



Reducing Alcohol Related Violence: A New Framework for the ACT

A Paper by the ACT Greens

September 2009



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FOREWORD

There are few better ways to enjoy a warm summer's evening than sitting with friends enjoying a meal or a drink, or heading out in to town after a movie for a quick bite to eat, or perhaps even dancing on until the wee hours. What better way to beat a cold winter's night than meeting some mates in a bar and listening to a band?

Yet the prospect of making your way home at the end of a good night, and having to confront the fear of alcohol related violence is a reality for many people in Canberra, especially our young people.

Canberra should be a place where everyone feels safe and comfortable. Regardless of your age, your gender, your ethnicity or your sexual orientation, you should be free to move about our streets without fear.

As this Paper identifies, issues arising from the excessive consumption of alcohol, particularly the threat of alcohol related violence, are undermining the sense of personal safety in the Canberra community.

The Greens want people to be able to hit the town and have a great time. What we seek in this Paper is to identify some steps that minimise the risk of that night getting out of control or ending in tragedy. Of course there is no magic answer, no single solution. But in undertaking the research to prepare this paper, we have identified a range of measures that we believe can make a difference, that can enhance personal safety, and make Canberra a better place for everyone.

The targeted measures we have identified are broad ranging. They need to be to better address alcohol related violence. Our measures range from the relatively simple mandatory Responsible Service of Alcohol training to a more complex revision of the licensing fee structure to ensure compliance activities are fully funded and carried out. Some of the measures provide a financial incentive for good behaviour by licensees while others will legislate against risky behaviour such as irresponsible drink pricing.

Alcohol related violence has the potential to affect us all, whether we are patrons, pedestrians, commuters, passers through, licensed venue workers or owners. The Greens encourage all of the ACT community to consider the proposed measures contained in this report and we welcome feedback.

Shane Rattenbury

ACT Greens Attorney-General Spokesperson
Member for Molonglo

Feedback Wanted

The ACT Greens welcome feedback on the proposals contained in this report by:

- Writing to Shane Rattenbury MLA, GPO Box 1020 Canberra ACT 2601;
- Emailing Rattenbury@parliament.act.gov.au;
- Calling (02) 6205 0005; or
- Registering as an interested individual/organisation to be notified of future developments on alcohol related violence proposals.

Feedback is asked for by Friday 20th November 2009.

INTRODUCTION

Alcohol related violence has become a significant problem in Canberra and across Australia. In addition to the direct problems associated with intimidation and assaults, alcohol related violence hinders the ability of people to move freely and feel safe.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberrans are twice as likely to be physically assaulted, verbally abused or threatened by a person under the influence of alcohol than a person affected by illicit drugs.¹ The research also showed that more than one quarter of people had been verbally abused and one in seven had been threatened by an intoxicated person.²

In addition, the Australasian Centre for Policing Research has collated national statistics showing:

- 6.3% of intoxicated persons have verbally abused someone;
- 1.2% of intoxicated persons have physically abused someone;
- 1.8% of intoxicated persons have caused damage to property;
- That somewhere between 33% and 45% of homicides, victims and offenders are intoxicated;
- That there were 192,292 hospital admissions over a ten year period resulting from alcohol related injuries and assaults; and,
- That there were 3,233 deaths over a ten year period resulting from alcohol related injuries and assaults.³

In recent years, studies have shown that alcohol related violence usually occurs in or around licensed venues, and that only a small proportion of licensees are associated with the majority of violence.⁴ Studies also show that these venues are often located in the same districts, the same suburbs and sometimes in the same buildings, creating clusters and hotspots.⁵

In the ACT, alcohol related violence poses risks to patrons, pedestrians, commuters and passers through. Given the concentration of violence around certain hotspots there is an opportunity to implement highly targeted strategies to prevent and respond to violent incidents.

On the 1st of April 2008, the ACT Attorney General released a Liquor Act Review Discussion Paper for public consultation. Submissions closed on 30 June 2008. This ACT Greens Paper aims to add to the continuing discussion of how to address alcohol related violence in the ACT.

This ACT Greens Paper sets out nine proposals the ACT could adopt in a targeted alcohol related violence strategy.

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2005) **National Drug Household Survey. First Results.** Australian Institute of Health and Welfare: Canberra. P48

² Ibid.

