Where the Beer Truck Stopped: Drinking in a Northern Australian Town

Maggie Brady
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A Research Report
by
Maggie Brady
for
The Drug and Alcohol Bureau
Northern Territory Department of Health
Darwin, Northern Territory

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Lastly I should like to thank Jim and Ruby Goodbourn, Simon Madin and Neil and Glenda Stripling, whose professional help was but a prelude to the hospitality and friendship also extended to me and which so enhanced my time in Tennant Creek.
This report describes qualitatively and quantitatively, the impact of alcohol use upon the Tennant Creek Community - its social life, its physical and social health and its working life.

It also attempts to characterise the nature and structure of the interactions that take place between people who utilise drinking as their medium of expression.

In February 1983 the Northern Territory Government held a Cabinet Meeting in Tennant Creek. Members of the Tennant Creek Town Council made representations to the members of Cabinet regarding the impact of alcohol use on the town and objecting to the behaviour of some Aboriginal people in this regard. In response to these representations Ian Pitman of the Office of Aboriginal Liaison made preliminary investigations and held discussions at Tennant Creek. Subsequently the Drug and Alcohol Bureau determined to commission a report that would document the impact of alcohol on the town and invited me to undertake this research.

The project was of three months' duration, from September to November 1983. During this period I spent five weeks in Tennant Creek collecting fieldwork observations and quantitative data and conducting informal interviews with European and Aboriginal residents of the town.

The original focus on Aboriginal drinking articulated by the Town Council was broadened to include European drinking - it seemed inappropriate to select only one group for scrutiny when so many people indicated that it was a 'town' problem. The Drug and Alcohol Advisory Committee also recommended that the study be a composite one.

Since the first printing of this report in 1984, there have been some developments in the town which, to varying degrees, have an impact on alcohol use. These developments have been both structural and social in nature, and many of them involve the provision of resources and services to Aboriginal people.

Some structural change in Tennant Creek has been precipitated by growth in the tourist industry. With the sealing of the Stuart Highway from Port Augusta to Alice Springs, the route to Darwin has become more accessible to
visitors. A new high standard motel is planned for the southern side of town, and existing hotels/motels are to be extended. In May 1987, an architectural consultant to the Aboriginal organisation Julalikari Council provided a report documenting proposed future developments to the town area, which considered the interests of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents. The report's author noted that,

The town is in a position to capitalise on its existing urban character by concentrating on all its known resources, historical background, and [by] fostering all aspects of its multiracial community (Wigley 1987, 2).

With a growing rapprochement between the Tennant Creek Town Council, and the Aboriginal Julalikari Council, it is possible that the town can continue to develop in a way that is both informed by, and considerate towards, its Aboriginal population.

Other changes in the town include the closure in August 1986 of the Meatworks whose workers patronised one of the two Tennant hotels; a smaller abattoir has opened north of Tennant. Two new gold mines have started operations, and a second local newspaper is now circulated throughout the Barkly region.

The changes noted above may mean an increased availability of liquor in the town; they will bring visitors who stay overnight and a subsequent sensitivity on the part of business owners who wish to maintain an orderly and attractive facade in the main thoroughfare.

Plans for a sobering-up shelter for alcohol-affected people were in hand during the period in which this research was undertaken and the shelter opened in Tennant Creek in August 1984. The shelter provides alternative facilities for those apprehended under protective custody legislation (Section 128) for those found inebriated in public (the Northern Territory decriminalised public drunkenness in 1974). The shelter staff provide care and supervision for the inebriated, who are brought to them — for the most part by the police. Clients also receive a light breakfast and clean clothes — a practical and non-judgmental alternative to the police cells. The shelter's clientele is 98 per cent Aboriginal. Such a service is of growing significance in view of the number of Aboriginal deaths in custody throughout Australia. Those accommodated are never left alone, and are not in alienating surroundings. The shelter staff keep detailed statistics on numbers of admissions by
week and by month, and the times of admissions (which peak between 9pm and 10pm). Such data is a valuable resource for further planning and provision of services. There are plans to extend the service to include counselling, which is not otherwise available professionally in the town. In view of these two crucial factors (the Aboriginal deaths in custody and paucity of services for alcohol abusers in the Territory), it is essential that the Northern Territory government continue to fulfil its stated policy of funding such shelters.

The study notes the existence of racial tensions, and these undoubtedly remain as an ongoing issue in the town. A major focus of anti-Aboriginal sentiment has been the Warumungu Land Claim, which remains (at the time of writing) unresolved, despite successful negotiations between the claimants and the town council over the acquisition of land in and around the town. The claimants responded to a call for a compromise solution and proposed to withdraw 90 per cent of their claim inside the extended town boundaries, in exchange for secure title to town camps and the acquisition of several pastoral properties on the northern border of the claim area. The resolution of the claim, and the granting of secure titles and extensions to the town camps will surely contribute to the economic and social stability of the town, as Wigley suggests (1987, 2).

Living conditions in the town camps have improved over the last three years, with the support of the Julalikari Council (previously the Warumungu Pabulu Association). New housing, telephones, ablution blocks and lighting have upgraded the facilities in existing camps, and at Karguru, previously without any facilities at all. As a result of these developments, town campers are planning to establish drinking areas as part of an overall Aboriginal-controlled strategy to combat alcohol abuse. Associated plans are being made for 'dry' camps out of town. Several meetings have been held to discuss alcohol-related issues with representatives from the various Aboriginal organisations and town Aborigines, and there are plans to establish a liquor committee similar to that of the Tangentyere Council (town campers) in Alice Springs.

Aboriginal organisations have grown over the last three years. The Central Land Council opened a small office in 1985, and a 'language house' Papulu Apparr-kari, opened in September 1986. The language centre works with local people on the maintenance of Aboriginal languages and identity. It aims to increase linguistic competence in four main languages (Alyawarre, Warumungu, Wakirti Warlpiri and
Warlmanpa), and to improve the job skills of Aborigines by providing opportunities to produce children's books in different languages and experience in graphics and office work. In November 1986 an Aboriginal health centre, Anyinginyi Congress opened, which provides the services of two doctors, a dentist and eight Aboriginal Health Workers to its clients. Anyinginyi has an important role in health maintenance among town campers and others, and may in the future develop its own alcohol programmes. A retail/whole-sale grocery outlet has been purchased on behalf of Aboriginal people of the Barkly region, which will serve the town camps and the outstations. The outstation movement has continued to flourish with the support of the Jurrkurakurr Aboriginal Resource Centre, and it remains an important part of the strategy by Aboriginal people to control alcohol abuse. An Aboriginal art and craft shop opened in Paterson street in 1987 which provides an outlet through which local people may sell their artefacts and art works.

Although many of these developments may seem only peripherally related to alcohol use and abuse, they serve to provide Aboriginal people with a voice in Tennant Creek which was previously denied. All will contribute to the growing self esteem and well-being on the part of Aboriginal people, qualities which should have a positive manifestation with respect to alcohol use. Europeans in the town, by way of contrast, have shown little mobilisation to deal with their own alcohol abuse.

During my stay in Tennant, I made contact with a wide range of people, both Aboriginal and European Australians. I spoke to local representatives of relevant Government Departments, and to town campers, shopkeepers, licensees, drinkers, teachers, nurses, doctors, missionaries and ministers, policemen, works supervisors, town councillors and the magistrate. I visited Warrego, Gilbertons Meatworks, Elliot, Ali Curung, Wauchope and Wycliff, and held informal discussions in those places. I attended Court, visited the Nursing Home, sat in pubs and clubs, and visited the wards in the Hospital.

Quantitative data were collected by means of a questionnaire conducted at the Tennant Creek Hospital as well as statistical information which was made available by the Medical Superintendent, the Police Department, Health Department, Department of Community Welfare, Northern Territory Liquor Commission, Commonwealth Employment Service, Department of Social Security and the Coroner's Office.
Time restraints have been great and the report is neither as detailed nor as extensively researched as I would have wished. Nevertheless it addresses the issues that prompted the initial concerns and will hopefully provide a basis for further investigation.

Maggie Brady
Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies
Canberra ACT 2601
October 1987
CHAPTER 1

TENNANT CREEK: THE TOWN AND ITS SOCIAL CONTEXT

Thalaualla, the black snake, arose first at a spot called Tjinurokora, where there is a rocky waterhole in the bed of Tennant Creek. This waterhole is now a sacred spot... Tradition says that after coming up out of the earth, the snake made the creek now called Tennant and travelled to the McDouall Range, which he also created (Spencer and Gillen 1904, 299.303).

There are many stories as to how the present town site was chosen. One is that an enterprising hotel owner... started a small store at the Creek, and in 1930 applied for additional land for a hotel. The application was refused... At almost the same time, a wagon carrying a load of beer and building materials for the construction of the hotel broke its axle. Rather than manhandle the supplies back to the Creek, everyone shifted camp. Where the pub is, so grew the town... (Tennant Creek and Barkly Region Information Booklet, TCTPA, 2).

Description

Tennant Creek lies on the western side of the Barkly Tablelands, 500 km north of Alice Springs and 1,035 km south of Darwin on the Stuart Highway.

