



Regional Alcohol Restrictions

Fact Sheet

2019

Purpose: to support a unified position on restrictions in the Pilbara, to counter industry resistance.

Distributed to: WACOSS, WACOSS and WANADA Pilbara members

Key Points:

1. Alcohol is not a usual commodity – it's use comes at an enormous cost to society
2. The Pilbara Inquiry – Decision of Director of Liquor Licencing – provides data and information from a range of human services demonstrating why alcohol is a concern in the Pilbara region
Information provided in the Inquiry report demonstrates why a whole of population approach through restrictions is needed
3. The Coronial Inquest into the deaths of thirteen children and young people in the Kimberley Region similarly recommended region-wide restrictions, and highlighted successes of restrictions. Comparable restrictions across both regions will reduce any “problem shifting”
4. Community services are supportive of alcohol restrictions – as one of a suite of initiative aimed at reducing individual, family and community alcohol related harm
5. The arguments against region-wide restrictions are not based on researched evidence or professional opinion.
6. We would welcome media taking a balanced, informative approach to reporting on the restrictions. Please give adequate weight to evidence and professionals that are working in the human and human services areas.

Full report includes specific data and quotes from the Pilbara Police Inquiry and Kimberley Inquest.

Alcohol is not a usual commodity

It is well established that alcohol is no run-of-the-mill commodity. While alcohol contributes to the economy, for example through employment and taxes, it comes at an enormous cost to society. Alcohol causes medical, psychological and social harm. It is a toxic substance, effecting a wide range of body organs and systems. Intoxications contributes to accidents, injuries and violence. Frequent and heavy drinking are associated with chronic health problems, and sustained drinking may result in dependence which impairs a person's ability to control how often and how much they drink.

It is well established that alcohol is a major contributor to the burden of disease, disability and death.

Decision of Director of Liquor Licencing – The Pilbara Inquiry

The *Decision of Director of Liquor Licensing – Pilbara Inquiry* provides data and information from a range of human services that demonstrate why alcohol is a concern in the Pilbara region.

Sample comments drawn from the Inquiry report include:

- Based on most recent data (2012/13), alcohol **per capita consumption** in the Pilbara is nearly twice that of the State (21.1 litres in the Pilbara compared with 11.4 litres in the State) (Chief Health Officer – clause 43)
- Professor Walker, Associate Professor and Head, Aboriginal Maternal Health and Child Development; Principal Research Fellow, *Making FASD History in the Pilbara* provided her professional opinion through the Chief Health Officer reported (clause 47) indicating that the **oversupply and harmful use** of alcohol has had a direct harmful impact on:
 - domestic violence and family dysfunction
 - adverse impacts on mental health and wellbeing
 - high rates of self-harm and suicide/attempted suicide
 - high rates of hospitalisation
 - reports of child neglect and physical and sexual abuse
 - unplanned teenage pregnancies
 - intergenerational impacts of alcohol consumption in pregnancy, causing developmental delay and social and emotional issues
 - poor school attendance, participation and educational outcomes
 - high rates of vulnerability at school entry level associated with suspected and diagnosed FASD and other comorbidities;
 - road traffic accidents
 - high rates of vandalism, issues with the justice system and incarceration.
- The rate of alcohol-related **domestic assaults** in the Pilbara increased in 2016 and was seven times the metropolitan rate, almost five times the State rate and just under double the Regional rate (Police report – clause 13)
- The primary **reasons why children come into the care of the State** is because of domestic violence and excessive alcohol consumption (Department of Child Protection and Family Support – clause 23 and 24).
- Alcohol abuse is at the forefront of the problems presenting to the Pilbara Community **Legal Service** (Police report – clause 11)
- For the period 1 January 2006 to 31 December 2015, the total **hospitalisation** rate for 'all alcohol-related conditions' for residents of South Hedland and Port Hedland was significantly

higher (1.9 and 1.5 times respectively) than the corresponding State rate (Chief Health Officer – clause 44)

- Alcohol is a factor in a high proportion of **suicides** in the area. A blood alcohol reading was detected in a significantly higher proportion of suicides in Port Hedland, South Hedland and surrounding suburbs (71%) in comparison to the State (39%). Across the Pilbara, a blood alcohol reading was detected in over half (57.1%) of suicides in the region (Mental Health Commission - clause 51)
- **FASD** is a recognised issue in the Pilbara and experts have advised that liquor restrictions in other Western Australian communities have contributed to the prevention of FASD (Mental Health Commission – clause 51)
- Tourism WA (clause 21 and 22) **supports the introduction of alcohol restrictions** in the face of the significant health and violence problems in the region, however it notes that different restrictions exist in different locations across the Kimberley and Pilbara, which can be confusing for tourists.

Coronial Inquest into the deaths of 13 children and young people in the Kimberley Region

The Coronial Inquest into the deaths of thirteen children and young people in the Kimberley Region recommends **restrictions across the entire Kimberley Region** that would address Tourism WA concerns and reduce any problem shifting:

Recommendation 8:

That there be restrictions on the purchase of take away alcohol across the entire Kimberley Region, but that such restrictions be formulated after there has been consultation with key stakeholders, including affected local Aboriginal communities.

Both the Pilbara Inquiry and Kimberley Coronial Inquest identify that alcohol is not just a problem for a handful of individuals – it is a concern for the regions. Something has to change. Ignoring the inquiry information and Inquest recommendations would be inexcusable.

The arguments against region wide restrictions are not based on evidence or professional opinion.

In addition to the Inquiry information and Inquest recommendations there is extensive **evidence for strategies** and interventions that can prevent or minimise alcohol related harm. Recognised effective approaches to minimising harm from alcohol include:

- pricing and taxation
- regulating the physical availability of alcohol (e.g. restrictions)
- modifying the drinking context
- drink-driving countermeasures
- restrictions on marketing
- education and persuasion strategies
- **treatment and early intervention services.**

