



Criminal Lawyers Association of the Northern Territory (CLANT)

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RECRIMINLISATION OF DRUNKENNESS WILL INCREASE CRIME

The Criminal Lawyers Association of the Northern Territory has criticised an Country Liberals election promise as the de facto re-criminalisation of drunkenness.

President, Russell Goldflam said, “Opposition alcohol policy spokesperson Peter Styles has pledged that drunks who are repeatedly taken into protective custody will be ordered into ‘a mandatory rehabilitation facility’ by a Tribunal if they do not agree to go into rehabilitation. There is no power in the Australian legal system to order a citizen who is not suffering from an acute episode of mental illness into ‘a facility’ (ie to lock them up), unless they have committed a criminal offence. The current Alcohol and Other Drugs Tribunal has no such power. The Country Liberals are in effect promising to recriminalise drunkenness, but they are too ashamed of their own policy to admit it. Drunkenness was decriminalised decades ago in the NT and elsewhere, in accordance with a key recommendation of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. To make being drunk an offence again would cause more harm, and, by expanding the scope of criminality, result in a dramatic increase in crime, by the Party which promises to reduce crime by 10% a year.”

“To make matters worse, the Country Liberals are talking about making alcohol even more readily available, by scrapping the Banned Drinkers Register, and suggesting more liquor licenses be granted to operate on remote Aboriginal communities. As Chief Justice Riley has said in sentencing one of the countless offenders who are convicted of alcohol-related violent crimes in the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory, ‘a system must be devised to limit the amount of alcohol made available to the people whose lives are being devastated’. The very last thing we need is a government which will do the precise opposite, and extend the amount of alcohol made available to the people whose lives are being devastated, said Mr Goldflam.

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