

31 July 2026

Committee Secretary
Legislative Scrutiny Committee
GPO Box 3721
Darwin NT 0801
LSC@nt.gov.au

Dear Secretary,

FARE SUBMISSION TO LIQUOR ACT AMENDMENT BILL 2026 (SERIAL 71)

The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the *Liquor Amendment Bill 2026* (Serial 71), which would amend the existing statute, *Liquor Act 2019* (NT). This submission addresses matters specifically relevant to the terms of reference as outlined by the Legislative Scrutiny Committee.

FARE is a not-for-profit organisation with a vision for an Australia free from alcohol harms – where communities are healthy and well, and where laws, policies and programs are fair, equitable and just. Working with local communities, people with lived experience of alcohol harm, values-aligned organisations, health professionals, researchers and governments across the nation, we are improving the health and wellbeing of everyone in Australia.

Our feedback speaks directly to two key reforms proposed within the legislation

- Conversion of interim alcohol protected areas (I-APAs) to general restricted areas (GRAs).
- Banning notices and extending the prescribed duration from 14 to 90 days.

We have had the benefit of working closely with Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT) and the Alcohol and Drug Foundation (ADF) to inform this submission. We strongly support their respective submissions to this inquiry. Our comments serve to reinforce their positions and the supporting evidence provided by ADF regarding banning notices.

Conversion of Interim Alcohol Protected Areas to General Restricted Areas

FARE supports measures that control the availability of alcohol as one policy option to reduce the harmful use of alcohol. However, these should be one part of a comprehensive, public health harm reduction strategy and major reforms should be subject to genuine co-design and shared decision making with affected communities.

The proposed legislation would hold that current designated I-APAs are to be permanently declared GRAs with all alcohol prohibited as a default position. Subsequently, there would be a statutory requirement for communities wishing to vary the conditions of their GRA. The legislation would require communities to make an application to the Liquor Commission accompanied by a community action plan.

Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations have consistently advocated for the retention of these restrictions as an effective alcohol supply regulation.ⁱ However, they need to be supported by long term investment to address the drivers of harmful alcohol use.

Reducing alcohol-related harms requires a comprehensive, evidence-based strategy, rather than reliance on any single policy lever. Supply measures such as restricted areas, reduced takeaway trading hours and minimum pricing are necessary because they reduce the availability and affordability of alcohol products associated with harmful use. However, supply controls alone cannot address the broader drivers of alcohol

harm or meet the needs of people, families and communities already experiencing those harms. Long-term change requires a public health approach that combines effective supply regulation with sustained investment in prevention, treatment and support services, community-led decision making, and self-determination for Aboriginal people.

FARE supports the I-APAs transition into GRAs and understands that this approach provides clearer statutory provisions that aim to maintain important protections against alcohol-related harms. We also note the proposed amendments represent a significant and permanent change for over 300 major and minor Aboriginal communities, outstations and town camps in the Northern Territory and impose significant regulatory processes for communities wishing to vary these conditions

To uphold Aboriginal community rights to autonomy and self-determination, communities must have clear, accessible information about the legal effect of conversion. Communities must be empowered and aware of the options available to them, and the steps required to vary or revoke restrictions through a community action plan if they wish to do so.

Extending the prescribed duration of banning notices

FARE recommends that any extension of the duration of banning notices should not proceed until the measure has been evaluated to assess its effect in preventing or reducing alcohol-related harm.

Under section 212 of the *Liquor Act*, a police officer may issue a banning notice if they reasonably believe that a person has committed, or is committing, a listed banning offence in a high-risk area, is likely to continue offending, and that issuing the notice is necessary to prevent alcohol-related violence or further offending. A banning notice prohibits the person from entering the relevant high-risk area for a period of 14 days. The proposed amendments within the Bill would extend the duration of a banning notice from 14 to 90 days.

