



**SELECT COMMITTEE ON SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN THE
COMMUNITY**

SUBMISSION NUMBER 0075

DATE: 10 March 2003

RECEIVED FROM: Mr Sean Arnold

To: <substanceabusela@nt.gov.au>
cc: <Pat.Hancock@nt.gov.au>
Subject: Submissions to substance abuse in NT communities

Dear Ms Hancock

I have lived at Cooinda (Yellow Waters) in Kakadu for seven years.

Cooinda is the only takeaway alcohol provider in Kakadu.

Drink driving - We experience drunk drivers travelling to and from Cooinda from other Kakadu and Arnhem Land communities and towns to drink and buy takeaway alcohol. My partner and I were almost killed in a head-on collision with a drunk driver who was driving back to Jabiru after Cooinda bar closed. That driver drove drunk almost every night for two weeks at the same times.

Intoxicated persons are often at Community alcohol outlets getting friends and tourists to purchase more alcohol on their behalf once the bar refuses to serve them more. This practice is widespread and is very difficult for liquor outlets to control.

Recommendations for Kakadu:

Light beer (2% alcohol or less) and low alcohol wine only to be sold anywhere in Kakadu. Definitely no takeaway of heavy alcohol.

Clear signage of these rules at Pine Creek and Humpty Doo notifying all people entering Kakadu of these restrictions so they may purchase alcohol of their choice before entering Kakadu.

The Gagudju Crocodile Hotel and Cooinda should lead the way if truly trying to help the people of Kakadu. If the alcohol distribution laws were severely tightened then many people would not honestly mind because everyone knows that it causes too many problems and violence in the community. Much better to have heavy alcohol on sale in Darwin or Katherine only and locals still can stock up if they really want. The ability to purchase heavy alcohol in communities will be their end.

Recommendations for the NT:

Divide the NT into geographical regions and assess levels of substance abuse in each region. Make rules for controlling substance abuse (including distribution of alcohol) applicable to entire regions, therefore you are not being racially prejudiced. The government controls the liquor outlet licences not a small group of community councillors. Note the Cape York research.

We see many people living in fear and being abused. Most will not report this to police because they will be punished further by the offender and other family members for a long time in the future (payback).

Some aboriginal people that are tour guides are traditional and knowledgeable. I do not foresee aboriginal guides in 30 years time having this knowledge or respect for their culture.

The true traditional aboriginal culture is dying today as faster than it ever has.

As the developed world becomes more materialistic, traditional aboriginal culture will become more interesting to the rest of the world. Therefore, I believe that aboriginal tourism experiences will become a major reason for overseas visitors to visit Australia and thus helping the Australian economy. Tourists will not be interested in a forgotten culture.

If the culture is to survive then the aboriginal children need a purpose to learn their culture and need respect for their elders. There are many problems with this currently as you can imagine. Maybe cultural education should be compulsory at community schools because some parents may be affected by depression and substance abuse. I hope your Select Committee can assist the children soon.

In the United States there has been great depression in the native Indian Reserves. Widespread substance abuse has occurred for a long time there and now most of the traditional culture is lost, the children grow up today with a white man mind-set and are starting to progress but have maintained little traditional culture.

Aboriginal substance abuse is a recent problem with equal alcohol consumption rights in the late 1960's. It is not too late to save some traditional culture. Traditional culture is a way of thinking. Once lost it can never be regained. Tourists do not travel to the United States to experience native Indian culture because they know it is nearly finished. But tourists still visit Australia to experience the soon to be lost, traditional aboriginal culture.

We cannot alter Uluru or Yellow Waters, however we can greatly improve the appearance of aboriginal culture and return cultural pride and this may become Australia's greatest tourist attraction.

Traditional aboriginal lifestyle entails collecting food daily and consuming it immediately (there is little evidence of food storage in aboriginal culture). The Government pays most aboriginal people fortnightly and many consume this within a few days. This has serious implications including leaving many starving children for most of the period between payments.

I recommend regular smaller payments throughout the period. This system should be implemented for all social security recipients.

The current manner of government payments to aboriginal people is not in line with their culture and is killing aboriginal culture faster today than any other factor affecting aboriginal culture in the past.

The government should honestly provide help to people. Not just reckless money.

Substance abuse, including alcoholism leads to depression and this fuels racist feelings.

Many aboriginal people are dying from "lifestyle" diseases. The government spends a lot on trying to help the sick people but not on prevention. The government does not understand aboriginal culture and makes the people sick when they give them fortnightly lump sum payments to dispose of it as they wish.

Depression: Everyone needs to be kept busy and for those that have steady occupations this is a major factor in avoiding depression. Early Australian explorers noted that the bush aboriginal people were always busy. It is a misconception that that aboriginal people are content just receiving the government's "sit down" money. The people must keep themselves busy. Maybe the government should encourage widespread active participation in cultural activities. Aboriginal culture is part of all Australian's Heritage. No human being can sit down all their life and not be depressed and maybe resort to substance abuse for relief.

The government should listen more to the bush aboriginal people (who are sometimes reluctant to talk to those who do not understand their culture) and less to mis-informed "do gooders".

Yes, I believe in equality. The system needs to change for everyone receiving government money. If it doesn't then say good-bye to what remains of aboriginal culture.

Both indigenous and non-indigenous Australians and tourists will thank your Government if you can help save the aboriginal culture.

Thankyou for allowing me to voice my views.
Sean Arnold - Proprietor