In 1981 there was a population of 3,118 people, of which 481 were Aboriginal people (about 15 per cent of the population). There are fluctuations in populations among both Aboriginal and European communities, which are influenced by seasonal employment among both groups. The nearest large Aboriginal community is Ali Curung (previously known as Warrabri) which lies 146 km south-east of the town. Ali Curung has a population of approximately 400 (1981 census); although Bell estimates the population to be 650 (Bell 1980, 242).

During the period discussed here (late 1983) it is likely that the Tennant Creek population was less than the 1981 census figures. This is primarily because of retrenchments from Peko-Wallsend's Warrego mine, and the end
of the season at the town's meatworks. The meatworks closed down completely in August 1986. The European population of the town in September 1983 would have been approximately 2,000 people. We can assume that Aboriginal population was still approximately 480. Aborigines thus constituted approximately 19 per cent of the total population of Tennant Creek during the research period.

Numerous tourists and business people pause at the town which is on the main Stuart Highway linking Alice Springs with Darwin. The town contains government offices and representatives of government departments whose area extends over the Barkly region are based in Tennant Creek. Europeans who pass through the town stop to see the local tourist attractions of the Pebbles and the Devil's Marbles and to swim and sail at the local recreation lake, Mary Ann Dam.

Aboriginal people from Barkly pastoral properties and settlements further south pass through the town or remain there for a variety of reasons. These include attending ceremonies, and to attend to other business such as collecting pension cheques and supplies, visiting relatives, attending court or the hospital.

One of the significant features of the town is the short-term nature of a section of the population. There are, of course, those who have lived in Tennant all their lives, but a considerable turnover exists among recent arrivals. Some, particularly professional and semi-professional people, expect Tennant to be a temporary workplace for one or two years. The hospital has a high turnover of medical staff, the Medical Superintendent in 1983 having the longest tenure (14 months) of any of his doctors (4 in number). The high school has a staff turnover of 50 per cent per annum; bank employees usually have two-year tenure.

The meatworkers employed by Gilbertsons expected to work only for about six months of the year. When the season ended, they left Tennant, to return when the works reopened. Warrego mine had a workforce of approximately 1,000 people until 1981 when retrenchments and closure of a copper smelter cut the population drastically. Warrego people, now numbering about 500, travel to Tennant Creek to shop, attend the hospital and for social reasons.

Tennant Creek, although small, is not a homogeneous community, but a heterogenous collection of social groups. Groups are differentiated by numerous social, political and cultural values which are espoused by their members. People visit the town for a variety of reasons and often for limited periods of time. Some manage to earn large sums of
money, and are depicted as having a get-rich-quick mentality. Other groups in the town are depicted as being drop-outs from the south, people who would not survive elsewhere. Some successful residents acquired land cheaply in earlier years and are now benefitting; some have spread their pecuniary interests throughout the town.

Among the Aboriginal groups in the town are several different language groups, primarily Warramungu, Warlpiri, Alyawarra and Kaititj. Some live in the town itself, in Housing Commission homes or those owned by an Aboriginal housing association. Others live on special purposes leases where new houses have been constructed, and others who live in makeshift humpies on land nearby are considered by the town's authorities to be 'illegal' fringe dwellers.

There are in Tennant Creek some Aboriginal people of mixed descent who hold Government or 'white collar' posts, who are 'integrated' into the community, viewed by Europeans as 'blacks who are like whites'.

Among the European population there are the professionals - usually temporary - at the schools, hospital and government offices. There is a strong local business community whose members between them own the properties and retail outlets in the main street, Paterson street. A few individual business people own multiple properties in the town. From this group the Town Council draws its membership. The major employers (the mine and the meatworks) have management and supervisory staff, who form a group distinct from the workers at these establishments.

There is a limited social arena within which these groups can operate which is made up of the sporting, recreational and licensed facilities of the town. These will be described in more detail in Chapter 2 but a brief description of these facilities is given.

There were 13 licensed outlets in Tennant Creek in 1983 and they are listed below.

**Wholesale:**
Tennant Creek Trading

**Stores:**
Headframe Bottle Shop

**Clubs:**
Tennant Sporting Club Inc.
Tennant Creek Memorial Club
Tennant Creek Bowling Club
Tennant Creek Golf Club
Police Club

**Restaurants:**
Boomerang Restaurant
Eldorado Motor Inn Restaurant

**Taverns:**
Squash Club

**Hotels:**
Tennant Creek Hotel (The Swan)
Goldfields Hotel
LIQUOR OUTLETS:

1 Headframe Bottle Shop
2 Memorial Club
3 Police Club
4 Boomerang Restaurant
5 Bowling Club
6 Squash Club
7 Goldfields Hotel
8 T.C. Trading
9 Brian's Place
10 Tennant Creek Hotel
11 Sporting Club
12 Eldorado Motor Inn

TENNANT CREEK

Figure 1: Map of Tennant Creek showing liquor outlets
Tennant Creek Trading

This establishment is a wholesale liquor outlet, situated in Scott Street, somewhat away from the central area of the town. Nine litres of alcohol is the minimum purchase (ie one carton of beer). The premises, which comprise a large warehouse, are open from 9.30 am - 5 pm Monday to Thursday, 9.30 am - 6 pm Fridays and 9 am - 12 noon Saturdays. During the week they may sell only to travellers going more than 50 km away from Tennant, although on Saturday mornings they are able to sell to anyone, a rule over which the owners expressed some bewilderment. Their beer prices are among the cheapest in town with Carlton White (ubiquitous in Tennant) at $16.50 a carton - although this price is to rise as a result of recent increases.

The Headframe Bottle Shop

The Headframe is still sometimes colloquially referred to as 'Peter's Place' as the bottle shop was previously housed in Peter's Place supermarket a few yards away. It has been open in its present form as a separate bottle shop since July 1982. The premises, which are the major source of takeaway liquor apart from the Goldfields drive-in bottle department, comprise a large brick building with bottles arranged in a supermarket-style display, with two check-out tills. Hours of opening are from 12 noon - 6 pm Monday to Thursday; 12 noon - 8 pm Friday and 9 am - 1 pm Saturday. Prices are cheap, with a carton of beer selling for $17.50 (half a carton $9); fortified wine is sold in bottles only, and was on 'special' during my research at $2 (Hardy's Tintara Invalid Port). The Headframe also carries a good selection of bottled and cask wine as well as flagons of Moselle and Reisling. Moselle is a favoured drink among Aboriginal people at $4 per flagon. The shop was the only source of large cans of Carlton White in the town (750 ml at $1.40); however the Northern Territory Government has banned ring-pull tops (for litter reasons), and these cans will in future not be sold in the Northern Territory. For many reasons the Headframe is an important source of alcohol for Aboriginal people in Tennant.

Sporties Club

The Sporties club (as it is known locally) has the highest membership of any Tennant Creek Club, approximately 600 (ie about 30 per cent of the European population). This high membership was achieved as a result of a 'membership drive' in order to help the club out of financial straits. It is likely that a much lower number actually attend the club on a regular basis. There is also multiple membership of several clubs.
The membership fee is low ($5). However access is strictly controlled by a key-card slot in the locked front door. Perhaps to counterbalance the low membership fee (and low alcohol prices), there are dress regulations. Shirts must be worn at all times in the Members Bar and Games Room. 'Tank tops' (sleeveless T-shirts) can be worn at the outer bar only until 7 pm.

Visitors may be given a temporary membership card which enables them to buy drinks at the bar. People are expected to join after they have been signed in on three occasions. Hours of opening are from 4 pm - 11.30 pm on weekdays, and until midnight at weekends.

The club is lively, offering several pool tables, table tennis, darts, poker machine, TV and Bingo (on Sunday afternoons). It has a softball team (the 'softies') and hosts post-event get togethers.

Bar prices are cheap with a 200 ml beer (7 oz) selling for 65 cents. A 285 ml beer (10 oz 'handle') selling for 85 cents and a can (333 ml/13 oz) for $1.30. A full nip of spirits plus mix costs $1.50. A takeaway carton of beer costs $18 (more expensive than the Headframe and Tennant Creek Trading). No meals are available.

The distinction between the two bars is innovative (since the present management took over 6 months ago). Previously there was only one bar, which has now been divided in two, creating a lounge bar (members) which is carpeted and has tables and chairs, separate from the outer bar which is unfurnished. The Sporties club advertisement in the local paper The Tennant and District Times carries the admonition that 'bad language will not be tolerated'.

Memo Club

The Memorial club is well-known in Tennant for its excellent meals which are served either in the dining room or the bar both at midday and in the evenings (except Sundays). Membership in 1983 was approximately 290 (14.5 per cent of the European population) and the membership fee increased to $20 in 1984. The door is not locked and access to non-members is not as strictly controlled as at the Sporties club. However the manager expressed annoyance that some people continued to use the club's facilities without joining. The club is open from 12 noon - 10 pm on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday and until 11.30 pm throughout the rest of the week.

There is one main bar with a carpeted area and tables and chairs, darts, pool, three poker machines and a TV. There is a separate pool table in a room of its own
near one end of the bar entitled 'bullshit corner', so named as it is the regular spot for a particular drinking group.

Prices at the bar are slightly dearer than at the Sporties, with a 200 ml glass of beer at 67 cents; 285 ml at 88 cents and a can at $1.35. A full nip of spirits costs $1.30. A carton of takeaway beer sells at $19 (an expensive way to buy 24 cans) - but as with the other clubs, over-the-counter sales are a matter of convenience rather than economy. Members claim that the club's prices are too cheap and that the management should charge more.

