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ACT GOVERNMENT'S NEW LIQUOR LAWS FOR A SAFER COMMUNITY

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Attorney General, Simon Corbell, has today revealed further details of the ACT Government's overhaul of the Liquor Act 1975, the first in over 30 years, which will tackle anti-social and violent behaviour related to excess alcohol consumption.

Mr Corbell today tabled an exposure draft in the Legislative Assembly urging the community to have it's say on this important suite of proposed reforms.

"This Bill is a major overhaul of the ACT's liquor laws and will see dramatic changes to improve public safety in popular nightspots and entertainment precincts through a risk based regulatory framework that affect clubs, pubs, restaurants and nightclubs," Mr Corbell said.

"It is the first time the Liquor Act has been overhauled since the 1970's, and this package of changes clearly shows the ACT Labor Government is conscious of the need for the liquor laws to reflect today's community expectations.

"The Government has spent almost 18 months consulting with the liquor industry, and has outlined a raft of proposed changes including new specially dedicated police teams and regulatory officers to patrol nightspots, the creation of offences that ban people buying drinks for friends who are intoxicated, and better protections for staff working in licensed premises.

The new laws include making it an offence to:

- Provide alcohol to an already intoxicated person by both patrons and employees on licensed premises;
- Abusing, threatening or intimidating an employee for refusing service of alcohol; and,
- Offering alcohol promotions which encourage rapid consumption of alcohol.

"Police will be able to issue infringement notices of up to $1,100 for a licensee, $220 for an employee and $120 for a member of the public, who supplies liquor to another person who is intoxicated on licensed premises," Mr Corbell said.

Key elements of the reform package include:

- Risk based licensing fees based on opening hours with premises trading past midnight until 2am or 4 am to pay a higher level of fees commensurate with the risks they pose to public safety;
- Dedicated ACT Policing liquor licensing teams and other regulatory activities funded from the new fee structure;
- The provision for lockouts at licensed premises if required in the future;
- The introduction of mandatory responsible service of alcohol training for all staff and security guards;

- A requirement on licensees to provide, contribute towards, or otherwise identify transport options for patrons to get home safely after early morning trading;
- New police powers including the power to impose an emergency 24 hour suspension of trade on the spot;
- Public notification of liquor licensing applications with provision for members of the community to comment on prospective liquor licences;
- New powers for the Commissioner for Fair Trading to impose and vary conditions on a licence at any time to protect the interests of the community.
- New powers for the Commissioner for Fair Trading to refuse a licence application if it is not in the interests of the broader community, aimed at preventing the over representation of licensed premises in a single location.

"The proposed new fee structure for licensed premises will strive to encourage more small scale, boutique-style entertainment venues, catering for up to 80 patrons, as these premises typically create fewer problems from anti-social behaviour related to excess alcohol consumption," Mr Corbell said.

"The Government recognises the need to invest in community safety, but believes that this should be a shared responsibility with those who choose to operate their licensed premises and sell alcohol late into the night."

The final Bill is scheduled to be tabled in mid 2010, with debate scheduled before next summer.

"Under these important reforms, the ACT Labor Government is proposing greater powers to the Commissioner for Fair Trading and ACT Policing to protect the community. Laws relating to responsible service of alcohol will be tightened and strategies to reduce anti social behaviour will be ramped up," Mr Corbell said.

The exposure draft will be out for public consultation until the beginning of May 2010 and is available for download at http://www.justice.act.gov.au/. Comments can be provided to liquor.review@act.gov.au.

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