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Pilbara residents back drinker register

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Calls for a Northern Territory-style banned drinkers register to be introduced in the Pilbara to combat alcohol-related harm are growing stronger after residents voted overwhelmingly against a police push for severe liquor restrictions across the region but in favour of the register as an alternative.

An online survey conducted by the Australian Hotels Association's WA branch, circulated to 650 Pilbara licensees and residents, found 87 per cent of respondents were opposed to tougher restrictions, while 93 per cent believed introducing a banned drinkers register was a better way to target problem drinkers.

AHA (WA) chief executive Bradley Woods said the survey conducted by his organisation showed the proposals were out of sync with what Pilbara residents believed was an acceptable response to the region's problems.

"The issue of excessive drinking in parts of WA is real and it is concerning, however, no one benefits from lazy policy responses which are ineffective at addressing the issue at hand, yet penalise law-abiding Australians," he said.

The proposed restrictions include a Pilbara-wide ban on takeaway liquor sales on Sundays and 2pm opening times from Monday to Saturday, a ban on full-strength takeaway beer sales and daily purchase limits on beer, wine and spirits.

However, hospitality industry representatives, including the AHA (WA), are pushing an alternative of photo ID-scanning technology designed to prevent purchases by registered banned drinkers.

Karratha International Hotel general manager John Johansen said customer feedback had been strongly against the proposed restrictions but the register had support because it targeted problem drinkers.

"I'm yet to talk to anyone that actually agrees with (the restrictions)," he said.

"The majority of people are responsible and it's just the minority that cause these problems, so if you target them you don't have that problem."

North West Liquor owner Brent Rudler last week told Spirit 1026 Hedland he believed the survey reflected public opinion towards the planned restrictions in the Pilbara and the banned drinkers register should be more widely considered.

"That is the song sheet that we need to be singing in the State — not just the Pilbara, not just the Kimberley, the whole State," he said. "It is government-run, (there are) no privacy issues, if you're a baddie you'll get banned for a certain period of time, (and) it can be flow-on to drink-driving on the road, so if you've got an alcohol-related offence you can be banned from entering a liquor store."

Hedland community service the Bloodwood Tree Association chief executive Kelly Howlett said excessive alcohol consumption was a serious issue in the community and could be best addressed with more local wrap-around support services to help people with alcohol problems.

She said while the service did not support the proposed police liquor restrictions because “banning alcohol does not work”, they agreed with a version of the banned drinkers’ register where there was flexibility in the form of ID used.

“Bloodwood Tree does support the use of a liquor industry-shared photographic banned list, as well as the inclusion of the court-banned offenders to create a greater Pilbara photographic banned list,” she said.

“This is felt to be a non-discriminatory approach.”

Pilbara District Police declined to comment on the grounds the matter was still before the Director of Liquor Licensing.