Bowling Club

The Bowling club situated next to the lawn bowls green is a small establishment with a regular clientele of approximately 40. Twice this number are officially members but the manager commented that he never saw them, they had 'disappeared'. There is a membership fee of $30 with an initial joining fee of $5.

Their bar is open from 4 pm - 7 pm and on bowling days it is open all day.

The club hosts visiting teams from elsewhere in the Northern Territory and interstate for bowls championships.

Police Club

The Police club is located within the courthouse/police station complex in the main street and comprises a small bar, with a pool table and darts. Police clubs have become more common in the Northern Territory over the last four years, and Darwin, Alice Springs and Katherine also have clubs. The Tennant Creek Police Club started in 1979 and now has a licence to open 70 hours per week. Trading hours are from 4 pm - 2 am to cover shift hours, 7 days per week.

Squash Club 'The Dolly Pot Inn'

The Squash Club is a highly successful venture comprising a licensed restaurant and three squash courts, together with a sauna and a spa pool. Dress is casual because people go to play squash, and many take their children. There is a TV and the club holds functions from time to time (such as hosting visiting musicians for the Arts Council). The quality of meals is high and prices low (the most expensive meal is around $7), but it is not necessary to have a meal in order to purchase at the bar.
Boomerang Restaurant

Located on the main street, this is the only licensed restaurant in Tennant which is not part of a Motel or Club. There is an open air beer garden section next to the restaurant.

Eldorado Motor Inn Restaurant

The Eldorado is the most expensive licensed restaurant in Tennant and is of high quality. The restaurant hosted Prince Charles and Princess Diana at a reception on their brief visit to Tennant earlier in 1983.

Brian's Place

Brian's place on a large corner block in the main street is described as a 'tavern' and comprises a large, lavishly furnished bar with a grill restaurant at one end. Because of its size, and the fact that it has a stage and facilities for amplification equipment, Brian's place is used as disco, as a venue for cabaret-style entertainments as well as local functions (school fund-raising events, meetings, etc.). Country and Western singers are popular. It opens for long hours, from 12 noon - 12 midnight Monday to Thursday; 12 noon - 2 am Friday; 5 pm - 2 am Saturday; 5 pm - midnight Sunday. Dress is 'to be suitable by management' (sic). There is a large video/TV screen.

There is a separate bar with its own side entrance which was known as the Key Bar. This is used for private functions, and at one time was intended to be an exclusive drinking place, with 'keys' issued to invited members only. It is not functioning in this way at present.

Tennant Creek Hotel

This was the first hotel to be built when the town started in about 1930. Also known as the 'Swan', the hotel covers a large area of land in the centre of town. It has no take-away bottle department although takeaways may be purchased over the counter. The hotel comprises several small bars; the front bar which is, in effect, the Aboriginal bar opens directly onto Paterson street. It is not carpeted and has little or no furniture. In 1987, the management changed this layout so that the 'Aboriginal' bar is located at the side of the hotel, with no entrance onto Paterson street.

There are four other bars, with access through another front door: a cocktail or lounge bar, and three small bars. The front bar was, in 1983 the only bar easily accessible to Aboriginal drinkers in Tennant Creek since the other 'Aboriginal' bar in Tennant Creek at the Goldfields Hotel
had been closed down for most of 1983. It serves wine at $1 for a plastic cup (8 oz) and cans of beer at $1.40. The bar keeps 'flexible' hours depending on the management's interpretation of the state of order or disorder - if a fight starts, the bar is closed down and reopened later. On 'pay days' (the days on which social security cheques are cashed - Wednesdays and Thursdays every fortnight), the front bar is open from 10 am - 2 pm. It then closes until 6 pm and stays open from 6 pm - 9 pm.

**Goldfields Hotel**

The 'Goldies' as it is called has existed in some form or another since 1936. It has a drive-in bottle department and a large front bar both of which open onto the main street. The front bar is basic, with no carpet and several pool tables - it once had a division which marked off the 'Aboriginal' bar.

At the back of the hotel is a lounge bar, which has tables and chairs, carpet and a video with a large screen.

The takeaway outlet is open from 1 pm - 9 pm Monday to Friday; 12 noon - 9 pm Saturday; and 12 noon - 8 pm Sunday. Prices are not the cheapest in Tennant, with a carton of beer selling for $20 (half carton for $10.50); the cheapest port available is Angove's Light Ruby which is $3 per bottle.

In the Aboriginal bar only cans were sold - the main reason given by the manager for the closure was non-profitability, although he also had had 'trouble' and commented that there had been 'fewer arrests' since the bar closed. The Goldfields has also undergone structural changes in 1987, and Aboriginal people now utilise the front bar - once the province of the meatworkers.

**Warrego and Noble's Nob (Outside Town)**

Both these mines provide access to alcohol for their employees. Noble's Nob, which is owned by Australian Development NL, is 16 km east of Tennant. The mine has a canteen where alcohol may be purchased by employees for consumption on the premises only.

At Warrego, 55 km from Tennant, there are two clubs providing drinking facilities; the Bowling Club and the Workers' Social and Amenities Club. Membership of the Bowling Club costs $40 per annum, whereas the Workers' Club charges only $2 membership. The Bowling Club thus provides (in the words of a staff member) 'a quiet and more secluded place to drink'.
The Worker's Club is the major social venue for Warrego mine workers and their families: 'everyone belongs'. It is open from 10.15 am - 12.15 pm and from 4 pm - 10 pm Monday to Thursday and until 11 pm on Friday; 10 am - 10 pm Saturday and 12 noon - 8pm Sunday. Takeaway liquor is available from 12 noon - 9pm. The Club is a social club with two large billiard tables, darts, poker machines and a large video screen, where films are shown every night. It has one large bar with a furnished area, and a small unfurnished bar 'The Dirty Dozen'. This is so named as it has no dress requirements, and the men may drink there straight from the mine; 'we can hose it down afterwards'. The bar sells a variety of interstate beers (XXXX, Melbourne Bitter, etc) as workers are mostly from elsewhere, and want to drink their own brands.

Types of Liquor Consumed

Tennant Creek is primarily a beer-drinking town. In 1982 for example, beer constituted 91.2 per cent of the total volume of alcohol consumed in the town and its surrounding area, according to figures given by the Liquor Commission. The figures show that less beer and more wine is consumed in Alice Springs than in Tennant Creek.

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<th>Wine</th>
<th>Spirits</th>
<th>Beer</th>
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<td>2.4</td>
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<td>Alice Springs</td>
<td>13.3</td>
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In Tennant Creek the two hotels between them sell approximately 45 per cent of the wine, 50 per cent of the spirits and 51 per cent of the beer sold in the town. Not surprisingly, the clubs sell a good deal of beer and spirits, but less wine. The stores sell more wine than any other alcohol beverage.

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Other Social Events and Alcohol in Tennant Creek

There are other occasions in the social life of the town when short-term special licences are granted— in fact many people commented that an event in Tennant without alcohol would simply fail to attract the numbers.

At annual events such as the Rodeo, Goldrush Show, Tennant Creek Show and the Races, one of the Service Clubs such as Apex or Rotary runs the bar on a special licence. The licence fee for such an occasion is a flat rate of $20, and apart from paying for overheads and the fact that the licensee is not entitled to purchase supplies at wholesale prices, this is a very lucrative business for whoever runs the bar. There is no requirement on the Club concerned to send in returns on sales.

The Speedway, held in the evenings twice monthly, has a special licence and sells canned beer, and drinking is also permitted at the baseball and basketball games; 'it gives them strength' one community member said. Any fund-raising event in Tennant Creek needs alcohol sales to make it viable; the primary school quiz night was held at Brian's Place; the Anglican Church wine and cheese night was held at the Tennant Creek Hotel (always a resounding success with approximately 200 people attending). Any event that demands good attendance for its success provides alcohol in order to achieve this; the Speech night at Warrego school had 'BYOG' on the invitations; its Preschool had a gathering for parents at which no food but alcohol was provided; as a consequence, the fathers came. One prominent member of the community commented 'every social event is associated with alcohol, and most are for men'. The male domains of the clubs are popular in Tennant: Apex, Rotary, Lions, Freemasons, Buffaloes.

'Dry' Social Activities

Social events in Tennant Creek as a whole revolve around alcohol. Consequently there is a lack of activities which do not provide alcohol, and those that exist tend to be for young people.

There is a weekly 'dry disco' held at the CWA hall. Entrance is $2 for youths and $5 for adults. The disco is popular, attracting between 80 to 120 people regularly, many of whom are Aboriginal. Occasionally an off-duty policeman helps on the door as there have been older men wanting admittance who have been drinking. For young people there is also roller skating at one of the schools on Saturday nights, and a BMX bike track. There is one drive-in cinema in the town. Of the two coffee bars, one Godfathers, is a health shop and restaurant; the other, the Pioneer Milk Bar
Bar sells takeaway fried foods. It is a popular teenage gathering place, for both Aborigines and Europeans, as it has a back room of pinball and space invaders machines. Drinkers go there from the two nearby hotels to buy food, especially Aboriginal drinkers, who tend not to buy counter meals at the pubs. The Pioneer closes at 9 pm every night except Fridays when it stays open until midnight. It has some broken windows.

