



# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

15<sup>th</sup> Assembly

## LEGISLATIVE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

### Public Briefing Transcript

#### Inquiry into the Liquor Legislation Amendment (Fast Track Approvals) Bill 2026

11.30 am, Tuesday 24 March 2026

Litchfield Room, Level 3, Parliament House

**Members:** Mrs Oly Carlson MLA, Chair, Member for Wulagi  
Mr Clinton Howe MLA, Deputy Chair, Member for Drysdale  
Justine Davis MLA, Member for Johnston  
Mr Chanston Paech MLA, Member for Gwoja  
Mrs Laurie Zio MLA, Member for Fannie Bay

**Witnesses:** *Department of Tourism and Hospitality*  
Melissa Garde: Executive Director, Liquor, Racing and Gaming

**INQUIRY INTO THE LIQUOR LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (FAST TRACK APPROVALS) BILL 2026**  
**Department of Tourism and Hospitality**

**Madam CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee, I welcome everyone to this public briefing into the Liquor Legislation Amendment (Fast Track Approvals) Bill 2026.

I welcome to the table to give evidence to the committee from the Department of Tourism and Hospitality Melissa Garde, Executive Director, Liquor, Racing and Gaming. Thank you for coming before the committee. We appreciate you taking time to speak to the committee and look forward to hearing from you today.

This is a formal proceeding of the committee and the protection of parliamentary privilege and the obligation not to mislead the committee apply. This is a public briefing and is being webcast through the Assembly's website. A transcript will be made for use of the committee and may be put on the committee's website. If at any time during the hearing you are concerned that what you will say should not be made public, you may ask the committee to go into a closed session and take your evidence in private.

Could you please state your name and the capacity in which you are appearing.

**Ms GARDE:** Melissa Garde, Executive Director, Liquor, Racing and Gaming.

**Madam CHAIR:** Ms Garde, would you like to make an opening statement?

**Ms GARDE:** No.

**Madam CHAIR:** Okay. I will introduce myself—Oly Carlson, Member for Wanguri and Chair. Online is the deputy, the Member for Drysdale, Clinton Howe. Also online is the Member for Gwoja, Chansey Paech—if you hear any voices behind you. I have the Member for Fannie Bay, Laurie Zio; and the Member for Johnston, Justine Davis.

I will open it up for questions.

**Mrs ZIO:** Could you please provide a quick overview about why this Bill is required?

**Ms GARDE:** The Bill implements the recommendations accepted by the government from the taskforce's final report Saying 'Yes' to Business. The amendments are intended to improve regulatory efficiencies in the liquor licensing system while maintaining appropriate safeguards.

The Bill introduces a fast-track approval process for certain low-risk licence applications; clarifies the criteria for determining whether a person is fit and proper; transfers responsibilities for determining applications for material alterations from the current Liquor Commission to the director; and streamlines the public notice and community impact requirements for low-risk applications.

**Mrs ZIO:** Thank you. I understand the changes to the Bill will fast-track low-risk applications. Can you tell me which specific authority types will regulation 4A prescribe as low risk?

**Ms GARDE:** Low-risk authorities are already prescribed in the regulations. What this will do is allow very low-risk and low-risk authorities to be determined by the director instead of going to the Liquor Commission.

**Mrs ZIO:** Can you give me some examples of low risk?

**Ms GARDE:** I can. Community club authority is a very low risk; restaurant authority is low risk and catering authority is low risk. Those types of applications will be able to be determined by the director or delegate.

**Mrs ZIO:** Under section 5D, what weight will the commission give to prior convictions for alcohol-related offences or harm beyond liquor offences?

**Ms GARDE:** I cannot speak for the Liquor Commission, but as the Bill is currently drafted it talks about penalties against the *Liquor Act*, Liquor Regulations or associated liquor laws in other jurisdictions. Additional legislation may be prescribed in the regulations.

**Mrs ZIO:** Can you tell me if there will be any mandatory reporting requirements on fast-track volumes or rejections, compliance breaches or any other correlated harm data?

**Ms GARDE:** Not that I am aware of, no.

**Mrs ZIO:** Can you also tell me what consultation was undertaken in the preparation of this Bill?

**Ms GARDE:** The taskforce that was put together by this current government, consulted widely on the recommendations from their report Saying ‘Yes’ to Business, so everybody from licensees right through to the chamber of commerce, small operators and community consultation was undertaken as part of the review..

**Mrs ZIO:** Do you have a list of people who were consulted during this process?

**Ms GARDE:** No, but I could get it for you. It is actually in the Saying ‘Yes’ to Business report.

**Mrs ZIO:** Okay. I do not need that question taken if we can research that. I do not have any more questions at this point.

**J DAVIS:** In relation to your outline on what is low risk, is there any process for informing communities if a licence is granted in the low risk?

