The Australian and Northern Territory Governments today announced the commencement of the buy-back of three take-away liquor licences in Alice Springs.

The licences held by BP Gap, Hoppy’s Cash Store and the Heavitree Gap Store would not have been granted under current liquor licensing practices.

The Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Jenny Macklin, said there has been considerable concern in the community about the damaging impact of excessive alcohol consumption and the high number of liquor licences in Alice Springs.

“This buy-back will help reduce the high-level of alcohol fuelled violence and neglect in the Alice Springs,” Ms Macklin said.

The NT Department of Justice assessed current licences in Alice Springs against the principles of the Liquor Act, particularly whether certain licences would be granted today under current alcohol licensing policy. Under this assessment three licences have been identified as inconsistent with current alcohol licensing practice and do not meet the needs of the community.

- The Heavitree Gap Store is a licence in close proximity to a health related facility (rehabilitation centre) and the planned short-term accommodation facility.
- Hopps Cash Store is a takeaway food outlet and under current policy such premises are no longer approved for takeaway licences.
- BP Gap is a liquor licence held by a petrol station and under current policy would not be approved to hold a liquor licence.

The NT Department of Justice has written to the proprietors of these establishments to propose that they agree to surrender the licences and enter into a deed with the NT Government which allows for an agreed payment to be made in compensation.

If the proprietors do not agree, consideration will be given to the use of section 72 of the Liquor Act which allows the NT Licensing Commission to cancel a licence which no longer meets the needs of the community. In the event this takes place, the amount of compensation to be paid would be agreed or if it cannot be agreed, it will be determined by a court as described in the Liquor Act.
The funding for the compensation payments will come from Australian Government funding for alcohol management under the Northern Territory Emergency Response.

The Northern Territory Minister for Alcohol Policy, Delia Lawrie, said the buy-back was a key recommendation under the Alice Springs Alcohol Management Plan.

“The Alice Springs Alcohol Management Plan, which was introduced in 2006, aims to reduce alcohol consumption and the number of take-away licences in the town,” Ms Lawrie said.

Actions under the Alcohol Management plan have delivered an 18 per cent reduction in pure alcohol sales since 2006, a decrease in the number of serious assaults, and an increase in the number of sobering-up shelter admissions, which has been attributed to proactive policing.

“The next step under the community-developed Alcohol Management Plan is to address the number of take-away liquor licences in the town,” Ms Lawrie said.

The buy-back of these three licences will reduce the number of licences in Alice Springs from 32 to 29.

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