

# Northern Territory Licensing Commission

## Reasons for Decision

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<b>Premises:</b>	The Victoria Hotel Smith Street Mall Darwin NT 0800
<b>Licensee:</b>	Minkie (NT) Pty Ltd
<b>Licence Number:</b>	80300989
<b>Nominees:</b>	Mr Russel Wilkes and Mr Andrew John Chigwidden
<b>Proceedings:</b>	Hearing into an Application for a variation of Licence Conditions pursuant to Section 32A of the <i>Liquor Act</i>
<b>Heard Before:</b>	Ms Merran Short (Presiding Member) Mrs Kerri Williams Mr Wally Grimshaw
<b>Date of Hearing:</b>	18 March 2008
<b>Appearances:</b>	Mr D Crowe for Licensee Mr P Timney for Director of Licensing (for the return of subpoena only)

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## Background

1. On 10 October 2007 application was made by Mr Crowe on behalf of Minkie (NT) Pty Ltd for a variation to licence Number 80300989 ("the Licence") conditions pursuant to Section 32 A of the *Liquor Act* ("the Act") to remove the exception contained within the Licence -

"No Trading of Good Friday or Christmas Day"

the effect of such removal would be to allow The Victoria Hotel ("the Hotel" to trade on Good Friday and Christmas Day ("the Application").

2. A similar application was made by the Mr Crowe on behalf of Malaguena Pty Ltd ("the Cavenagh Hotel") and the two (2) applications were heard together.
3. The Application is made pursuant to Section 32A of the Act. Section 23A requires the Commission when considering the Application to have regard to the Objects of the Act.

### **Section 32A Variation of conditions on application by licensee**

*(1)A licensee may apply to the Commission in a form approved by the Commission for a variation of the conditions of the licence held by the licensee and may request that the Commission conduct a hearing in relation to the application.*

*(2) to (7)...*

*(8) Where a hearing is conducted in relation to an application, the Commission may, having regard to the objects of this Act –*

*(a) vary or refuse to vary the conditions of the licence; and*

*(b) make any other order it thinks fit.*

(9) ...

(10) ...

### **Section 3 - Objects**

*(1) The primary object of this Act is to regulate the sale, provision, promotion and consumption of liquor –*

*(a) so as to minimise the harm associated with the consumption of liquor; and*

*(b) in a way that takes into account the public interest in the sale, provision, promotion and consumption of liquor.*

*(2) The further objects of this Act are –*

*(a) to protect and enhance community amenity, social harmony and wellbeing through the responsible sale, provision, promotion and consumption of liquor;*

*(b) to regulate the sale of liquor in a way that contributes to the responsible development of the liquor and associated industries in the Territory; and*

*(c) to facilitate a diversity of licensed premises and associated services for the benefit of the community.*

*(3) ...*

4. In addition when the Commission has regard to the objects of the Act in considering or determining the conditions of a licence the Commission must take into account the Public Interest Criteria set out in Section 6 of the Act.

### **6 Public interest criteria in respect of licence or licensed premises**

*(1) When the Commission has regard to the objects of this Act in –*

*(b) determining the conditions of a licence,*

*the Commission must, when taking into account the public interest in the sale, provision, promotion and consumption of liquor, consider any of the criteria specified in subsection (2) that are relevant to the application or conditions.*

*(2) For subsection (1), the criteria are the following:*

*(a) harm or ill-health caused to people, or a group of people, by the consumption of liquor is to be minimised;*

*(b) liquor is to be sold, or sold and consumed, on licensed premises in a responsible manner;*

*(c) public order and safety must not be jeopardised, particularly where circumstances or events are expected to attract large numbers of persons to licensed premises or an area adjacent to those premises;*

*(d) the safety, health and welfare of persons who use licensed premises must not be put at risk;*

*(e)- (i)*

*(k) (i) - (iv) the days on which and the times at which liquor may be sold;*

*(l)...*

*(3) Also, the Commission must consider –*

*(a) any other matter the Commission believes is relevant to the public interest in the sale, provision, promotion and consumption of liquor in respect of the application or conditions under consideration; and*

*(b) any information or matter contained in an application, or otherwise provided or raised by the applicant, which is relevant to the public interest in the sale, provision, promotion and consumption of liquor.*

5. Mr Crowe provided a detailed Application setting out the Public Interest Criteria as required under Section 6 (2) of the Act, the thrust of which included inter alia submissions that granting the Application would benefit the tourist industry, overcome unfair competitive advantage, and endeavour to ensure the safety of patrons via sufficient security and the responsible service of alcohol.
6. Section 32A Variation of conditions on application by licensee allows such an Application to be made and allows the Licensing Commission ("the Commission") to conduct a hearing into the Application. If the Commission determines to conduct a hearing then the Licensee is required to advertise the Application.
7. The Application was advertised on December 12 and 14 2007 in the Northern Territory News. The Application stated:

