

8. REPORT ON THE ALAC CONFERENCE, 19 FEBRUARY 2002

Officer responsible Environmental Services Manager	Authors Councillors Sue Wells and Lesley Keast, Martin Ferguson, DDI 371-1956, Klaus Prusas, DDI 371-1824
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On February 19, Councillor Keast and I attended Day 2 of the ALAC conference in Wellington, "Working Together 2002 – Communities in Action". Martin Ferguson from our DLA attended the full conference.

The stated objectives of the conference were to:

- promote communication and partnerships amongst all sector groups involved in liquor licensing and Host Responsibility
- provide a forum for discussion and debate of critical issues
- present, demonstrate and showcase examples of innovative and effective national and local action
- promote the effectiveness and objectives of licensing legislation.

We were the **only** elected members in attendance. The workshop scheduled for councillors was cancelled due to low numbers registering, and it is disappointing that we were not advised of that before we flew to Wellington. It is concerning that so few councillors around New Zealand attended the conference – it raises some interesting questions about how DLA functions are being administered, why that it so, and if there is sufficient overlap between that and other relevant council functions.

We still found it very useful. Both of us attended a presentation outlining the "Think Before You Buy Under 18s Drink" exercise that ALAC conducted using Ashburton, Oamaru and Balclutha as controlled pairs. In short, local media in all three areas was used over a six-week period to remind everybody of their obligations under the law as they related to purchasing alcohol for under 18s. The trial was properly assessed by a Dunedin consultancy. Results were negligible.

We moved then into a very brief outline from ALAC as to their new Draft Strategic Plan, copies of which can be downloaded (as can the conference notes) from www.alcohol.org.nz. From there we divided into small groups where we were asked to consider two of the proposed strategies.

Lesley and I both attended the same discussion group, and it is fair to say that there was a vigorous and robust debate about the realities of teenage drinking. The session was useful in that while the trial results were not significant:

- it highlighted recent figures about binge drinking among very young people
- it demonstrated the gap between the extent to which parents think alcohol they are providing to their children is going to be consumed under supervision and what happens in reality
- it showed some agencies have a very limited understanding of the psychology of the teenage population
- it highlighted the law and issues about 'provision' of alcohol, as distinct from 'sale'. (Check out <http://www.alcohol.org.nz/fuel/law/law.html> - it's cool.)

Over lunch, we discussed the workings of Wellington's Liquor Liaison Group with Laurie Gabites, now the Wellington City Council Safety Co-ordinator. It is an interesting model, forming part of a major safety strategy for the city which costs around \$600,000 pa. As our inspector Martin Ferguson so succinctly puts it, "Great what you can do if someone throws heaps of money your way". He does, however, note that industry liaison is an area in which we can improve our overall performance in a short space of time, and we have some recommendations to that effect later in this report.

The afternoon sessions we attended were also fascinating. I attended "Making The DLA functions Work", which turned out to be an exposé of Wellington's unique liquor licensing policy. They function rather differently to the way we do here, and comments from industry representatives around me indicated that they prefer the transparency of our style. Praise also flowed for Martin Ferguson and Tony Sullivan and the excellent work that they do.

Wellington's sole political input into sale of liquor functions has effectively been compressed into a 'policy', which does not appear to have any exception process within it. Anyone interested enough to read all 36 pages of it will find it at:

http://www.wcc.govt.nz/policy/current/liquor_licensing_policy.pdf

I found it an exceptional (if occasionally horrifying) learning experience – I wonder what knowledge the local body politicians in Wellington could ever have of what happens with regard to liquor licensing in their town.

Flight times meant we had to leave before Martin Ferguson's presentation on the 'sting' operations our team ran here last year, which was disappointing as we would liked to have been present to hear the compliments we know our staff have earned.

Martin advises that, "Our sting presentation went down well. Scott Taylor from Auckland received a decision on the day of the presentation relating to a sting they had run. A seven-day suspension was given for a one-off incident (a great outcome). Of note were the comments of the Judge:

- a cancelled Eftpos sale does not constitute a sale,
- the witness should not lie (i.e. say they are 18 if they are not)

Our operation went with a full sale cash sale, receipt and liquor are to be produced as evidence, our under age person was instructed to tell the truth. It seems we are going down the track expected by the Authority."

Lesley and I absolutely endorse Martin's comments – "It's always reassuring when your peers look to you (read our whole team) for information and guidance. We must be getting it right."

CONCLUSION

It was worthwhile attending the conference, and useful to have two elected participants attending different sessions plus having Martin there throughout. As always, gaining a sense of where the industry and other TLAs are at over the breaks was almost more valuable than some of the presentations – but they were structured in such a way to allow ample discussion time, which was very sensible.

We were alerted to the ALAC strategic plan and Martin, Tony and Klaus will be reporting to the April meeting of this committee. There is an opportunity for us to become more proactive as lobbyists in the area of liquor abuse prevention.

There is also a need for Christchurch to refresh its liquor policy and that is on the work plan for this financial year. As part of the work, we propose some informal preliminary discussions with industry, the Police and elected members.

Such informal discussions do not fit entirely comfortably within existing frameworks we have in place. For example, it is helpful on occasion to bring together appropriate Police and hospitality industry representatives, together with Council staff and elected members, to canvass likely stances on particular issues before the need to lodge applications arises. The formality of a full committee is not appropriate for that, nor is a three-person DLA hearing committee suitable for that purpose.

As Christchurch looks to refreshing and enhancing its liquor licensing policy this financial year, it would be helpful to have preliminary general discussions that involve the DLA staff and elected member team, as well as seeking feedback from other elected members when that is appropriate. For that purpose, we are proposing that for the purposes of policy liaison, Councillors Wells, Keast, Cox, Ganda, Sheriff and Withers be the elected members primarily charged with assisting those discussions between outside bodies and Council staff. There may well be occasion where it is appropriate to engage other elected members in that process also.

It is also proposed that in May/June, the Regulatory and Consents Committee host a seminar for all Councillors on the Christchurch City Council's DLA functions, including:

- delegations to officers
- the purpose of the Sale of Liquor Act
- how the processes work
- reporting mechanisms
- the interface between the DLA and the RMA
- the role of the elected member as part of the DLA team
- what the LLA does

We suggest also that for those elected members who are to serve on formal DLA hearings, a further training session be prepared on the Sale of Liquor Act, caselaw, evidence and hearings procedures and that any elected member wishing to serve on DLA hearings must undergo the training.

**Recommendation
from Chair:**

1. That for the purposes of policy liaison, Councillors Wells, Keast, Cox, Ganda, Sheriff and Withers be the primary elected member representatives.
2. That the Regulatory and Consents Committee host a seminar for all councillors in May or June as outlined above.
3. That appropriate training be made available for elected members who are to serve on DLA panels.
4. That when the training is in place, it be a prerequisite for service.
5. That the officers of the DLA be warmly congratulated on the feedback received on their work.