mr Cairns told the audience of shareholders to trust that Woolworths will be very responsible in selling alcohol in the highly vulnerable area.

Unfortunately, it’s a hard line to swallow when you consider it was only a few months ago that Woolworths was exposed for plying problem gamblers with alcohol to keep them losing on the pokies.

We fear there is only one real message which Woolworths executives listen to, which is the message coming from their profit margins.

We can only hope that Woolworths investors won’t stand for unethical, predatory behaviour from corporations against vulnerable communities and people. Vulnerable communities shouldn’t be preyed upon like this.

### Metadata