³ Australasian Centre for Policing Research (2004) **The Antecedents of Alcohol Related Violence in and Around Licensed Premises.** Australasian Centre for Policing Research: Adelaide. Pp3-5

⁴ Australasian Centre for Policing Research (2007) **Identifying and Responding to Problematic Licensed Premises: A Guide for Police.** Australasian Centre for Policing Research: Adelaide. P6

⁵ Ibid.

REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Compliance Problems in the ACT

In Canberra and elsewhere, an ongoing problem is the lack of visible policing of the regulations pertaining to the provision of alcohol to people who are already intoxicated. Many studies have highlighted the importance of penalising licensees in violation of these regulations.⁶

In response to the Review of the Liquor Act Discussion Paper, a number of researchers and organisations implored the ACT Government to recognise the importance of enforcing the existing regulations in improving personal safety and security in the City, and stressed that strategies must be policed if they are to be adhered to by licensees.

The Auditor General recently looked into this in the report on the Regulation of ACT Liquor Licences. In the three years preceding the report, the Office of Fair Trading had not met their inspection targets, with the Auditor General reporting that:

- After-hours inspections were intermittent and rare, and were only carried out in limited premises;
- In the 2004-05 year, only 28% of licenses issued were inspected for compliance;
- In the 2005-06 year, only 34% of licenses issued were inspected for compliance; and,
- In the 2006-07 year, just 17% of licenses issued were inspected for compliance.⁷

The Auditor General also found that, when venues were inspected, there were high levels of non-compliance with nearly 350 breaches being reported from 2004-05 to April 2007.⁸

According to the Auditor General's report, "such high levels of non-compliance would appear to indicate that an extension of regulatory activities would be necessary to ensure better industry compliance with legislation and licensing conditions." The report added that "it is doubtful that the current limited compliance activities were effective in promoting responsible consumption and sale of liquor."⁹

Based on the Auditor General's report and the other research undertaken in this area, the ACT Greens propose an increase in funding for compliance activities carried out by the Office of Regulatory Services who now have responsibility for carrying out inspections under the Liquor Act.

Strengthening Policing and Enforcement: A New Regulatory Framework

The ACT Greens believe that the Office of Regulatory Services must be adequately funded to monitor compliance as a starting point from which to address alcohol related violence. Regulations will only be effective if they are being enforced inside licensed venues.

⁶ National Drug Research Institute (2007) **Restrictions on the Sale and Supply of Alcohol: Evidence and Outcomes**. Curtin University of Technology: Perth. Pp197-198

⁷ ACT Auditor-General's Office (2007) **Performance Audit Report. Regulation of ACT Liquor Licences**. Department of Justice and Community Safety: Canberra. P8

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Id. Pp35-36

To ensure that the Office of Regulatory Services is funded to carry out compliance activities, the ACT Greens propose to revise the existing licence fee structure so that the costs of compliance activities are recovered from licensees.

By having compliance activities funded from licensees instead of internal government funding sources, compliance activities are assured from one year to the next and will not be subject to changes in government priorities.

The proposed model for a new fee structure would charge a licence fee that reflects the level of risk posed by each venue. The Victorian Government has recently announced changes to their licensing system on a similar rationale. Figure 1 outlines the methodology that will be applied in Victoria.

The restructure of ACT licence fees would provide a financial incentive for licensees to ensure their venue was complying with the existing regulatory requirements, as well as providing economic incentives to comply with non-mandatory components of the proposed Liquor Accord (see Proposals 2 and 3). Factors such as operating hours and venue capacity are accurate indicators of risk of alcohol related violence occurring and would form part of the risk assessment of each venue.