***Liquor Act***

*Notice of Application for a Variation To*

*Liquor Licence Condition*

*The Victoria Hotel*

*Minkie (NT) Pty Ltd, HEREBY GIVE NOTICE that it has applied to the Northern Territory Licensing Commission for a variation to the TAVERN Liquor Licence (Number 80300989) to sell liquor from the premises known as The Victoria Hotel located at the Vic Arcade, Smith Street Mall, Darwin.*

*Proposed variations are:*

*Remove the Condition:*

- *No trading Good Friday and Christmas Day.*

*The nett affect of this change is to allow normal trading on Good Friday and Christmas Day. Currently, normal trading hours are: 10:00 hour to 04:00 hours (the following day).*

*This is the second notice of application.*

*The objection period is deemed to commence from Friday, 14 December 2007 (date of publication of second notice).*

*Pursuant to Section 47F(2) of the Liquor Act an objection may only be made on the ground that the variation of the licence conditions may or will adversely affect:*

*(a) the amenity of the neighbourhood where the premises the subject of the application are or will be located; or*

*(b) health, education, public safety or social conditions in the community.*

*Only those persons, organisations or groups described in Section 47F(3) of the Liquor Act may make an objection. Section 47G of the Liquor Act requires the Director of Licensing to inform the applicant of the substance of any objection. This will include the identity and where relevant the address of the objector.*

*For further information regarding this application contact the Director of Licensing on telephone 8999 1800. Objections to this application should be lodged in writing with the Director of Licensing, Licensing and Regulation, GPO Box 1154, Darwin, within thirty (30) days of the commencement date of the objection period.*

8. Prior to the hearing of the Application Mr Crowe issued a subpoena against the Director of Licensing (“the Director”) seeking various documents including all correspondence between Licensing and Regulation; and
  - the Darwin City Council (“DCC”); and
  - the Department of Health and Community Services (“the Department of Health”); and
  - the Police Fire and Emergency Services (“the Police”).

Mr Crowe also sought statistics –

- for Liquor Volume Purchase records for quarters in 2006 and 2007, for all premises within 5km of the Darwin Post Office, and
  - copies of all licences for premises within the same area, and
  - copies of agreements between DCC and Wisdom Café and the Deck Bar.
9. There was some argument regarding the process of the issuing of the subpoena. The Commission is of the view that the process is valid. However, a better option for a party seeking documents from the Director is for the party to request those documents from the Commission via a letter and the Commission will in turn seek the documents from the Director.
  10. The Commission ruled that the correspondence between Licensing and Regulation and the above listed agencies ought to be produced, that the request for liquor statistics had not been shown to be relevant, that the licence details as requested were available on the web and that the Director could not be expected to collate material freely available on the web and further the drafting of the clause regarding the licences was ambiguous and finally the agreements between DCC and Wisdom Café and DCC and The Deck Bar were not documents of the Director and therefore should not be produced.
  11. The subpoena having been met in full Mr Timney, at his request, was excused.
  12. Submissions regarding the Application were received from DCC, the Police and the Department of Health. Although earlier ruled as valid objections by the Legal Member of the Commission, due to subsequent correspondence and the non attendance of the agencies at the Hearing these submissions were treated at Hearing as submissions to assist the Commission, rather than objections to the Application.
  13. The substance of the submissions from the Police and the Department of Health were to the effect that allowing the Hotel to trade on two (2) additional days per year was not conducive to objects of the Act, namely to minimise the harm associated with the consumption of liquor, or to “protect and enhance the community amenity, social harmony and wellbeing through the responsible sale, provision, promotion and consumption of liquor.”
  14. In particular the Department of Health was concerned that should the Commission allow another licensed premises to trade on Good Friday and Christmas Day with extended hours or operation “would place extra demand on the Royal Darwin Hospital Accident and Emergency (A&E) resources”.
  15. The Police submitted that “...one of the significant reasons why this application should not be approved on Good Friday and Christmas Day is that alcohol related incidents requiring police attention are significantly reduced on Good Friday and Christmas Day”. In addition

the Police asked that the Commission not be influenced by the 'tourist' needs but did take into account the fact that "...it is standard around Australia that Licensed premises do not normally trade on Good Friday and Christmas Day except to provide Christmas lunches and dinners." The Commission did not receive any evidence of what was standard within Australia, however did form the view that we live in a predominantly Christian society and it is well recognised that both Good Friday and Christmas Day are considered significant days of celebration in a Christian society.

