

Roper Gulf Shire short submission to Senate Select Committee Hearing 20th May 2009

Roper Gulf Shire Pay Day for staff and CDEP participants

Currently payday is fortnightly on Thursdays. We are currently undertaking a review of the pay day and a proposal is being considered to change it to Friday.

- It has been noted that when every payday comes around, there tends to be a mass exit of staff and CDEP participants from some communities in the Roper Gulf Shire. Often many of these staff members do not return to work until Monday which affects service delivery on Thursday and Friday on alternating weeks.
- The reason for this mass exodus is believed to be to pursue consumption of alcohol where it is available (Katherine and Mataranka).
- This has been a long-term problem – the point is that NTER has not improved the situation.

Alcohol and other drug abuse, gambling

- People who were used to drinking alcohol in designated drinking areas closer to their communities are now subjected to drinking areas much further away which impacts on their ability to get to and from them. Often they are too close to the highway which raises serious safety issues e.g. people are falling asleep on the roads and whilst there hasn't been any recorded fatalities since NTER it is a huge concern to all who use the roads, especially at night. It also causes major stress to the families of those who drink.
- Management staff who work on communities note that there are obvious signs of a large number of people using illegal drugs and other substances. Although we cannot tell whether the problem has worsened since NTER it has not done anything to visibly reduce the abuse.
- Gambling does not have seemed to have diminished since NTER.

Resentment/confusion

- There has been confusion/resentment about the income management.
- There has been Indigenous resentment at the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 to implement what is perceived as a racist policy.

GBM

- There is evidence of some confusion around the role of a GBM.
- We have had both good and bad experiences with GBMs. At times GBMs "micromanage" operations that are not in their jurisdiction.
- GBM capital funding has been a welcome initiative although it has created additional work for already stretched shire resources.

CDEP

- Upcoming changes to CDEP will create significant uncertainty, distress, anger and frustration which the RGS will have to manage through SSMs, CDEP programme coordinators, and Mentors. CDEP with a two tiered benefit payment system – either paid from RGS or Centrelink depending on join date.

- We are expecting a backlash in relation to Income managed CDEP payments from 1st July 09.

Employment

- The NTER has undoubtedly created more jobs on communities. However we would question long-term sustainability of these jobs without dependence on government funding.

Outback/ALPA Stores

The imposed management of stores by the likes of Outback and ALPA has resulted in:

- improved quality of range of foods for sale, and overall presentation.
- Improved governance and accountability of store committees.
- In some cases prices are more reasonable but prices are still very high for people who predominantly depend on benefits for their main income.

Snapshot on alcohol restriction in place pre-NTER and during NTER:

Community	Pre NTER 21 st June 07	Post 21 st June 07	Alcohol management plan?
Barunga	Takeaway beer sold at shop (no spirits or wines). No restrictions on where alcohol could be consumed.	Dry – club’s licence suspended soon after commencement of NTER.	No point as alcohol banned – community wants one when alcohol restrictions are lifted.
Beswick	Beer sold at clubhouse (light & mid-strength only). Restrictions on quantity (6 for men, 4 for women).	Dry – club retained licence post-NTER so residents permitted to drink at club only.	No point as alcohol banned – community wants one when alcohol restrictions are lifted.
Manyalluk	Dry, permits issued by NTP on request	Dry	No point as alcohol banned – community wants one when alcohol restrictions are lifted.
Bulman/Weemol	No restrictions	Dry	No point as alcohol banned – community wants one when alcohol restrictions are lifted.
Mataranka	Not prescribed community – grog sales 10am-11pm		No but local board are lobbying to establish one.
Jilkminggan	Dry, permits issued by NTP on request	Dry	No point as alcohol banned – community wants one when alcohol restrictions are lifted.
Ngukurr	Dry - total ban imposed by community	Dry	No
Numbulwar	Dry, permits issued by NTP on request	Dry	No
Borroloola	Not prescribed community – pub closed due to liquor commission revoking licence. Takeaway alcohol at shop – restrictions apply.		Yes
Robinson River	Dry – total ban imposed by community	Dry	No