

Sex, sutures and school assemblies: Better or worse post liquor restrictions?

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Information taken from:

- ***Fitzroy Valley Liquor Restriction Report:*** *An evaluation of the effects of a six month restriction on take-away alcohol relating to measurable health and social benefits and community perceptions and behaviors.* University of Notre Dame, May 2008.
- ***Fitzroy Valley Liquor Restriction Report:*** *An evaluation of the effects of liquor restrictions in Fitzroy Crossing relating to measurable health and social outcomes, community perceptions and alcohol related behaviors after a 12 month period.* University of Notre Dame, August 2009.
- ***Fitzroy Valley Liquor Restriction Report:*** *An evaluation of the effects of alcohol restrictions in Fitzroy Crossing relating to measurable health and social outcomes, community perceptions and alcohol related behaviors after a 24 month period.* University of Notre Dame, December 2010.
- ***Halls Creek Alcohol Restriction Report:*** *An evaluation of the effects of alcohol restrictions in Halls Creek relating to measurable health and social outcomes, community perceptions and alcohol related behaviour after 12 months.* University of Notre Dame, December 2010.
- Bangor-Jones, R. et al. *Alcohol restrictions and STIs: is there a link?* Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health. 2011; vol.35 no.1



Fitzroy Crossing

- 4 hours east of Broome.
- Central town in the Fitzroy Valley. There are approximately 45 smaller communities in the Valley which all have close ties with the town.
- There are two licensed venues in Fitzroy Crossing of which the community have majority ownership through Leedal.

Halls Creek

- 4 hours south of Kununurra.
- A small number of communities surround Halls Creek.
- There are two licensed venues in Halls Creek.



The Restriction

The sale of packaged liquor, exceeding a concentration of ethanol in liquor of 2.7 per cent at 20oC, is prohibited to any person, other than a lodger (as defined in section 3 of the Act).

Fitzroy Crossing - 2 October 2007

Halls Creek - 18 May 2009



In summary

- Overall, the restrictions have had a positive impact on health and social outcomes.
- Greater positive benefits in Fitzroy Crossing after 12 months than Halls Creek:
 - Strong and more coordinated community leadership
 - Fitzroy leadership and cultural governance links to other Valley communities in an integrated manner
 - Close working relationship between agencies and licensed venues
- No one interviewed wanted to go back to a time when there was NO restrictions.



In summary

- Quieter with less anti-social behaviour – both.
- Reduction in police reactive activity – both.
- Significant reduction in alcohol related presentations and severity of presentations to health services – both.
- **Reports** of significant movement out of community as result of restrictions – both.
- Less ambulance callouts and less violence and aggressive behaviour towards staff – both.
- More community members drinking at the local bars – both.



Health and wellbeing

- Prior
 - Health services largely reactive with staff spending significant time treating alcohol related injuries.
- Post
 - Fewer drunk patients and reduced severity of injury.
 - Less aggression and staff abuse (HC removed security).
 - Staff less stressed – less agency staff and more long-term staff.
 - Improved appointment keeping (and follow-up appointments).



Health and wellbeing

- Ability by staff and interest by patients to address long-term health issues (not just the acute).
- Staff report that they can work with patients and advice is taken.
- Increase need for primary health care services – child health, nutrition, environmental health.
- Increased need for mental health services before AOD.
- ‘Granny Dumps’ reduced significantly – FX.



- STI Rates
 - Fitzroy Crossing notifications of gonorrhoea decreased by 50%, and rates of chlamydia decreased by 30%, in the two years post-restrictions when compared to the two years pre-restrictions, despite increased testing.
 - Halls Creek confirmed a similar decrease in notifications of STIs after the introduction of restrictions.
- “We used to dread doing sutures, we had so many to do. Now, we fight each other to practice doing sutures.” – Nurse FX
- “This used to be a great training hospital, you would get to see all sorts of things in a matter of hours. Since the restriction, we have become really quiet.” – Doctor HC

- Prior
 - Police very reactive in dealing with alcohol related issues.
- Post
 - Immediate increase in demand for drivers licenses and licensing vehicles.
 - Better education of drivers and more wearing seatbelts.
 - Police able to be more proactive.
 - Reduction in road crashes despite community perception.
 - Community complains that they being breath tested and cars inspected much more than prior.