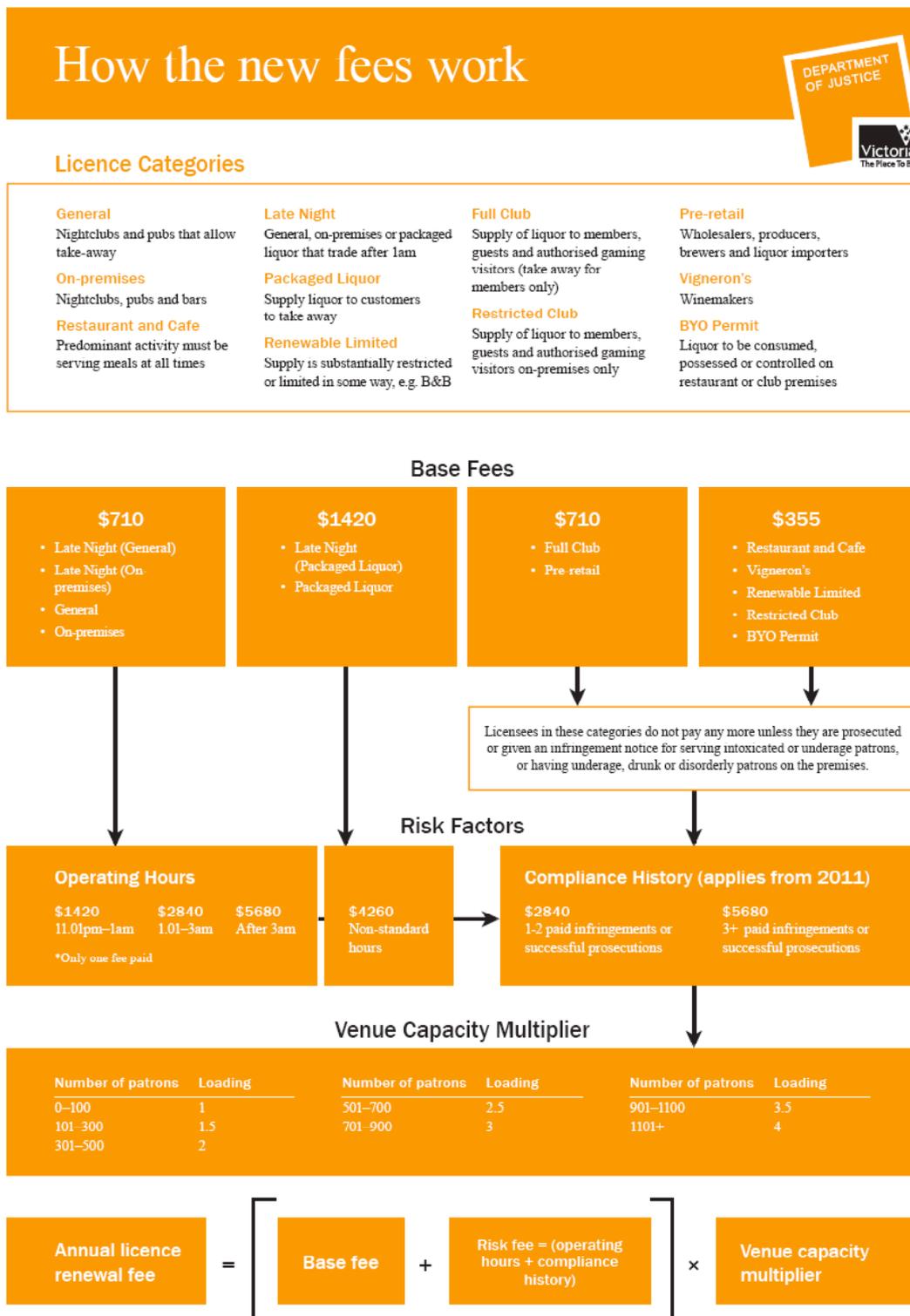
Appendix 1 outlines the modelling and analytical work that would need to be done in the ACT to implement such a revision.

Proposal 1: A New Regulatory Framework

The ACT Greens propose a new framework for determining licence fees. Under the new model, all licensees would be assessed with higher costs imposed on those who present a greater risk. The new structure would meet the dual goals of:

- Ensuring costs of compliance activities are recovered through the new licensing framework; and
- Using financial incentives to maximise compliance and good venue behaviour.

FIGURE 1: LICENSING FEES IN VICTORIA



Liquor Accord

Currently, a number of States including Victoria, Queensland and New South Wales have implemented voluntary liquor accords. These have included a range of measures to discourage the discounting of alcoholic beverages and encourage the development of robust in-house policies. Although these measures have been successful to an extent, experience from other jurisdictions shows us that the accords are only as successful as the willingness to measure performance against them.

The ACT Greens propose that measures such as Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA) Training (Proposal 4) and restrictions on the irresponsible discounting of liquor (Proposal 5) be mandatory features of liquor licensing regulation. For those features that are more suitably left to the discretion of the licensee, such as in-house design and management features, a voluntary liquor accord system is appropriate.

The voluntary liquor accord system would be developed in consultation with licensees to improve design, cleanliness and management practices within venues. The accord would have protocols setting out measurable criteria against which the venues would be assessed. Following assessment, the licensee would be eligible for licence fee reductions under the revised licence fee structure (Proposal 1).

Proposal 2: A Liquor Accord for the ACT

The ACT Greens propose the implementation of a voluntary Liquor Accord to improve design, cleanliness and management practices within licensed venues.

