

## Address to Grog Crisis Rally, Alice Springs, 13 May 2013

Russell Goldflam

President, Criminal Lawyers Association of the Northern Territory

We have five times the national imprisonment rate. We have doubled our prison population in ten years. We'll double it again in the next five years. The Country Liberals promised to get rid of the BDR because it made us a nanny state. Instead, they've brought us the bully state, the slammer state. We've got ourselves a government which is hell bent on jamming as many of its citizens in the slammer as they can.

Now they've announced two measures which will cost us a bomb, achieve nothing of value, and effectively criminalise a terrible health problem – alcohol abuse. These radical measures will be enabled by radical laws. But have we seen these laws? No. Disgracefully, the government has chosen to keep them under wraps, to be released only when they hit the floor of Parliament. Of course, bullies don't consult.

Firstly, chronic problem drinkers will be carted off into so-called 'treatment' behind barbed wire for three months. Because they are law-breakers? No. Because the government genuinely wants to help them? No. I'll tell you why. It's because the government wants to get ugly drunks off the street, out of the public eye, safe behind a fence, and out of our way.

They will be taken there, by force. They will be kept there, by force. If they run away, they will be caught, by force, and be brought back, by force. After three months, they will go back to the environment they came from, and the vast majority of them will go to a pub and buy a drink – there's no Banned Drinkers Register any more, so the pub will serve them – and before long they'll be back in Mandatory Treatment for another 3 months. This is the gold-plated spin-dry, the jewel-encrusted straw broom. \$100,000,000 down the toilet, wasted on keeping the streets clean by locking up and locking away people only because they're in the grip of grog.

The second measure is Alcohol Protection Orders. These look like the old Banning Alcohol and Treatment Notices: the police issue them, they ban you from drinking for 3 months, and if you're caught drinking, you get breached. But there are two fundamental differences. If you breached a BAT, you were directed into treatment, and you were not criminalised. If you breach the new APO, you do *not* get treatment, but you *are* criminalised: you get charged, you can be kept in custody on remand, you go to court, and you can get sent to gaol. We figured out thirty years ago that we should not lock people up just for being drunks. Now this government has in effect recriminalised drinking. That's disgraceful.

Was the BDR perfect? Of course not, but it made it harder for banned drinkers to breach. Under this new scheme, it will be an offence for bar staff to knowingly serve people on Alcohol Protection Orders, but with no BDR, the bar staff will never never know they're serving a banned drinker, and the banned drinkers will be set up like ducks in a shooting gallery to be locked up for breaching their order.

Minister Tollner, by the way, has refused to agree to the appointment of an assessor to look at the operation of our animal bars cum drive-in bottle shops because, he says, it would be inappropriate to "isolate and target" these two premises. He says there are no data, facts or evidence to causally link them to alcohol-related harm. What about, Minister Tollner, you start publishing some data, facts and evidence about the sale of alcohol from those premises? Shame on you for turning a wilfully and hypocritically blind eye to those who profit from this toxic trade, and shame on you for isolating and targeting its victims.