- Significant reduction in DD despite increases in RBTs:
 - FX – 6.1:1 prior and 19.6:1 post
 - HC – 9.3:1 prior and 55.9:1 post
- Immediate increase in community violence when the Tarunda supermarket burnt down – FX.
- Initial reduction in DV (both) but **reported** domestic violence incidents have **increased** since the 6 month mark in FX.
- More alcohol now coming into town from outside – people a lot better organised now than prior. (65 cartons in the hours after the road opened in April 2011)

- Police note a growing acceptance of restrictions and it is becoming **unacceptable** to engage in alcohol fuelled violence – FX.
- Police noted an initial increase in threatening behaviour – HC.
 - People generally sober (or less drunk) and able to be reasoned with.
 - While threatening, less violent than prior.

Drinking patterns

- Prior
 - Most alcohol was drunk outside of licensed venues.
 - 9,360L pure alcohol sold in 3 months prior, 8,541L takeaway – July to September 2007 (FX Inn).
- Post
 - 2,512L pure alcohol sold of which 458L takeaway – July to September 2009 (FX Inn).
 - Self imposed restrictions within venues (timing of sales).
 - Added security (75% cost increase at FX Lodge).
 - Staff abuse and threatening behaviour.



Drinking patterns

- Groups of people who were previously drinking apart, now drinking together in one location – added tension in some cases.
- Less money to be spent on essentials as cost of alcohol at the bar is higher than takeaway – HC.
- Relationship with police is considered good since the restrictions.
- Difficult to recruit and retain staff – FX.
- More alcohol coming into towns from surrounding communities the longer the restrictions remain (Knx and Wyn now restricted).



- Prior
 - Was argued that tourism would be adversely affected due to the restrictions.
- Post
 - Some local businesses maintain that there are less tourists stopping in HC and FX.
 - HC Visitors Centre showed a significant increase in numbers/booking.
 - Accommodation is very difficult to get in FX and HC during the Dry (tourist season).
 - Some tourists complain that they are not able to purchase takeaway alcohol.

- Most respondents believed that the restriction has positive impacts for children.
- Educators note that children attend more regularly but social issues that prevent learning were still there.
- Increase in reports of children left in care while parents drink at pub or travel to other towns to get alcohol.
- Improved parent engagement with schooling.
 - “Prior to restrictions we had to round parents up on the bus for assemblies – and then we had to be selective. Now we get lots of adults at school assemblies’ – FX.

- Difficult to measure with accuracy.
- Movement across the region is not new and happens for a variety of reasons.
- Reports of significant movement out of community as result of restrictions.
- Most recorded movement has been back to home communities.
- More day/short stay trips to surrounding towns.
 - ‘I never use to attend family things in other towns – too drunk. Now I go, mainly to attend the event but in the back of my mind I know I can get grog there as well’ – FX resident.

Future reports

- Fitzroy Crossing narrative
- Halls Creek 24 month restriction report
- Kununurra and Wyndham 6, 12 and 24 month quantitative restriction reports (with input from the NT)
- Infant health research in Fitzroy Crossing



Challenges for Service Providers

- Keeping up with demand
- Monitoring the impacts across a remote region
- Coordinating delivery
- Engaging community in the process – effective information sharing
- Staying current
- Not being complacent



‘The haze caused by too much grog has been lifted from our community. We now have a chance, with help, to really change the culture and the future of our community.’

‘Before, when the pub cut you off, drinkers used to abuse the staff. Now, other drinkers step in and stop the people abusing the staff and explain why they can’t have grog. There is a light at the end of the tunnel.’



- Liquor restrictions are only part of the solution.
 - They allow for a window of opportunity to develop and implement other initiatives to create a sustainable and healthier community.



For more information...

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