Signatories would be assessed and become eligible for licence fee reductions where Accord protocols are met on a consistent basis by the venue.

The protocols in the Liquor Accord could cover the following areas:

Measures to reduce overcrowding

Research has consistently shown that overcrowding is strongly associated with alcohol related violence. Overcrowding contributes to:

- Frustration and irritability amongst patrons;
- Accidental contact between patrons;
- Increases in temperature;
- Increases in noise; and
- Increases in alcohol consumption.¹⁰

When overcrowding occurs in walkways and in doorways, it increases contact between patrons and can be directly attributed to incidents of violence. When it occurs on dance floors, it makes it harder to identify patrons as they become increasingly aggressive. Finally, when overcrowding occurs around bars, it increases the incidence of purchase of large quantities drinks by one patron for others, making it harder to regulate the provision of alcohol to intoxicated patrons.

Improved ventilation

High levels of heat within licensed venues intensifies physical discomfort; aggravates patrons and leads to higher levels of alcohol consumption. In recognition of the role

¹⁰ National Drug Law Enforcement Research Fund (2003) **Alcohol and Licensed Premises: Best Practice in Policing. A Monograph for Police and Policy Makers**. National Drug Law Enforcement Research Fund: Canberra. P27

played by heat in drinking environments, some jurisdictions have taken steps to ensure minimum required levels of ventilation within licensed premises.

Cleanliness

Cleanliness and the enforcement of behavioural standards can help create a safe and enjoyable drinking environment. This was acknowledged by Doherty and Roche:

Clean drinking environments are more desirable places to drink. A clean environment sets a standard for patrons. Maintaining a clean licensed venue provides increased opportunity for staff to monitor and address problem behaviours.

Areas around toilets have been found to be a key location for disorder. Public toilets within licensed venues and in the nearby environment provide an environment where people affected by alcohol may be susceptible to victimisation. This is particularly so where these facilities are not well lit, monitored or in a very visible area. It is therefore important that toilet facilities are readily visible and accessible to bar staff, well maintained and clean.¹¹

Enforced in-house policies and management practices

The presence of good management practices and the enforcement of in-house policies can have a strong influence on the behaviour of patrons. Conversely, perceptions of permissiveness amongst management can also play a role in shaping behaviour. Research conducted in other parts of the country has shown that enforced in-house policies are associated with fewer alcohol related incidents, and importantly, better enable patrons to enjoy themselves and move freely.

Operational logs

One example of good practice increasingly adopted within Canberra and elsewhere, as noted by Doherty and Roche, is the use of operational logs to keep a record of incidents and monitor breaches of house policy. This is not only a useful regulatory tool, but sends an important message to patrons about the permissiveness of the venue's management.

Proposal 3: Liquor Accord Protocols: Management and Design

The ACT Greens propose the Liquor Accord contain protocols on:

- Measures to reduce overcrowding
- Measures to improve ventilation
- Guidelines for improved cleanliness
- Guidelines for management practices
- Enforced in-house policies
- Operational logs

¹¹ Ibid. P29

MANAGEMENT OF LICENSED PREMISES

Provision of Alcohol to Already Intoxicated Patrons

In general, most researchers agree that the type of license held by venue does not predict the level of alcohol related harm.¹² The quantity of alcohol consumed on premises and the provision of alcohol to patrons who are already intoxicated are frequently cited as crucial indicators of violence.¹³

Under the Liquor Act, licensees and permit holders “must not sell or supply liquor to a person if there are reasonable grounds for believing that the person is intoxicated.”¹⁴ Despite the regulations, provision of alcohol to intoxicated patrons continues to be a problem in the ACT.

Research attributes the ongoing provision of alcohol to already intoxicated people to:

- Conflicts for licensees between profitability and requirements to not sell alcohol to already intoxicated patrons;
- Low levels of training amongst staff;
- High rates of turnover amongst staff; and
- Weak lighting, large crowds and other environmental factors, which can impair the ability of staff to gauge if patrons are intoxicated.¹⁵

If the incidence of resale of alcohol to intoxicated patrons can be reduced, alcohol related violence and assault would clearly be reduced. In other States and Territories, such as Victoria, the Northern Territory, Queensland and Tasmania, it is compulsory for the managers of licensed venues, licensees and permit holders to undertake training in the Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA).