16. The DCC limited its comments to note that the "Council had supported applications in the past for licences on Good Friday and Christmas Day provided alcohol is consumed in conjunction with a meal". The DCC supported the Application "provided it is replaced with a condition that requires that alcohol will only be served in conjunction with a meal and that the hours of trade are restricted to 11.00 hours until 22.00 hours".
17. Mr Crowe after outlining his Application called Mr Michael John Burns Director of Minke (NT) Pty Ltd to give oral evidence. In addition to his oral evidence Mr Burns submitted a written statement to the Commission.

## **Consideration of the Issues**

18. Mr Burns gave evidence on many issues including; security, availability of transport to get patrons home from licensed premises, the tourist market the Hotel enjoyed and the desire of the Hotel to provide their services to tourists on every day of the year including Good Friday and Christmas Day, but it is fair to say that an important aspect for the Hotel was the option of opening as a late night venue on Good Friday and Christmas Day. Mr Burns gave evidence to the effect that were the Commission to allow late night trading at the Hotel the impact upon the community would not be so significant as to warrant not allowing the extension of trade. Further, Mr Crowe submitted that given there were other licensed premises of a similar or comparable nature it was unreasonable for the Commission to deny the Application.
19. In support of the Application, Mr Crowe submitted that to allow the late night trading would not necessarily have a negative impact upon the community because it would mean another licensed premises in the CBD to offer an alternative late night trading venue to patrons and so doing would mean there was less convergence in the one area at closing time. Mr Crowe relayed submissions that were put in another matter, to the effect that to increase the number of licensed premises in a small area did not necessarily lead to an increase in the harm but rather could assist with the distribution of patrons.
20. No specific data was put before the Commission in this regard, despite this; the Commission did consider those submissions. Although, on its face, the argument does seem to have merit, the Commission was ultimately not persuaded. The Commission was not persuaded because the evidence of Mr Burns as to the patronage of the Hotel, being sub 30 years of age, is different to the patronage of say Discovery Nightclub, being sub 25 years of age and the Casino being 30 plus years of age. Therefore, the Commission is not convinced by the submission put by Mr Crowe that to allow another late night trading venue on the Days would likely lead to a redistribution of the patrons already accessing the CBD and not necessarily an increase. Rather the Commission is of the view that it may well lead to an increase in the number of patrons in the CBD, given the difference in the venues, which may well in turn lead to an increase in the alcohol related harm.
21. As to the tourist aspect of Mr Crowe's submissions, the Commission is persuaded and accepts Mr Burn's evidence that the Hotel caters for tourists, in particular backpackers, for the rest of the year in the form of offering meals and a meeting place before and after tours. And as such, it is conceivably reasonable that the Hotel be able to offer that service on Good Friday and Christmas Day. That said, the Commission is not convinced that late night trading is for the 'benefit' of tourists but is more aimed at local patronage and in those circumstances the Hotel must convince the Commission that granting the Application as submitted is in the best interests of the community and in observance with the objects of

the Act. The Commission is doubtful that observance of the objects of the Act is attained based on the material before it. The Commission does agree that possibly the Hotel ought be allowed to trade on a competitive basis with other venues however that alone is not sufficient to meet the objects of the Act.

22. The issue of competition brings the Commission to another important point when it comes to trading on Good Friday and Christmas Day, it is an issue that Mr Crowe made submissions on. There seems to be no consistency among licensed premises as to who can trade and who can not. There does not appear to be any consistency in hours, conditions, i.e. whether alcohol is served ancillary to a meal or not, or whether licensed premises can trade at all.
23. The Hearing Commissioners are aware that the Chairman of the Commission, who is not a party to hearing and determining this Application, has also considered this issue and at his suggestion the Commission has agreed to undertake a full review to consider the issues of Good Friday and Christmas Day trading for all licensed premises. It cannot be ignored that we live in a society that is increasingly aware of the negative impact that alcohol can have on a community and the consequent cost to society. It is against this background that such a review of Good Friday and Christmas Day trading is opportune and timely.
24. In circumstances where this review has begun or is about to begin and as yet the outcome is unknown the Commission has determined to grant this Application limited to this Good Friday only and defer any further decision pending the outcome of the review.
25. Overall the Commission is not persuaded that allowing another late night trading venue in the CBD will “enhance community amenity, social harmony and wellbeing” in accordance with the objects of the Act.

## Decision

26. In the meantime a licence is granted to the Hotel to trade this Good Friday (2008) on the conditions set out below, any decision regarding future trading on Good Friday or Christmas Day is deferred subject to the review which is to be undertaken by the Commission.
27. Trading Hours to be from 10.00AM to 10.00PM alcohol only to be served ancillary to a meal.
28. Any decision regarding Christmas Day 2008 and future Good Fridays and Christmas Days is deferred pending the outcome of the review to be conducted by the Commission.

Merran Short  
Presiding Member

18 March 2008