I have described briefly the availability of alcohol in Tennant Creek and given an outline of the social events which are associated with alcohol and those which are not. In order to complete this section on the town and its context, I now turn to a description of the Aboriginal people in and around the town and their social networks.

Tjunkurakura: on Warramungu Country

Tjunkurakura is the Warramungu name for the Tennant Creek waterhole and sacred site complex north of the town which is built on country belonging to the Warramungu people. The takeover of their hunting, gathering and watering places has been more or less continuous since the establishment of the Overland and Telegraph station in 1871. When Spencer and Gillen passed through the region in 1901 they witnessed so many ceremonies by the Warramungu that they were quite exhausted (Nash 1980, 2). They reported that 200 Aborigines were camped at Tennant Creek, and Spencer's photographs are evidence of the richness of Warramungu culture that they witnessed (Mulvaney 1982, 70-102). Thirty years later, Professor Stanner remarked that the tribe was very much depleted. He noted that the number of people camped at Tennant Creek was about 60 (Stanner 1980, 43). By this time payable gold had been found in the area and the rush was on, bringing over 600 people of European and Asiatic background to the goldfields (Tuxworth 1978, 4; Powell 1982, 173). A reserve set aside in 1892 for the Warramungu east of the Telegraph station, was by the 1930s dotted with over 50 miner's claims and was overrun by 500 head of pastoralists' cattle. Gold had been found on the reserve. The area included rockholes and places of spiritual significance to the Warramungu. Stanner wrote, 'I was upset ...... by some talk of moving the Aborigines, the last of the Warramungu, out of the way of the miners into a stretch of bush in which incidentally, I almost perished for water' (Stanner 1974, 16). His report (printed in 1980), recommending that bores be sunk and a ration depot opened on the new area, was ignored. The old reserve was shifted into this barren area; and as Stanner dryly stated, 'the miners won and the Warramungu lost'. Warramungu people continued to live on the 'old' reserve until 1945 when approximately 200 Aborigines were removed to Phillip Creek Native Settlement. This was a barren place and closed down because of water
problems once another site was located at Warrabri in the 1950s.

The Town Dwellers

During the 1930s and 1940s the town of Tennant Creek was 'out of bounds' to the Aboriginal people. The Phillip Creek people were allowed in twice a week, on Thursdays and Saturday nights for the cinema (pers. comm., Mrs H. Tuxworth). However, even with the establishment of Warrabri in the 1950s some people chose to stay near the town once the old Aboriginal Ordinance preventing this had ceased. The pattern of movement into Tennant from Warrabri has apparently existed since the establishment of Warrabri. Undoubtedly the Warramungu continued to visit their sites and places of spiritual significance north of the town.

The presence of Europeans and the taking up of pastoral land and mining leases on land Aborigines considered as their own in themselves also served to encourage some Aborigines to stay in and around the town. As Reynolds notes the "town blacks" shifted camp regularly, even though distances moved were increasingly confined within a shrinking circle of territory (Reynolds 1981, 160).

The Village

In the 1960s an area of land was set aside away from the central district of Tennant and on the south side of the town as a camping place for Aboriginal people from Warrabri who wanted to work in town. This became known as 'The Village', now a special purpose lease held by an Aboriginal Housing Association (Warramungu Pabulu Association).

The Village has both Warramungu and Warlpiri residents numbering 40 in March 1983, according to the 1983 DAA Community Profile, and the lease is 1.15 hectares in size (H of R 1982, 2171). New houses with electricity, town water and sewerage connections have been erected in 1983. The land, once apart from the town, is now on the road leading to the dump. As Clark noted in his submission to the Standing Committee on Fringe Dwelling Aboriginal Communities, the Village residents have a reputation for heavy drinking which he doubts is justified (1981, 1390). The Village is the place where visitors from Warrabri tend to stay, and is the centre for people going to and from Miyikampi Outstation.

The Mulga

An area of land north of the town on the eastern side of the highway had long been a camping place for Aboriginal people
from the Barkly Stations. Mrs Mary Ward of Banka Banka Station built a hostel on this land which was intended to house visiting stockmen and families as part of her philanthropic work. The building was never used for this purpose, and now stands amid the newly erected houses of the Mulga Special Purpose Lease. People from Rockhampton, Elliott and Banka Banka frequently stay at The Mulga; behind the 'official' camp are some 'unofficial' camps of Alyawarra and Wombaya people (the latter from Brunette Downs). The Mulga is the largest on the Aboriginal Special Purpose Leases at 8 hectares (H of R 1982, 2170). The resident population was 79 Warramungu people on the DAA’s March 1893 reckoning, the majority being women. Some of the Warramungu women at the Mulga are important ceremonial leaders.

Blueberry Hill

This is the smallest of the Tennant Special Purpose Leases, only 1.02 hectares, on the western side of town. Clark comments that it is one of the oldest in the town, as people have been living here for 30 years - the official lease was granted early in 1982 (H of R 1982, 1391). Five elderly Warramungu people live at Blueberry Hill. Town water is available and there are septic tanks.

Karguru

A new lease of 25 hectares is planned for Karguru, on the eastern side of the town. At present the population of mainly Alyawarra people live in humpies and tents and must cart water by hand. There is one tap. Facilities are minimal at present. No housing is planned as yet for the 'new' Karguru lease but the Town Council, who wish to hold the lease to the land, has had plans drawn up for ablution facilities. The Warramungu Pabulu Association also wish to hold the title themselves and the matter is still being negotiated. The new lease is intended by the Town Council to encompass so-called illegal fringe dwellers who are not on leases. The camps at Karguru have expanded since 1980 and Bell and Ditton (1980, 74) point out that this has caused conflict, since the east side camps were originally for non-drinkers who sought a quiet place to camp while on visits to town.

The new lease will boost the area of land available for Aboriginal residence in Tennant Creek to 35.17 hectares. Up until this new lease was planned Tennant had, by comparison with other Northern Territory towns, one of the smallest total areas of Special Purpose Leases for Aboriginal town dwellers: 3 leases totalling 10.17 hectares (H of R 1982, 2170).
Figure 2: Map showing Aboriginal Town Camp and Lease locations
Other Camps

There are several other camps on the edges of town (mostly out of sight of the casual passer-by) which are constructed of corrugated iron, plastic sheets and tents.

The positioning of campsites in Tennant has for decades reflected the geographical orientation of the different language groups: the Warramungu to the north, the Warlpiri to the west and the Alyawarra and Kaititj to the south-east.

Within this group orientation are locations selected for more individual reasons. For example, there is a camp near the drive-in (drive-in camp) where a small group stay who were ousted from The Mulga because of their drinking behaviour. Another camp was set up near The Village as a grieving camp (sorry camp) after a death. Freedom of choice over campsites is a crucial part of Aboriginal strategy with regard to alcohol. Consequently drinkers' camps are located away from the scrutiny of the police and casual passers-by, and conversely camps may be established in order to avoid drinkers. Access to water, shade and firewood also influence the location of camps.

Aboriginal Housing

The Warramungu Pabulu ('Housing') Association (WPA) owns eight houses in town which are leased to Aboriginal families, and the Housing Commission has five houses specially allocated to Aborigines and some other houses tenanted by Aborigines. Rent for Housing Commission homes is $57.30 per week but those on unemployment benefits receive a rental rebate.

The Warramungu Pabulu Association had a staff of three, a workforce of sixteen and a Council of eight members (five men and three women in 1983). As well as being a housing association which erects houses in the town camps, the Association has also become a resource centre to supply outstations. They have a grant of $130,000 from the Aboriginal Development Commission to provide shelter on outstations. The outstations movement, as elsewhere, is strong in the region, and with the psychological and monetary commitment that such a venture demands, serves as a powerful alternative to committed drinking in the town. The following are the outstations associated with the WPA.

Nguradidji (Alyawarra)  Kalumbulba (Warramungu)
Miyikampi (Warlpiri)  Nicholson River, 3 outstations (Garawa)
Canteen Creek (Alyawarra/ Warramungu)  Jingulu (Tjingili)
Indarinya (Alyawarra)  Murandji (Mudbura)
Jara jara (Kaititj/Warlpiri)
Plate 1: An 'illegal' camp, located beyond the boundary of a Tennant Creek Special Purpose Lease

Plate 2: New housing at the Mulga, on the north side of town
Some of these outstations are unofficially 'dry' in that prominent adult members of the group attempt to dissuade drinkers from going into the outstations. The sheer investment of time and energy in keeping an outstation community viable curbs drinking. In a sense it is a strain for an outstation to carry the additional burden of the trouble that drinkers can cause. People lose sleep, working life can be disrupted and people may get hurt. Miyikampi and Jara Jara are considering making application to be officially 'dry', but there are, naturally, immense problems in policing such an arrangement. The WPA chairman thought that making these outstations dry would be 'hard' because people would be encouraged to go to Tennant to drink. Certainly there some men well-known in Tennant as heavy drinkers who stay at The Village, and an older relative of theirs runs Miyikampi outstation. He has reportedly 'kicked them out'. The problem for Aboriginal people is then, one of responsibility: in order to maintain order on an outstation it may be necessary to eject certain individuals who then 'make trouble' elsewhere. An outstation group is more vulnerable in many ways - it may be composed largely of elderly people, and skilled medical help (in the event of a fight) may be far away. People are concerned about such things, even if equipped with two-way radios. It is 'safer' for drinkers to be in town where there is a hospital and the police are on call.

