

WOOLWORTHS A LAW UNTO ITS OWN IN FUELLING ALCOHOL HARM

Woolworths will stop at nothing to build a Dan Murphy's megastore in the middle of three dry Aboriginal communities, after sustained lobbying by Woolworths saw the Northern Territory (NT) Government rush amendments to the *NT Liquor Act* through Parliament before shutting down due to COVID-19.

Despite the NT Liquor Commission rejecting the proposed development on the grounds of unacceptable risk of harm to the local community, the legislative change was made on the last sitting day of NT Parliament, and at a time when everyone's attention was diverted by COVID-19.

FARE has taken the unprecedented step of formally writing to the Board of Woolworths asking them to properly consider and reassess their Director responsibilities under the *Corporations Act 2001*.

"The question we are now asking is whether the Directors of Woolworths have taken steps to fully inform themselves of this proposal and consider the harm that this Dan Murphy's megastore will produce," FARE CEO Caterina Giorgi said.

Despite a moratorium on new liquor licences in response to the NT's higher rates of alcohol harm, Woolworths is progressing with attempts to develop one of the biggest Dan Murphy's stores in the country on the corner of Osgood Drive and Bagot Road, within two kilometres of the Bagot Community, Minmarama Park Community and Kulaluk Community; and right next to a six-lane highway.

Ms Giorgi says as well as the worst time, Woolworths could not have picked a worse location for their alcohol megastore.

"Make no mistake, this store, in this location, will fuel more harm. The NT Liquor Commission has made that clear, yet Woolworths continues to do all in its power to ignore the law and now change the law – seemingly hell-bent on serving their own corporate interests," Ms Giorgi said.

On Friday 27 March, FARE wrote to the Woolworths Board seeking confirmation that Directors have discharged their duties to properly inform themselves about the nature of risks associated with this development, and properly consider and balance those risks according to their responsibilities under section 180 of the Act.

The letter to Directors seeks clarification that the Board members have considered the risks of the development outlined by the NT Liquor Commission and the potential impact on the corporation.

Ms Giorgi says that some of the risks raised by the Commission and noted in the letter include that the development "would lead to a significant increase in the level of alcohol related harms which already exists in this community" and that "allowing the application would increase the risk of death or severe injury to pedestrians wanting to access the store".



“When a large corporation has before it information that confirms that their proposed development would result in more alcohol-fueled harm, and even death, then they need to be transparent as to their understanding of the risk and accept responsibility for their decision-making,” Ms Giorgi said.

Ms Giorgi says at the heart of the matter are the people, already vulnerable, and even more so amid the COVID-19 crisis, whose lives will be negatively and severely impacted by Woolworths’ corporate greed.

“If you are selling a product that causes considerable harm to the community, you need to earn your social licence to operate. There is an expectation that corporations consider the impact of their decisions on communities, not just their ability to make a profit,” Ms Giorgi said.

Caterina Giorgi is available for interview.

Media contact:

Clare Ross 02 6122 8616 or 0429 291120

The **Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE)** is an independent, not-for-profit organisation working to stop the harm caused by alcohol. Alcohol harm in Australia is significant. Nearly 6,000 lives are lost every year and more than 144,000 people are hospitalised making alcohol one of our nation’s greatest preventive health challenges.

For over a decade, FARE has been working with communities, governments, health professionals and police across the country to stop alcohol harm by supporting world-leading research, raising public awareness and advocating for changes to alcohol policy. In that time FARE has helped more than 750 communities and organisations, and backed over 1,400 projects around Australia.