**Ms GARDE:** We have built a safeguard into the legislation. A community club authority, for instance, could be anything from the local football club to a community club in a remote community, so we built a safeguard into legislation to allow the director to consider the community impact assessment and public interest test, should it be determined those types of licences need that additional review as part of processing application.

**J DAVIS:** Can you clarify which kinds of applications will require the director to do that, or all of them?

**Ms GARDE:** All of them will require, yes, except for ones that have been determined as not impacting the community.

**J DAVIS:** What would examples of those be?

**Ms GARDE:** Over the years we have had a number of applications, and based on those applications received we can determine which ones have received objections in the past. The ones that have not received objections we can process quickly.. Those ones that have, we will take a further look at them.

**J DAVIS:** Bear with me because I do not know how it currently works, but at the moment the commission would decide whether or not a licence is granted; is that right?

**Ms GARDE:** The Liquor commission has delegated some of those powers to us, so we can make that determination. Moving forward, if the director determines that a low-risk authority needs to go to the Liquor Commission, it will be referred to the Liquor Commission.

**J DAVIS:** If there is community concern about a low-risk licence, what is the process then?

**Ms GARDE:** Under section 57 of the Act a applicant has to publicise the application. Once the director determines that it is not low risk and it needs the full public interest test, it actually has to be advertised. That allows 14 days for people to object and make submissions, and that way those objections will form part of the brief that goes to the Liquor Commission.

**J DAVIS:** In terms of process, if it is not going through the commission—it is going through the director—will people know? How will people be informed if that is on the cards?

**Ms GARDE:** Let me think of an example. Say the local netball team wants to set up a community club that is not going to impact anybody around the area; therefore, it will be determined by the director. There will still be requirements in place, but it just would not go to the Liquor Commission for consideration.

**J DAVIS:** When an application is approved, will it be made public?

**Ms GARDE:** Yes, all licences are actually published on the public register.

**J DAVIS:** Part of this Bill extends the responsible service certificates; is that right? Does that mean people will have less frequent training? Is it from three to five years?

**Ms GARDE:** Yes. There is still a requirement for businesses to train their staff, but this aligns our legislation with New South Wales. They currently have a five-year renewal period which they have to do refresher courses.

There are some jurisdictions, such as Queensland, WA, SA and Tasmania, that have no renewal period. We are still going to have a renewal period.

The refresher training is reviewed annually by Hospitality NT, so we can keep up with the current regulatory requirements and ensure that people are trained correctly.

**Madam CHAIR:** Can I just check in with the Members for Gwoja and Drysdale; do you have any questions?

**Mr PAECH:** No.

**J DAVIS:** Is there a change to the fit-and-proper person test? There is something about that in this Bill as well; is that right?

**Ms GARDE:** That Bill introduces a new requirement that in the previous 10-years, if you have been found guilty of an offence against the liquor legislation, you would not be fit and proper.

**J DAVIS:** Are there circumstances where someone who might have a relevant offence still be approved?

**Ms GARDE:** If someone was found guilty of breaching the BDR (Banned Drinker Register) and not scanning ID before serving someone takeaway, that is an infringeable offence; therefore, that would be a breach against the Act, yes.

**J DAVIS:** And therefore would not be approved?

**Ms GARDE:** Would not be suitable.

**J DAVIS:** Are there circumstances or offences where someone would still be approved?

**Ms GARDE:** Not as it is currently written, but again there is the power for the Liquor Commission to make their own determination.

**J DAVIS:** I think Laurie just asked this, but just to follow up, what is the evidence base for needing this and for wanting to fast-track liquor approvals? What is driving it?

**Ms GARDE:** It came out of the taskforce report, Saying 'Yes' to Business.

**Mrs ZIO:** Can I value-add to that one? How will transferring these roles free up the Liquor Commission's time?

**Ms GARDE:** The Liquor Commission will be able to focus on medium to high-risk licence applications and complaints that have been referred to them. Those low-level applications can be done in-house, and the high-risk applications will be done by the Liquor Commission, so that frees up their time.

**J DAVIS:** Just in general, in terms of this Bill, how does it align with the harm minimisation objectives of the *Liquor Act*?

**Ms GARDE:** We have built-in safeguards, as mentioned before, to ensure those low-risk applications still require the public interest test if it is determined that they could impact community, so there is still that harm minimisation aspect to this Bill.

**Mrs ZIO:** Is there any transitional support provided to current applications during this process? If somebody is mid-application, what happens with those?

**Ms GARDE:** There is. If you have applied before the Bill commences, it will be processed under the current process that we are doing. Anything after the legislation commences will be processed the new way.

**Madam CHAIR:** I will just check again with the Members for Gwoja and Drysdale; any further questions?

**Mr PAECH:** No, thank you.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Garde, for coming before the committee and answering those questions.

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The committee suspended.

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