Research shows that RSA training improves managers and staff knowledge of responsible serving practices.¹⁶ Although the provision of training doesn't necessarily increase refusal of service to intoxicated patrons, it improves the ability of licensees to uphold regulations in other ways, such as improving management of patrons who are intoxicated and enhancing staff responses to difficult situations.¹⁷

Requiring servers and licensees to undertake training will ensure that a consistent message is delivered; that staff members have minimum levels of competencies in the service and management of alcohol; and, will improve staff understanding of the risks associated with alcohol misuse.

Proposal 4: Mandatory Training in the Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA)

The ACT Greens propose RSA Training be made mandatory for all staff working at licensed venues.

¹² National Drug Law Enforcement Research Fund (2003) **Alcohol and Licensed Premises: Best Practice in Policing. A Monograph for Police and Policy Makers**. National Drug Law Enforcement Research Fund: Canberra. Pp14-22

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ **Liquor Act 1975** (ACT) S 138 (1)

¹⁵ National Drug Law Enforcement Research Fund (2003) **Alcohol and Licensed Premises: Best Practice in Policing. A Monograph for Police and Policy Makers**. National Drug Law Enforcement Research Fund: Canberra. P24

¹⁶ National Drug Law Enforcement Research Fund (2007) Young Adults Experience of Responsible Service Practice in NSW. **Alcohol Studies Bulletin**. National Drug Law Enforcement Research Fund: Canberra. Pp1-2

¹⁷ Ibid.

Discounting of Alcohol and Drinking Promotions

Drink promotions and discounted alcohol are a major characteristic of bars, taverns and nightclubs in Canberra. Promotions featuring discounted drinks, happy hours and multiple drink offers lead to excessive alcohol consumption over small time periods.

Promotions strongly influence the behaviour of young drinkers, who tend to be attracted to cheap drinks with high alcohol content. This is supported by the National Drug Research Institute, who have said that:

*There is evidence for the effectiveness of measures that control the price of alcoholic drinks. Young people and heavy drinkers are influenced by price. The current Australian approach to alcohol taxation, and therefore pricing systems, are not entirely consistent with good public health approaches to minimising alcohol-related problems.*¹⁸

According to a recent study conducted by the National Drug Research Institute, restrictions on the economic availability of alcohol dramatically reduce the consumption of alcohol.¹⁹ This highlights the strong correlation between price and consumption. On this basis, the ACT Greens propose implementing mandatory restrictions on the discounting of alcohol to reduce alcohol misuse and violence.

Proposal 5: Restrictions on the Discounting of Alcohol

The ACT Greens propose irresponsible drink pricing in licensed venues be restricted through legislative amendment.

Definition of 'Intoxicated' in the Liquor Act

The subjectivity of the language within the legislation was cited in a number of submissions as part of the Review of the Liquor Act. The test that is applied when assessing if a licensee or permit holder has sold liquor to an intoxicated patron provides for "reasonable grounds for believing that the person's speech, balance, coordination or behaviour is seriously affected by the consumption of liquor."²⁰ In assessing whether a licensee has sold liquor to an intoxicated person, the term 'seriously' is used.

In this regard, the ACT Liquor Act is much weaker than comparable legislation in other jurisdictions. For example, the New South Wales Liquor Act defines intoxicated as "the person's speech, balance, co-ordination or behaviour is noticeably affected."²¹ Similarly, in Victoria, intoxication is defined as "a state of intoxication if his or her speech, balance, co-ordination or behaviour is noticeably affected."²²

If the enforcement of these parts of the Liquor Act are to be strengthened, the language must be made clearer and less contentious. Changing the term from 'seriously' to 'noticeably' affected would remove some subjectivity and strengthen the ability of authorities to penalise licensees who sell alcohol to intoxicated patrons.

¹⁸ Chikritzhs, T. Rechichi, V. Saggars, S. (2008) **Preventing Alcohol-Related Harm in Australia**. Curtin University of Technology: Perth. P3

¹⁹ National Drug Research Institute (2007) **Restrictions on the Sale and Supply of Alcohol: Evidence and Outcomes**. Curtin University of Technology: Perth. Pp197-198

²⁰ **Liquor Act 1975** (ACT) S 138 (3)

²¹ **Liquor Act 2007** (NSW) S (5)

²² **Liquor Control Reform Act 1998** (Vic) S (3)

Proposal 6: Strengthening the Definition of 'Intoxicated' in the Liquor Act

The ACT Greens propose to strengthen the definition of intoxicated in the Liquor Act by replacing 'seriously affected' with 'noticeably affected'.