Ali Curung (Warrabri)

Ali Curung people are closely associated with Tennant Creek and have constantly travelled in to the town since the establishment of the settlement. Warrabri was established in 1956 as a settlement for Warramungu and Warlpiri people from Phillip Creek: it was vacant Crown Land east of the Stuart Highway. Warlpiri people had scattered as far north as Phillip Creek and Wave Hill, after the Coniston killings in 1928. The name 'Warrabri' coined to incorporate the two names of Warlpiri, sometimes spelled as 'Warlbri', and Warramungu. Unlike the establishment of some other settlements, it was reported that the Aboriginal people were not unwilling to move from Phillip Creek to Warrabri; although it was not their traditional country - indeed they arrived at the new location six months earlier than planned (pers. comm., E C Evans). Bell notes that it was an unfortunate site for a settlement, being a dog dreaming place (Bell 1982b, 203).

Warramungu, eastern Warlpiri and Kaititj people occupied the reserve, and Alyawarra people came later, in the 1960s. The present composition of the settlement has been estimated as Warlpiri: 35 per cent; Warramungu/Walmanbah: 20 per cent; Kaititj: 15 per cent; Alyawarra: 30 per cent (Toohey 1979, 7). The Warlpiri and Warramungu are
still basically considered by the other language groups at Warrabri to be interlopers (Bell 1982b, 199). These factors have created and sustained tensions which are manifest in violence and unrest in the settlement (Bell 1980, 242) from which people wish to absent themselves from time to time. Ali Curung has been declared a 'dry' area and no alcohol may be taken onto its 440 sq km without a permit. So far, those who have been granted permits by the Aboriginal Council have been European staff members. The dry area is policed by two European police sergeants and two Aboriginal police aides who between them run the police station, located in the settlement itself.

Liquor has never been available at Ali Curung but residents have long had access to alcohol from the Wauchope Hotel, on the Stuart Highway north of Ali Curung. The nearest liquor outlet to Ali Curung community is however, at Wycliff Well, a roadhouse on the Stuart Highway only 25 minutes drive from the settlement.

Wycliff Well (Restaurant and Takeaway Licence)

To a large extent, the shop and liquor outlet at Wycliff derives its income from Aborigines (NT Liquor Commission 1982b). These are mainly Ali Curung people but Aborigines from Emerald Station, Willowra, Neutral Junction and Stirling station also utilise Wycliff. Alcohol may be purchased at Wycliff for consumption with a meal or for consumption more than 2 km away. The number of white cans in heaps around the Aboriginal camps reveal that the 2 km law is neither observed nor enforced in this particular corner of the Northern Territory. Apart from Wauchope, Wycliff is the only takeaway outlet on the Stuart Highway between Alice Springs and Tennant Creek. The premises are open until midnight, and consist of a dining room (with a shirt and shoes dress requirement) and a shop selling counter meals (ie a plate of hot food for $2.50) and alcohol, as well as a range of goods of particular appeal to Aborigines (clothes, blankets cassette players, cowboy hats). Near the counter is a 'snack' area with tables and chairs where some Aboriginal people eat; others take their meals outside. Staff from Ali Curung sometimes book a separate room for private dinners; they also purchase alcohol there. Buses and tourists stop at Wycliff for fuel and refreshment.

Three families of Aboriginal people live at Wycliff, a few metres north of the roadhouse. They sometimes help around the store. Aboriginal social security cheques are sent care of the store. This arrangement, and the credit system it secures has received some public criticism (Sunday Territorian, 8 June 1986). The licensee keeps a large range of imported beers (at $2.50 per bottle), but Carlton white cans (for example) are sold for $14 a half carton.
Wauchope (Roadside Inn Licence)

Wauchope is located 17 km north of Wycliff (113 km south of Tennant Creek), and because of its picturesque nature it is a regular stopping-place for tourist buses on the Stuart Highway. Wauchope is a pub and a hotel with a dining room. It has two bars, each with separate doors - the main bar is the one frequented by Europeans; the public bar is, in effect, an Aboriginal bar. The latter sells a range of food commonly bought by Aborigines (instant milk, camp pie, Bushells tea). Takeaway alcohol is purchased through a half-door in the main bar. Wauchope sells half a carton of Carlton white cans for $17 ($3 more than at Wycliff). There is an informal arrangement with Ali Curung Council that no fortified wine is sold, and beer may only be purchased to a limit of half a carton per person per day (ie 12 cans). The hotel sells a wide range of Australian beers (Fosters, Southwark, Victorian Bitter, Swan, Emu, West End Draft, XXXX) and hot snacks are available over the counter. The main bar has a juke box, a lottery ticket machine and is liberally decorated with memorabilia. Dress requirements are announced by a notice on the door of the main bar which reads: 'Sex. Now that we have your attention, no shirt, no service'.
CHAPTER 2

ALCOHOL AND THE DIFFERENTIATION OF SOCIAL GROUPS

They've got some bloody good drinkers in the Northern Territory, from Darwin down to Alice Springs, they're always on a spree. From out on the Barkly Tablelands and across to VRD, they've got some bloody good drinkers in the Northern Territory (from a song by Ted Egan).

We got the habit of drinking. Once you're liquor, you're liquor (Tennant Creek Aborigine, September 1983).

To characterise the drinking activities of Tennant Creek people, both Aboriginal and European, and to document the links between the range of drinking facilities in the town and the variety of social groups which utilise these facilities is to attempt a sociology of drinking in an outback town. While the main task is to document the impact of alcohol on the social and physical well-being of the town, there is an additional issue of a sociological nature. It concerns the disjunction between the drinking behaviour of Aborigines and Europeans in Tennant Creek, as well as the perception of this disjunction by the more powerful and influential sector of the community.

A Marginal Town

Tennant Creek is a town on the edge of the desert. It can be hot and dusty and it is isolated. Although linked by a bitumen road to other towns, it is five hours drive from Alice Springs and a days drive from Darwin. The road sign outside the town once read 'Tennant Creek. Stay a Day', as if that was all the town could hope for from visitors. It is, then, geographically, socially and psychologically a marginal town whose residents strongly maintain their own reality, in order to keep at bay the desert which lies only a few kilometres from their doors.

Drinking and its associated conviviality is an integral part of such a maintenance of human social interactions. Through the social intercourse of drinking the town can make and remake its social alliances.

'There's only one way of drinking in Tennant Creek', I was told, 'and that is to drink a lot!' With few exceptions
people in Tennant acknowledged that there is a drinking 'problem' in the town, and its satellite town Warrego. Moreover, the views of these residents, impressionistic and personal as they are, included the European population as being part of the 'problem' and did not focus entirely on Aboriginal drinking. Having made such generalised and apparently egalitarian statements, many people then continued by directing my attention to specific groups in the town who were perceived to be problematic, both in the amount of liquor they consumed, and in the disfunctional after-effects of this consumption. Most commonly, (and again, impressionistically) my attention was drawn to Aboriginal people and to the meatworkers as illustrating the 'problem'. I shall examine later and in more detail the wider drinking scene, but this differentiation is a useful starting point.

Each group (the meatworkers and the Aborigines) shares certain common characteristics in the minds of the Tennant Creek populace. They are both considered to be transients and outsiders. They come into Tennant for limited periods of time and use its facilities. It is supposed that they acquire large amounts of money which they squander on gambling and alcohol. Their chosen drinking styles are described as noisy and demonstrative. Their chosen drinking locations are well-known and are to be avoided. Their family life is somewhat unorthodox and is probably 'suffering' as a result of their lifestyle. A certain amount of mythology has been created around the two groups, and actions performed by members of each group are seen to reinforce these perceptions so that they become self-perpetuating. By articulating such perceptions of where the 'real' drinking problem lies, Tennant Creek citizens deflected attention from themselves.

Within this mechanism for directing attention elsewhere lies a contradiction, for within Tennant Creek as a town also lies a high level of tolerance for heavy drinking. Such level of tolerance is illustrated by several examples. Medical staff at the hospital commented that when answering the standard questions on the admission form (do you smoke?, do you drink?, how much?) it was common for respondents to reply 'not much', or 'average' and then state that they drank eight or 10 cans of beer a night. Prominent members of the community from time to time are known to have been involved in alcohol-related incidents, which were accepted as normal by the community - I was told that elsewhere such a person would be removed from their position. Workers came out on strike when a fellow employee, a heavy drinker, was not re-employed because of his drunkenness at work. 'It could only happen in Tennant' I was told. Workmates tolerate and protect drunkenness on the job and gifts of alcohol are used to facilitate quick attention to
maintenance tasks. Attempts to deal with such matters provoked a 'closing of the ranks'. Workers are considered unfit for work only if they cannot walk and measuring work performance is 'impossible' in Tennant Creek according to personnel staff. The same informant stated that 'physically a man can be only 20 per cent and still appear to do his job'. Both personnel officers and others commented on the difficulty of talking about drink problems with those concerned, saying it was virtually impossible to criticise friends or relatives or workmates for their drinking habits.

