



Liquor permit schemes in the spotlight



LIQUOR permit schemes in the Northern Territory can be made easier to implement and more accountable to local communities, an NT Government-commissioned report has found.

The review, led by Menzies School of Health Research's Professor Peter d'Abbs and consultant Dr Ian Crundall, evaluated the uptake and success of liquor permit schemes since their inception in 1981.

Under the *NT Liquor Act*, communities that choose to restrict access to liquor have the option of recommending that permits be issued to approved individuals, subject to conditions specified by the communities.

Although they require formal approval by the director-general of licensing, liquor permits are intended as a community-based measure.

More than 20 communities in the NT operate liquor permit schemes.

Prof d'Abbs said the review found that two kinds of liquor permit schemes had evolved over time.

"In some communities, permits are a mechanism

that allows staff employed in remote communities – mainly non-Aboriginal staff – to bring liquor into an otherwise 'dry' community and consume it in their own homes," he said.

The review found that in most instances there was little or no community input into these schemes, with responsibility falling by default to local police.

Prof d'Abbs said in some communities this led to resentment at perceived double standards.

"In the second type of scheme, liquor permits are a central mechanism for managing purchases of takeaway alcohol. In these communities, takeaway alcohol cannot be purchased without a permit, which in turn requires endorsement by a local liquor permit committee."

The review found that this type of scheme had contributed to a reduction in alcohol-related problems and had broad community support. But the schemes had become administratively cumbersome.

The report recommends the introduction of police guidelines, and other measures aimed at simplifying the administration of permit schemes.