# The risk of alcohol harm has just been supercharged

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### Does the NT want to gamble with the future ownership of a Darwin Dan Murphys?

The Darwin community will shortly know whether Dan Murphy’s has been approved by the NT Liquor Commission.

Woolworths’ application runs to more than a thousand pages in an effort to claim the liquor barn won’t cause more alcohol-fuelled harm, violence and crime.

If approved, the Darwin Dan Murphy’s would be one of Australia’s biggest, guaranteeing the cheapest alcohol in a place that holds the national record for alcohol-related harm. It’s a tragic combination whichever way you look at it. Decades of research prove without doubt that the cheaper the alcohol, the more that’s sold. And the more that’s sold, the greater the harm.

This means more late-night attacks, which recently left a [31-year-old in a coma in Royal Darwin Hospital](https://www.ntnews.com.au/news/crime-court/police-appeal-for-witnesses-to-alleged-brutal-nightclub-bashing/news-story/b54275f5aa489159d0af1c137ceb81dc). It also means more domestic violence, child neglect and crime. More work for the Territory’s overworked police and emergency services. More taxpayers’ money spent cleaning up the mess.

What is not appreciated is that the risk of harm will potentially be supercharged by Woolworths’ proposal to roll its ‘sin businesses’ into a separate corporate entity - a restructuring not revealed to the Commission during the hearings in May.

The Dan Murphy’s chain is being hived off, and it could well fall into the hands of a scandal-ridden pubs and pokies outfit, the Australian Leisure and Hospitality (ALH) Group, which is under investigation by regulators in four states. More than 170 ALH venues have just been investigated in South Australia, Queensland, Victoria and NSW for plying problem gamblers with free alcohol to keep them gambling.

In NSW, it’s a criminal act to give pokies players free alcohol to entice them to play for longer. The NSW liquor regulator has already started disciplinary proceedings against two venues for ‘systemic’ breaches.

But there are scores of other allegations of ALH venues giving free drinks to problem punters.

Former staff members also say ALH secretly compiled personal details about gamblers, such as favourite sports teams and favourite drinks, so staff across shifts could make a connection with them and keep them at the machines.

The corporate giant has been named in federal parliament on multiple occasions. Several whistle blowers have come forward to give evidence and hundreds of documents have been seized by regulators.

There’s no doubt the ALH joint venture has damaged Woolworth’s, despite the lucrative revenue from its more than 320 licenced venues and 12,000 pokies across Australia.

Woolworths owns 75 per cent of ALH. No doubt the joint venture is hugely profitable. Last year Woolworths earned $260 million from hotels and gaming, with gross margins of more than 80 per cent. But the relationship has also rocked Woolworths with one controversy after another.

It’s been a long running public relations disaster and last month Woolworths bowed to public pressure announcing it would offload its ethically-tainted gambling and liquor empire. The alcohol businesses are well known and include big names like Dan Murphy’s, BWS, and CellarMasters.

So there’s a very real risk that the long-term stewardship of a Darwin Dan Murphy’s would move from bad to worse, resting in the toxic hands of an entity focussed exclusively on profiting from addictive, harmful products. Worse because it would be led by a ruthless management that knows only one thing, which is taking money from vulnerable people.

The NT knows better than the rest of Australia how much harm is caused through alcohol use. It’s why there’s been such a concerted effort to introduce a ground breaking suite of reforms to stop alcohol-related harm. It’s also why the new Liquor Act makes clear the heavy responsibilities of liquor outlets. They must be run according to the highest standards.

Which begs the question - does the NT want to gamble with the future ownership of a Darwin Dan Murphys? The risk of harm to the community would be supercharged, which is another reason for the Commission to reject Woolworths’ application.

### Metadata

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