'Everybody Gets Drunk'

A similar tolerance exists among Aboriginal people in the town. As elsewhere, Aborigines in Tennant, although often expressing concern about the violence associated with drinking, generally consider drinking to be the business of the individual and not as something upon which others have an influence. This is a matter of jurisdiction and control, and lies at the heart of the alcohol disorder issue for Aboriginal people. This question of tolerance and social control was illustrated by a discussion I had at The Village with a group of drinkers and non-drinkers. Several people were drunk at the small gathering but no attempt was made by others either to oust them or cut across their sometimes rambling comments. During the discussion, individuals deflected attention from themselves, drinkers criticised other drinkers but not for drinking, and drinking was roundly announced as being part of daily life:

1. We drink at the long house, [a large shed with a concrete floor some metres west of The Village] we camp there too. If people get hurt we have to walk to the hospital. We should have a 'phone box in here (but kids might bust it).

Do you worry about drinking?

2. We worry every day for grog. Every day. From Monday to Sunday I'm still drunk, and tomorrow I'll start again. Sunday I'm still drunk. Nothing else to do. We got the habit of drinking ....once you're liquor, you're liquor.

What do you drink, wine or beer?

3. We drink anything. They drinking metho at Darwin and dump camp.

5. There's a lot of woman do that. That other woman, her kids eat tomato sauce. You're picking on me all the time. Everybody gets drunk...why don't you pick on X who gets drunk? (from taped discussion, Village, 19 September 1983).

The statement of speaker number 1 showed that he was not concerned with how to prevent violence, but accepting that violence occurred, he complained that they had no telephone to contact the hospital. The speaker of statement 2 proclaimed not just drinking but drunkenness as desirable, acceptable and apparently inevitable ('once you're liquor, you're liquor'). Statements 3, 4 and 5 all involve accusations and deflections by stressing that another woman's children ate only tomato sauce (this was repeated several times). The woman who was speaking refused to be held responsible for her own children. How can one person be worse than another when 'everybody gets drunk'?

Both communities, Aboriginal and European, have their non-drinkers. Among Aboriginal people are those who are actively Christians, who attend the Aboriginal Inland Mission Services. Average attendance is estimated at about 40 people and the two missionaries said that their churchgoers were drawn from all the town camps. They also stated that several Aborigines who had been 'hopeless drunks' had become Christians (mentioning that 'about 30' had done so over the years) and who then referred to drinking as 'rubbish way' and 'not God's way'. Other, older non-drinkers are committed to establishing their outstations or devote much of their energy to traditional pursuits such as the performance of ritual, and organisations of bush trips for food and site visits. Survey work of an anthropological nature has been conducted over the last few years (for land claims and for the Alice Springs to Darwin railway and pipeline) and this in turn has encouraged the enactment of ritual performance and facilitated contact with traditional country.

Such activities, although they are not definitely anti-drinking in nature, serve to reinforce Aboriginal perceptions of the importance of their links to country (in that they provide a public recognition of such links), and strengthen traditional rights and powers within Aboriginal groups. By providing the opportunity for internal social bonds to be overtly legitimated and acted out, the work performed by Aborigines on such occasions helps to lessen the preoccupation with alcohol. It is ironic that activities associated with land rights, which provide such positive spin-offs for Aboriginal people (including the potential impact on drinking mentioned above) should be the cause of such defensiveness and intolerance on the part of Europeans in Tennant Creek.
Europeans in Tennant who do not drink, or who do drink very moderately, appear to be few in number. Such people may be guided by religious principles, others by health considerations. Two doctors at the hospital are non-drinkers - one as a means of making a 'statement' about drinking in Tennant, the other being vegetarian and committed to physical and social health.

Such moderation seems to be the exception rather than the rule, and alcohol is deemed a natural part of virtually every social occasion in the town.

'If you don't have grog available, you don't get the numbers' and 'if you don't drink, you don't get on socially' I was told. 'Getting on socially' is crucial in such a town, and perhaps even more so in smaller communities such as Warrego. Tennant Creek's social life in the 1930s was described to the historian Alan Powell as being when 'everyone was in everything and you knew everyone' (Powell 1982, 173). Certainly there are areas of social interaction which draw on a cross section of the community in Tennant, such as sporting activities and school events. However, the fact that everyone is in everything has its disadvantages in 1983, and social and racial groups in the town actively pursue mechanisms whereby they may be differentiated from each other. In order to do this, the licensed outlets in the town have tailored themselves to fit in with the needs of their clientele, and in some cases have actively pursued a particular 'image' in order to attract a particular clientele.

**Who Drinks Where, and Why**

There are three examples which have been selected, of such a differentiation of social interactions associated with alcohol: (1) Staff and Workers; (2) Miners and Meatworkers; (3) Aborigines and Whites.

**Staff and Workers**

The intimacy of work place and social environment in Tennant Creek and Warrego is often a trying one for employees and management. Consequently, there is often a quite dramatic split between social circles. At Warrego for example, approximately 500 people live in a small company-owned town in a variety of living conditions. There are 100 single men, many of who live in caravans or single mens' quarters - the latter being rows of demountables consisting of small single rooms, linked by a central breezeway. The caravan park of 50 caravans once had 150 filled sites (until late 1981) and contains a variety of dwellings, some with a decidedly make shift air. Houses in the town clearly show the status of their occupants. The workforce includes substantial numbers
of Yugoslavs and other new Australians; several men have Philippino wives. The women suffer from boredom and loneliness and there is not much social interaction between the families and single men. Many of the single men were described as 'just hanging on' to their jobs despite chronic drinking. They too are sometimes lonely and isolated individuals. A man who was found dead in the single men's quarters in February 1981 was suffering from chronic alcohol abuse. It was noted that no one recalled seeing him for some time (Coroner's Records, Alice Springs).

The town has a 'dry' mess, frequented mainly by single men from the quarters, as they lack cooking facilities. There is a takeaway food outlet locally known as the 'greasy spoon' and a local Asian woman has set up a Chinese takeaway. The two licensed premises, the Workers' Club and the Bowling Club, are frequented by the workers and the staff respectively. 'Everyone belongs' to the Workers' Club I was told, but not everyone drinks there.

Members of the management staff explained that the Bowling Club was a 'quieter' place to drink, and that the Workers' was where the heavy drinking went on. 'If you go to the Workers' you get hounded by people wanting jobs for their friends' one staff member told me. Despite these statements, there is now 'more mixing' between the two groups because the population has declined (from a workforce of over 1,000 in 1981 to 370 in 1983), and the Workers' has become more 'family' oriented, whereas it used to cater mainly for the single men. However, the mine workers still retain dominance of gambling activities, which are often accompanied by heavy drinking. There is a betting shop at Warrego which is patronised by about 20-30 men, 'they keep it going'.

There are also long poker games (reportedly up to two and a half days) which are conducted in the single mens quarters at which large amounts of money are reputed to change hands.

It was said of Warrego that if you did not drink when you first arrived, you would 'end up' drinking eight a night, no trouble! With such a dearth of recreational activities, or perhaps more accurately a dearth of group pressure to participate in those which are available (a tennis club has only 10 playing members; the swimming pool is 'mostly for kids'), there is 'built-in pressure to drink just to be part of the group', in the words of an employee. There was some evidence that workers indulged in binge drinking every six months or so - this was described as being in order to relieve the stress of working at Warrego and instead of going away on leave.
A similar differentiation in drinking environs occurs between the management and workers of Gilbertson's Meatworks. One hundred and seventy nine workers were employed in the plant just before its seasonal closure in September 1983, of which 150 were men and 29 women. The men have the reputation of being 'big drinkers and big spenders', and also of being strong union men. All workers at the Works belong to the AMIEU and there was a strike in 1983. As one of the management ruefully commented, 'we definitely can't go down the Goldies this year'.

The 'Goldies' (Goldfields Hotel) is the pub where the meatworkers drink. The management of the meatworks on the other hand, drink at Brian's Place, a tavern further along the main street. I was told that the management would never drink at any of the places frequented by workers, the Goldies, the Swan, or the Sporties club. Apart from the simmering industrial relations issues that keep the two on an uneasy level of interaction, the separate drinking spots were said to be necessary 'because they start hassling you about what you did at work that day'. This statement was based on an incident that had occurred when meatworkers were drinking in Brian's Place.

At one time Brian's Place instituted a 'Key Bar' with its own side entrance. Entry was restricted to those who had been given keys, and those who received keys were a selected group in the town. All staff from the meatworks were given keys. The manager of the tavern reportedly used the electoral roll in order to select those in a particular income bracket. However, the Bar opened only once and did not become a viable club. Some informants thought that this was because Tennant was too egalitarian; others believed that it failed because it coincided with a downturn in the town's economy.

The police in Tennant have their own club and the necessity for it was explained to me (by them) in terms of the difficulties faced by the police (in a small town) of unwinding and relaxing without adverse comment from the public. There has been some criticism of the exclusive bar for the police and some feeling in the town that they should 'mingle' more with the populace.

