



MEDIA RELEASE

Substance Abuse in the Community

9 October 2002

Public Hearing

The Northern Territory Parliament's Select Committee inquiring into substance abuse in the community is holding a Public Hearing at Parliament House this Friday, 11 October 2002, commencing at 9.00 am.

Chaired by the Member for Arafura, Ms Marion Scrymgour, MLA, the Committee has been undertaking a program of community consultations throughout the NT over the past three months. Most recently, it has held a number of public meetings and hearings with Tiwi Island communities.

The Committee's initial focus is on alcohol abuse, petrol sniffing and the abuse of other inhalants, and cannabis use.

Ms Scrymgour stated that, while the first round of the Committee's consultations is yet to be completed, the evidence before it to date indicates that alcohol abuse has a huge impact on some sectors of the Northern Territory. As well, the availability and consumption of cannabis, particularly in Indigenous communities, is of grave concern.

"The Committee has taken evidence from communities in the south and west of the NT and has just completed some intensive consultations in the Tiwi Islands.

"Petrol sniffing, and the abuse of other inhalants, is not found in all communities but is devastating for those where it is present. Apart from the impact upon the immediate family and community, the future costs in terms of medical treatment and care for people brain damaged by continual use makes it a problem for whole of the Northern Territory community.

"And that is just one problem. In the Top End, a total of 8 suicides in less than five months from one community alone is a major crisis for any society. The Committee has heard that the prolonged abuse of alcohol, leading to family breakdown and social dysfunction, has set the scene for what was described as a 'culture of suicide', which is exacerbated by a high rate of cannabis consumption.

"While a direct medical link between cannabis use and psychosis is yet to be proved, the anecdotal evidence from people on the ground points to the huge impact its consumption has, often in combination with alcohol use, when social and mental problems are present," Ms Scrymgour said.

The Committee has invited representatives from a number of organisations to appear before it at Friday's Public Hearing, including Alcohol Awareness and Family Recovery, FORWAARD and CAAPS, groups which provide treatment and rehabilitation services. As well, the Committee will be hearing from representatives of the Larrakia Nation and the Northern Territory branch of the Australian Medical Association. An industry perspective will be provided by the Australian Hotels Association.

Further information on the Hearing can be obtained from the Committee Secretariat on 89461429.