As it stands, the Act allows the Minister to declare high-risk areas where banning notices are considered a reasonable way to prevent or reduce alcohol-related violence. Currently, these areas include central parts of major urban centres across the Northern Territory, including Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs, as well as the central business districts of Darwin and Palmerston, the Casuarina shopping precinct and other suburban areas.ⁱⁱ

FARE acknowledges the serious harm caused by alcohol-related violence and the responsibility of governments to take effective action to prevent and reduce that harm. While banning notice schemes are used in every jurisdiction in Australia, they are to varying degrees more limited in their scope and effect than the NT scheme. There has been very little evaluation of the effectiveness of banning notices and no evidence to indicate they work in achieving their stated aims of reducing alcohol related violence and anti-social behaviour.ⁱⁱⁱ

In assessing whether the Bill has sufficient regard to individual rights and liberties, the Committee should consider the impact of extended banning notices on fundamental rights such as freedom of movement and participation in community and cultural life.

We welcome the Bill's additional exemptions allowing a person subject to a banning notice to enter a high-risk area to access health and medical care and government services. These are important safeguards. However, consideration should also be given to further exemptions for other legitimate reasons, for example religious observance, cultural obligations, to access education and fulfil family or caring responsibilities, and this should not be limited to what is prescribed within the legislation.

In regional NT towns, exclusion from a high-risk area also means limited access to purchase groceries and other essential household goods. It is untenable and impractical to impose such restrictions on individuals for a period of 3 months, particularly in circumstances when they have family and caring responsibilities.

A longer exclusion period will increase the likelihood that a person will breach a notice, leading to increased and unnecessary contact with the justice system, and is likely to disproportionately impact people experiencing alcohol use disorder, mental health conditions, poverty and homelessness, as people without secure housing may have limited practical ability to avoid high-risk areas.

NT Police data for the year 2024-2025 shows that banning notices were almost exclusively issued to First Nations people.^{iv} This raises serious concerns about whether the policy currently operates equitably and whether adequate safeguards are in place to prevent discriminatory outcomes. Where powers are discretionary, with police able to issue notices based on “reasonable belief”, there is a greater need for clear statutory criteria and transparent review mechanisms to ensure that notices are being used without discrimination and only where they are necessary and proportionate.

FARE recommends that any proposal to extend the duration of banning notices should not proceed unless it is supported by clear and robust evidence demonstrating that the change is necessary and effective in preventing or reducing alcohol-related harm. Any extension must also be shown to be a proportionate response that does not unnecessarily or disproportionately restrict the rights and liberties of individuals. In the absence of such evidence, extending banning notices risks imposing greater limitations on personal freedoms without a corresponding improvement in community safety, undermining the principles of evidence-based policymaking and proportionate regulation.

FARE would like to thank the Legislative Scrutiny Committee for the opportunity to provide this submission and the Committee Membership’s consideration of our recommendations.

We look forward to seeing the outcome of this consultation. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact Aimee Brownbill, Director of Policy and Research at Aimee.Brownbill@fare.org.au or 02 5104 9316.

Yours sincerely,



Ayla Chorley
Chief Executive Officer

ⁱ Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (2026). AMSANT calls for certainty on the future of Alcohol Protected Areas. <https://amsant.org.au/amsant-calls-for-certainty-on-the-future-of-alcohol-protected-areas/>; Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (2026). Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Disability Inquiry into health impacts of alcohol & other drugs in Australia Public Hearing 15 April 2026, Opening Statement by Ebony Abbott-McCormack Chairperson, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress <https://www.caac.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Chairperson-Statement-to-Alcohol-Inquiry-April-2026-FINAL.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Northern Territory Government (2026). [Banning notice | NT.GOV.AU](https://nt.gov.au/banning-notice)

ⁱⁱⁱ Farmer C, Curtis A, Miller P (2018). The steady proliferation of Australia’s discretionary police-imposed patron banning powers: an unsubstantiated cycle of assertion and presumption. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748895817733792>

^{iv} Northern Territory Police Force (2025). Annual Report 2024-2025, Northern Territory Police, banning notices and exclusion orders in high risk areas, Section 233, Liquor Act 2019. Northern Territory Government. <https://territorystories.nt.gov.au/10070/1015010>