Doctors, policemen and managers in the town have all expressed a similar complaint; that they cannot leave their roles behind while they relax socially. Representatives of each group commented that they were approached by members of the community on work-related issues while in their off-duty hours, and drew attention to the tedious and sometimes stressful impact of such informal consultations. Such incidents reinforce the desire to interact in their own discrete social groups.
Miners and 'Meaties'

The Goldfields is well known to be the 'meaties' pub and since the closure of the meatworks, it has taken a 50 per cent drop in bar sales. Takeaway sales have not been so affected because the 'meaties' are 'bar drinkers' (pers. comm. Keith Hallet). The front bar of the Goldfields is big enough to allow large groups of people to drink and interact freely. 'It's group work and group drink' a meatworker said. The Tennant Creek Hotel (the Swan) on the other hand, is composed of a series of smaller bars. The Swan is known to be the miner's pub and the 'townies' pub (the Mayor of Tennant Creek, for example uses the Swan).

The most significant difference between the two groups is that the 'meaties' are virtually all men from interstate. It is mandatory for all workers to be union members and the union only gives membership to skilled workers. Few local people have the necessary skills or experience and so only approximately 20 out of the workforce of 179 were local people (pers. comm., Tony Campbell). The Meatworks does not, then, benefit Tennant Creek as far as employment is concerned, and this is the cause of some resentment in the town. Workers stay the season (usually 6 or 7 months of the year) and then return to their homes states. The skilled men, (boners for example) have no trouble finding work down south; others used to stay and go on the 'rock and roll' (dole) in Tennant until the season started again. A job the following season is assured, as the same men are called each year. Pay is on a piece work tally, and the skilled men make good money (eg slicers made $27,000 in 1982 for 7 months work). It may be that their ostentatious spending adds to the reputation of the meaties. Gambling is also a feature of their spending pattern and there is a thriving two up school outside the gates of the Works. I was told that the meaties were 'big blowers' - they spend their money quickly. Raffles are popular among meaties and at the Goldies at the end of the season, workers were known to be raffling off their possessions in order to gather enough money to return south. Clashes between the two groups were referred to in a generalised way - especially when the mines and meatworks were at full operation - however I could collect no firm data on such incidents.

Aborigines and Whites

Perhaps the most obvious of the differentiation of groups in Tennant Creek as far as drinking is concerned is that between Aboriginal people and Europeans. Apart from purchasing takeaway alcohol, there is only one venue where numbers of Aboriginal people in the town drink - the front bar of the Swan. Until early 1983 Aboriginal people also drank at the Goldfields in a section of the front bar which was
Plate 3: The Tennant Creek or 'Swan' Hotel. The front bar opens directly onto the main street.

Plate 4: The Goldfields Hotel was known as the Meatworkers' pub.
divided off from the main area. As already stated this section of the bar was subsequently closed down. Aborigines in Tennant have, then, two choices: to drink 'at home' (or outside the 2 km limit) or to drink in one bar at the Swan. Their choice of takeaway outlets is limited too - because in general they are not members of Tennant Creek clubs (Memorial, Sporties, etc.) they may not purchase takeaway alcohol from them. Aboriginal takeaways are purchased primarily at the Headframe and the Goldfields drive-in bottle departments. Tennant Creek Trading is not patronised much by Aboriginal people because of its location (not central) and the minimum purchase rule (9 litres alcohol - 1 carton beer), both of which make purchasing alcohol without transport difficult. Some 'town' Aborigines (many of mixed descent, with government jobs, or adopted by European families) belong to the town's clubs (eg the Sporties) but these people are unusual and are treated by Europeans as being exceptional Aborigines (or, as one explained it, 'Aborigines who are really like white fellers').

As a rule, then, Aborigines and Whites do not drink at bars alongside one another. We know that this is also the case at Wauchope for example. The two groups purchase and consume their liquor separately, apart from the exceptional Aborigines (mentioned above) and also some exceptional Europeans who live on the fringes of white society and who maintain defacto or marriage relationships with Aboriginal women. Whites, then, do not often see Aborigines in the act of drinking; they see only the end result, the state of drunkenness.

Europeans have by virtue of their status and compliance with dress requirements, a comparatively wide choice of drinking venues - two restaurants, two taverns, two hotels and five clubs. As we have seen, this variety of establishments enables the Europeans to sort themselves into chosen social and class groupings, so that they may avoid encounters with certain others (eg management and workers, police and public). Aboriginal people do not have the same range of environments at their disposal. This means that grievances, annoyances and disputes may not be dissipated by a distribution between premises (ie controlled, bounded environments rather than the open air) as they are with Europeans. Rather, those Aboriginal people who wish to drink in a bar are all forced to use one small room for this purpose. The small size and mixed clientele of the Swan's front bar has been criticised by several Aborigines to whom I spoke. In a tight area, containing determined drinkers who are inevitably of a variety of language groups, visitors and residents, the slightest push or wrong word is potentially volatile. The door of the front bar opened directly onto the main street, with no entrance hall or doorway - drinkers and arguers spill out onto the main
Plate 5: The 'Long House'. A popular Aboriginal drinking place south of the village.

Plate 6: The Two Kilometre law has lowered the number of drinkers around the Headframe Bottle Shop.
street (Paterson street) constantly, where they are in full view of vigilant citizens or cruising police. The highest number of 2 km law infringements is recorded from outside the Swan (23 cases, or 12 per cent of total offences). Over a five month period (June - October 1983) 235 people were taken into protective custody from the Swan Hotel, thus constituting by far the most common spot for such apprehensions to be made in the town. One wonders what would be the result if the 'townies' and the 'meaties' had been forced to drink together in such an enclosed space.

Aboriginal people partially overcome this problem by choosing to drink in groups in a variety of drinking spots around the town (despite the 2 km law instituted in January 1983). Many of these places are outside the Special Purpose Leases which constitute the official town camps (and which are 'private' places and thus exempt from the law). Aboriginal people drink at their camps on these 'unofficial' sites, as well as in the caravan park on the north-eastern edge of town, and at the "dump camp" behind The Village and near the dump, on the south-eastern edge of town. There are drinking places along the drainage ditch which lies north-south on the eastern side of the main street (this is out of sight of cruising police vehicles). A more central spot which is more vulnerable as it is only partially hidden, is a small patch of waste ground immediately south of the Headframe Bottle Shop - here there is limited shade, some grass, and a water tap, all which are important features. A large open-sided shed on scrub-land east of (but not part of) The Village lease, is another Aboriginal drinking place, known by them as 'the long house'. This shed is cool, breezy and has a water tap. People camp under it from time to time. The long house hosts large communal drinking groups of up to 20 men. It is a short walk to the hospital from here, and approximately 1.5 km to the Headframe. The police do not interfere with drinking here unless they receive a complaint (pers. comm., Allan Clark). However, drinking places have been undoubtedly reduced in number since the implementation of the 2 km law, and people have been driven to the scrub rather than the town. As Basil Sansom noted in his work on Darwin fringe camps, 'a running calculus of risk and danger is a necessity because fringe people while they stay in town are at a structured disadvantage' (Sansom 1980, 178).

This is now particularly so, since public drinking is illegal and the whole town is within 2 km of liquor outlets. Drinking places this year have been selected to minimise risk and danger from surveillance and arrest. There is, however, little evidence that such sites are chosen in order to minimise physical risk, as occurs in other Aboriginal communities (Brady and Palmer 1984).
The importance of the 'fringe' camps as well as the official town leases is clear, as this excerpt from the House of Representatives Standing Committee enquiry into their status shows:

... camps and fringe communities on small reserves near towns are regarded by Aboriginals as black refuges - whether for Aboriginals to drink alcohol free from police surveillance, or as a place for evicted or homeless people to go to stay, or for casual visitors to town to stay at. The importance of preserving such places and the impact of a final dispossession (abolishing such reserves) would be considerable (H of R 10 December 1981, 1288).

Europeans, because their group drinking is conducted in ways which are less visible and considered to be (on the whole) socially acceptable (pubs, parties, barbecues in private homes or in recreation areas) do not have to run the gauntlet of the police in the same way. Nevertheless there are times when European drinking events come to the attention of the authorities - police were called out on four occasions in October 1983 to attend to noisy parties.

Ali Curung and the 'Visiting' Drinkers

Ali Curung people are closely associated with Tennant Creek, as the four main language groups who live there are also represented in the town. Many residents have close relatives in Tennant and it is natural and necessary that Ali Curung people should travel into Tennant to accomplish various ends. The significant factor associated with Ali Curung though, in the minds of many Tennant Creek people, is that it is a dry area and liquor may not be taken into the settlement without a permit. It was thought by some Europeans, that Aborigines would break into the homes of Europeans known to keep alcohol in order to obtain it illegally. This has not happened at Ali Curung (pers. comm. Sgt Alan Mitchell). At present no Aboriginal person has a permit. Consequently, there is a popular belief that many of the drunks around Tennant are Ali Curung people who come to town to drink. Many people, both European and Aboriginal, also believe that much of the fighting and disorder associated with drinking revolves around Ali Curung men.

The debate about whether 'dry' areas force Aboriginal drinkers into the towns has been going on for some time, and is discussed at length in the NT Liquor Commission's Report on Restricted Areas 1982a. The evidence collected by the Commission did not back up such claims. Evidence presented in the Barrow Creek Hotel case showed that the numbers of Aboriginal people who travel to town for their liquor are
quite small (NT Liquor Commission 1982b, 15), and Ali Curung people who had moved into Tennant numbered only 15 or 20 out of a population of about 600 (NT Liquor Commission 1982b, 31). Ali Curung people usually stay at The Village when in town, although at least one family has relatives in a Warra-mungu Pabulu house in town with whom they stay. Certainly The Village does host many drinkers, and has experienced fighting and damage to houses as a result. Figures on protective custody cases over a five month period (June - October 1983) show in the majority of cases, people giving The Village as their address — although these may be the same individuals receiving protective custody on several occasions.