Lockouts

Lockouts disallow the entry of patrons to licensed venues past a specified time. Lockouts and curfews have been trialled in South Australia, New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria. The Western Australian Government is also considering implementing a trial.

Arguments that have been used to support lockouts include the need to stop pub crawls that lead to violence; reduce the number of people moving from venue to venue late at night, sometimes after being asked to leave licensed venues; and, control the movements of people in alcohol hotspots.

Lockouts can make it easier to police alcohol related violence within designated areas because they allow for the control of movement in hotspots and the targeting of particular areas. However, neither independent research nor the results of the trials have demonstrated the efficacy of the strategy in reducing violence.²³

Where they have been implemented, lockouts are also associated with violent queues outside venues in the hours before the lockout; queues and tension in taxi ranks following the lockout; violent spill over periods as the streets fill with people after lockout; the loss of revenue for licensees; and, the displacement of violence to other parts of the city.²⁴

For these reasons, the ACT Greens do not support the implementation of a lockout in the ACT.

²³ National Drug Research Institute (2007) **Restrictions on the Sale and Supply of Alcohol: Evidence and Outcomes**. Curtin University of Technology: Perth. Pp205-206

²⁴ Ibid.

SECURITY AND MANAGEMENT IN PUBLIC SPACES

Despite responsible measures taken within licensed venues, public spaces surrounding the venues can become intimidating environments for patrons and members of the public. The provision of appropriate infrastructure in those public spaces in and around entertainment districts is therefore crucial.

Given the incidence of violence spilling onto walkways and roads in the City and elsewhere, the enforced provision of barriers and verges would help protect pedestrians and other patrons.

Proposal 7: Protective Barriers

The ACT Greens propose the erection of barriers at licensed venue entrances that open onto main roads and busy streets with a high vehicle flow.

The barriers would be erected on a temporary trial basis to monitor success in reducing patron spillage onto the road and would be installed in consultation with licensees to ensure a sensible match with existing street level structures was achieved.

Lighting

The provision of a minimum level of lighting outside licensed premises enhances the safety and security of patrons by:

- Eliminating dark spots;
- Reducing perceptions of anonymity;
- Deterring loitering;
- Enabling pedestrians to safely pass through areas densely populated by entertainment venues; and
- Enhancing the ability of police to monitor the areas outside venues more effectively.

Proposal 8: Improved Lighting Around Licensed Venues

The ACT Greens propose an audit of existing lighting around licensed venues in Canberra in order to identify locations in need of improved lighting.

Provision of Public Transport

The provision of public transport in the evenings is crucial to enhancing safety. In addition to well known benefits associated with the reduction of drink driving, the availability of transport helps to disperse patrons, reduce interactions between intoxicated patrons and create a reduction in public disorder offences and assaults. It is also important to ensure that patrons who feel threatened have sufficient access to transport.

Proposal 9: Improved Provision of Public Transport

The ACT Greens propose improvements to night time public transport be identified including extension of the existing ACTION Night Rider bus service.

APPENDIX 1: MODELLING AND COSTING

This appendix relates to Proposal 1, which proposes a revision of the existing licence fee structure to meet the dual goals of:

- Ensuring costs of compliance activities are recovered through the new licensing framework; and
- Using financial incentives to maximise compliance and good venue behaviour.

Stage 1: Setting a Target

The total annual cost of compliance activities in the ACT will need to be determined. From here, the methodology would work backwards to ensure that the total cost of compliance activities is raised through licence fees.

The ACT Office of Fair Trading set annual targets for the number of venue inspections. Although this information would be used to inform some of the modelling, the annual inspection targets have dropped from 1,000 to 400 from 2004-05 to 2006-07.²⁵ None of the targets were met in this period. It is therefore important that the compliance costs be calculated based on the total actual cost of compliance activities rather than past experiences where targets have not been met.

Stage 2: Collecting the Data

In working backwards to determine the licence fees, a range of ACT data would need to be collected. This includes:

- Total number of existing licences;
- Licence categories and fees;
- Projections for each category into the future; and
- Risk factors based on ACT specific characteristics.

Stage 3: Developing a Fee Structure

The fee structure should provide financial incentives for compliance. Careful analysis and consultation with venues will need to be undertaken to inform the fee structure.

²⁵ ACT Auditor-General's Office (2007) **Performance Audit Report. Regulation of ACT Liquor Licences**. Department of Justice and Community Safety: Canberra. P8

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