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Liquor restrictions reducing domestic violence in Halls Creek, report finds

By Natalie Jones Posted Thu 5 Feb 2015 at 3:37pm, updated Thu 5 Feb 2015 at 3:44pm



Liquor restrictions have been in force in Halls Creek for a number of years. (Dave Hunt, file photo: AAP)

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There has been an overall reduction in alcohol-related crime and domestic violence since liquor restrictions were introduced to the Kimberley community of Halls Creek five years ago, a report released today shows.

In 2009, the director of Liquor Licensing banned the sale of full-strength alcohol and limited any sales before midday in the remote West Australian community.

A Drug and Alcohol Office report showed statistics on drink driving, assaults and domestic violence had lowered across the period.

The findings are in line with that of two previous reviews conducted 12 months and 24 months after the restrictions were introduced.

The latest report found the number of verified assault offences pre and post restriction period dropped an initial 32 per cent, followed by 51 per cent, 47 per cent and 46 per cent each year afterwards.

Of those, the percentage of assaults related to alcohol dropped initially by 87 per cent, before plateauing to 66 and 68 per cent in the following years.

Domestic violence incidents lowered initially by 24 per cent, followed by a 50 per cent, 56 per cent, 28 per cent and 47 per cent drop but the proportion of those statistics linked to alcohol remained high.

Child Protection Minister Helen Morton said the number of alcohol-related emergency department presentations also dropped.

"With the liquor restrictions in place the reductions in the assaults, in the family and domestic violence and in the area of emergency department ... alcohol-related emergency department presentations have so significantly reduced it's worth continuing with this program," she said.

She said she was extremely pleased with the findings.

"Overall these are findings that verify that liquor restrictions that have been in place in Halls Creek have had a lasting and ongoing benefit to the community of Halls Creek," she said.

"It means that children are getting a better education, children are getting to school.

"It means that families are less dysfunctional, there are more services that are appropriate to people's needs and that emergency departments are not being clogged up unnecessarily by alcohol-fuelled problems."

Assaults, domestic violence decrease after restrictions

Ms Morton was in Halls Creek on Thursday to open a drug and alcohol counselling service, something she said was a product of the restrictions.

"One of the most amazing benefits was the attendances at the sobering-up centre reduced to such a degree that the facility wasn't being utilised and has subsequently been redeveloped into a drug and alcohol counselling service," she said.

The restrictions were introduced indefinitely, and Ms Morton said she had no intention of altering that.

WA Police estimate their liquor-related workload reduced from 90 per cent to 70-80 per cent as a result of the restrictions.

Commander for Regional Western Australia Murray Smalpage saw the changes firsthand.

"I was the District Superintendent for the Kimberley in Broome in 2009 when liquor restrictions were introduced and as far as I'm concerned it was like night and day," he said.

"The numbers of alcohol-affected people that were staggering around Halls Creek was appalling to put it bluntly."

Problem shifted elsewhere, critics claim

But there were criticisms of the restrictions, including that tourists travelling through the community were put off by not being able to buy full-strength liquor.

There had also been criticisms that the hardest drinkers travelled to other Kimberley towns to get full-strength liquor, creating flow-on effects for the services and resources in surrounding towns.

Commander Smalpage acknowledged there have been challenges in the past five years, including the illegal trade of alcohol in the Kimberley region.

He welcomed Ms Morton's indications that nothing would change.

"We'd hate to see those restrictions at this point diluted," he said.

A review of the liquor restrictions in the nearby community of Fitzroy Crossing is due to get underway soon.

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