



27 March 2026

Secretary
Legislative Scrutiny Committee
GPO Box 3721
DARWIN NT 0801

Dear Secretary

LIQUOR LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (FAST TRACK APPROVALS) BILL 2026 INQUIRY

The Association of Alcohol and Other Drug Agencies Northern Territory (AADANT) is the peak body for Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) community treatment and support services in the Northern Territory (NT). As an independent, membership-driven, not-for-profit association, we work with our members to support and strengthen AOD service delivery for people who experience harmful substance use in the NT.

Our mission is to build and maintain a strong, sustainable and culturally diverse AOD sector that works together to reduce alcohol and drug-related harm across the NT. AADANT acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we live, work and walk.

AADANT's position

AADANT's position is that this Bill weakens core harm minimisation protections in the NT liquor licensing system. It reduces scrutiny of some licence applications, narrows opportunities for community consultation, and treats some licence categories as low risk in circumstances where local impact may still be significant. AADANT has significant concerns about these changes.

There is clear evidence that the Northern Territory experiences the highest rates of alcohol consumption in Australia and the highest levels of risky alcohol use compared with the national average. The NT continues to have the highest alcohol consumption per capita of all Australian jurisdictions. National Drug Strategy Household Survey data also show that 40% of NT adults consumed alcohol in ways that put their health at risk, compared with a national average of 31%, and that the NT has the highest proportion of residents exceeding recommended guidelines for alcohol consumption in a week or on a single occasion.

Alcohol policy in the NT, inclusive of the role of liquor licensing legislation, must also be understood in the context of the well-established intersection between harmful use of alcohol and family, domestic and sexual violence. This is not only a service system issue but a broader public policy issue, and it reinforces the need for liquor regulation to remain firmly grounded in harm minimisation and public interest. It is also consistent with the direction of the National Plan to End Violence against Women and

Children 2022–2032 and related intergovernmental commitments to address drivers and enablers of violence.

From AADANT’s perspective as the peak body for AOD community treatment and support services, alcohol harm is experienced across the systems and services that respond to its consequences every day, including:

- AOD, mental health, housing and social services
- Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations
- Hospitals
- Policing and justice systems
- Other frontline health and community services

Alcohol is a neurotoxic substance that causes significant harms to individuals and communities in the NT, and the regulatory frameworks for its sale and supply should not be weakened in the name of business interests or administrative efficiency alone. In the public interest, the Liquor Act should be grounded in public health including harm minimisation for all Territorians.

AADANT supports the submissions made by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) and Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT) in relation to the Liquor Legislation Amendment (Fast Track Approvals) Bill 2026.

In particular, AADANT would like to reinforce the following key points:

1. The proposed low-risk approach is not supported by the evidence

AADANT’s position is that the proposed treatment of some licence applications as ‘low risk’ is not evidence based and should not be relied upon to justify reduced scrutiny.

The Bill would exempt some applications from existing safeguards on the basis that they are characterised as low risk. However:

- the proposed approach relies on a base fee classification rather than a genuine assessment of likely community impact
- low risk does not mean no risk
- licence categories can contain significant diversity, meaning that applications within the same category may have very different local impacts
- local conditions, cumulative impact, operating model, trading conditions and community setting all matter

AADANT does not support this change.

2. The Bill narrows community consultation unjustifiably

AADANT's position is that these reforms will narrow opportunities for community consultation and reduce the ability of affected communities and stakeholders to be heard. This change is not justified.

The proposed changes would remove or narrow:

- public interest and community impact assessment requirements for some applications
- public notice requirements
- review pathways for some applications that are characterised as low risk

AADANT does not support these changes. Community input is a core safeguard in liquor licensing. Communities, service providers and public health stakeholders must retain a meaningful opportunity to respond where licence changes may affect local alcohol harm, safety or service system pressure.

3. The Bill prioritises business interests and administrative efficiency over public health and harm minimisation safeguards

AADANT's position is that the proposed reforms prioritise business interests and administrative efficiency over public interest protections. In practical terms, this approach:

- reduces oversight without strengthening harm minimisation safeguards
- treats scrutiny as red tape rather than as a legitimate public protection measure
- frames community objection and public participation as barriers to efficiency

AADANT does not support this approach. In the NT, liquor licensing should never be a routine administrative process detached from any assessment of community consequence. It is a public policy mechanism that directly affects alcohol-related harm, safety and wellbeing.

4. The consultation process has been inadequate

AADANT's position is that the consultation timeframe for this Bill has been inadequate, preventing opportunity for meaningful engagement with Territorians.

Short consultation periods have been a repeated issue across alcohol policy and legislative reform in the NT. This undermines the capacity of peak bodies, community organisations, Aboriginal organisations, service providers and affected communities to engage properly with complex reforms. It also limits the ability of member-based organisations such as AADANT to consult our members and reflect sector experience in a meaningful way.

AADANT does not support this approach to reform.

Recommendations

AADANT supports the detailed recommendations set out in the FARE submission. In particular, AADANT reinforces the following high-level positions:

- the Bill should not proceed in its current form
- existing public interest and community impact safeguards should be retained
- public notice and review pathways should not be removed for applications simply characterised as ‘low risk’
- ‘low-risk’ classifications should not be used to justify reduced scrutiny of licence applications
- consultation on liquor law reform should occur over longer and more meaningful timeframes, with proper opportunity for member, community and public health input.

As the peak body for AOD community treatment and support services in the NT, AADANT’s view is that liquor licensing reform must remain firmly anchored in public health and harm minimisation, public interest, and genuine community voice. In a jurisdiction that experiences such significant alcohol-related harm, the response cannot be to narrow consultations, weaken safeguards, and reduce scrutiny. If anything, these are measures that should be safeguarded and strengthened.

Therefore, AADANT does not support the proposed changes in this Bill.

References

- NT Government (2026), Alcohol Policy in the Northern Territory.
- AIHW (2025), Alcohol, tobacco & other drugs in Australia – State and territory data (National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2022–23).
- NT Government (2026), Alcohol Policy in the Northern Territory – Consumption.

Yours sincerely

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Executive Officer

AADANT