However, the blaming of 'outsiders' for disruptive behaviour is a common method of deflecting the unpleasant and unwelcome task of intervention and is a common theme among both Aboriginal people and Europeans. A discussion of this 'deflection principle' will be referred to later in the report. Despite the fact that a proportion of disruptive drinkers in Tennant may come from elsewhere — mentioned in the Liquor Commission hearings at Barrow Creek (NT Liquor Commission 1982b, 31) — it is also apparent that local people do get themselves arrested and suffer from physical assault through drinking. Europeans who dwell on Aboriginal movement into Tennant assuming that it is solely for the purpose of drinking, often do not appreciate the complexity and variety of reasons behind decisions to make a visit into town.

There are, for example, ceremonial reasons to visit the town. Hagen et al. (1982, 271) noted that large scale ceremonies were held east of The Mulga in January and February 1982 which involved some 70 women and 50 men from places including Ali Curung. Bell (1982b, 204) reports that an Ali Curung woman moved into Tennant Creek in order to avoid sorcery induced illness.

A strong argument against the notion that people go into Tennant in order to drink is that Ali Curung people have access to alcohol only 20 minutes drive from the settlement, at Wycliff. Wauchope, further north on the Stuart Highway, is also a source of alcohol. The local police sergeant at the time of the Liquor Commission's Barrow Creek investigations gave evidence that Ali Curung drinkers went to Tennant Creek only if they could not obtain alcohol at Wycliff or Wauchope.

Between January 1981 and September 1983, 42 arrests were made for taking liquor onto the restricted area of Ali Curung. Thirty six of these arrests (86 per cent) involved alcohol affected people. In 1983 though, there have been only nine cases of taking liquor into Ali Curung, suggesting
that people are either not getting caught, or are happy to
drink outside the settlement.

Data presented later in this report will show that
considerable numbers of protective custodies were of local
people. People from Ali Curung have to visit town for many
reasons, and have every right to do so. If they are men and
women who drink then inevitably they will drink while in
Tennant Creek. The evidence suggests, however, that only
small numbers of people move into Tennant from Ali Curung
for the sole purpose of drinking.

Rules by Which to Drink

A considerable amount of research into cross-cultural styles
of drinking has concluded that social drinking can serve to
construct and organise social relationships, assist in group
solidarity and enable people to create and discharge debts
to one another (Frake 1964; Heath 1975, 28; Collman 1979).
A paper by Mobbs (1982b, 9) however, questions such a posi-
tive analysis of the effects of drinking. There is a current
trend in Aboriginal studies, she points out, which
emphasises the beneficial aspects of drinking interactions,
often to the exclusion of patently damaging after-effects.

Drinking has also been shown to take place within
structured social limits within which certain 'rules' are
observed (Sansom 1980), although the state of drunkenness
also allows rules to be broken while providing a readymade
excuse (MacAndrew and Egerton's notion of 'time out', 1969).
All drinkers tread the uneasy line between drinking accord-
ing to some rules and being 'licensed' to break others.

In Tennant Creek it is not a matter by and large, of
whether you drink. It is the matter of how you drink which
is at issue. This lies at the core of the apparent contra-
diction in the town's attitude towards alcohol. On the one
hand, it is expected, encouraged and rationalised that
members of such an isolated outback community drink, and not
always in moderation. However only certain types of drinking
behaviour are acceptable to the townspeople, and particular-
ly by their more powerful spokespeople.

Let us examine briefly the drinking styles of the two
racial groups in Tennant Creek. European drinkers organise
themselves for the drinking act in ways which often divide
the sexes from one another. I have already mentioned that
the 'service' clubs, Apex, Rotary, Lions and the Freemasons
and Buffaloes are popular in the town, and are male organi-
sations. They enable men to drink together. Despite (or
perhaps because of) the 'frontier' image of Tennant, women
do not congregate in large numbers in the public bars of the
hotels - or at least they did not over the period of my
observations (see also Sansom 1980, 179). On several occasions I was the only female in the bar. European drinking behaviour is ordered (and sometimes disordered) by dress requirements — although these are, on the whole, extremely casual in Tennant Creek.

After all, a 'dress' requirement of thongs and singlet is certainly minimal. However, dress requirements are in use in the town, for example at the Sporties Club, to differentiate the 'lounge' end of the bar from the other end. However membership in itself is an entry requirement and in a sense serves a similar purpose to that of the imposition of dress requirements. Prohibitive notices outside premises are placed there by proprietors, in an attempt to discourage undesirable people and behaviour (the newsagency displays a sign prohibiting eating, drinking and smoking inside the shop).

European drinking environments also have a diffused focus — they contain juke boxes, video machines, poker machines, TVs, pool, darts; people play bingo, compete in tournaments and make speeches while drinking alcohol. A bar with many 'features' is considered with interest — the main bar at Wauchope is a good example. It is decorated with the paraphernalia of drinking, photographs of drinking sessions and their aftermath, cartoons, newspaper cuttings, coats of arms donated by government departments (presumably grateful drinkers), commemorative ties from sporting teams. A 'credit board' hangs behind the main bar upon which customers pin money (ranging from $2 to $50 notes) identified by their signature. This enables the purchase of a drink on a future occasion when cash might be short. All these items celebrate the drinking culture of the long road north. The Aboriginal bar at Wauchope is, by comparison, uncluttered and functional, with whitewashed walls and tins of foods on display. Another aspect of European drinking style in a small town such as Tennant, is the concept of 'regulars'. The barman know their regulars, and pour their usual drinks the moment they enter the bar. At the inquest for a local man who died of natural causes in 1980, a Tennant Creek barman was called to give evidence and told the coroner that the deceased had looked ill that day, and had not taken his usual six cans home with him. A request for a non-alcoholic drink (lime and bitters) or a slightly unusual drink (a 'dry and dry') can produce a momentary fluster for a Tennant Creek barman. The range is simply divided into the colours of the cans: 'a blue' or 'a green' or 'a white'. A newcomer is immediately noted, and one's business in the town soon discovered.

Although there are 'benders' (binges), and these were mentioned with particular reference to Warrego men, it seems that a regular nightly presence often in the same spot is a
marked feature of European drinking in Tennant. 'If X was here now, he'd tell me I was standing in his spot' I was told at the Memo Club. 'Telecom always use those tables, and Works and Jerks have that end of the bar as far as here'. The Memorial Club is situated on the western side of town not far from Telecom at the post office and the Transport and Works ('works and jerks') depot.

Fights occur, but are not generally acceptable behaviour. 'Larking around' (definition unclear), however, is a socially sanctioned behaviour for Europeans, although it can have unfortunate consequences. A youth died at the Sporties Club in 1980 while 'half drunk' after hitting his head on the floor. Drunken Europeans, it was thought by several informants, were taken home by their mates, or reached home (somehow) by driving (the breathalyser unit was said to be easily visible at night, and thus avoidable). Most Europeans do not have far to drive home - the serious alcohol-related motor vehicle accidents (MVAs) occur on the Stuart and Barkly Highways. However people do get caught under the 0.08 legislation, and in a sample day at Tennant Creek court, six of the eight Europeans were appearing on charges of exceeding 0.08. Their blood alcohol levels ranged from 0.140 to 0.290 (proceedings at Tennant Creek court house 20 September 1983 before Mr J Murphy, SM). A policeman reported that many Europeans in Tennant Creek become extremely abusive when asked to take a breathalyser test.

A brief outline of Aboriginal 'style' in the drinking procedure shows some marked differences. Both men and women drink in the one bar available at the Swan, and in drinking groups at camps. However, I have also seen men only drinking sessions in process at the long house. There are no dress requirements for an Aboriginal drinking session, and the Swan's patrons may have bare feet. Aborigines then, do not utilise their attire in order to differentiate their internal groupings. At the time of research in 1983, the Aboriginal bar at the Swan had no distractions - no TV, video or pool, no music or games.

The entire proceedings, then, focus solely on the consumption of alcohol and on interpersonal behaviour. The barmen and liquor sellers of the town know the majority of Aboriginal drinkers by name, but their discriminations are more oriented to their knowledge of an individual's likely behaviour than to his choice of liquor. The chosen alcoholic beverages are few. At the Swan bar white cans (Carlton), and wine (Moselle in plastic cups), are sold but no fortified wine is available. At the takeaway outlets, Aboriginal people buy white cans (usually by the half carton), flagons of Moselle, bottles (no flagons) of fortified wine and small bottles of rum ('Bundy'). People mix
'Bundy' with Moselle to create a fortified wine - they call it a 'big bummer'. Down the track at Wycliff and Wauchope no fortified wine may be sold and beer sales are restricted to half a carton per man per day.

It is commonly assumed that Aborigines are all binge drinkers and that the 'drink and bust' pattern arose from prohibition days, secrecy and seasonal lay-offs with large pay packets. Beckett (1965) and Millar and Leung (1974) certainly give evidence of these patterns. This research was neither detailed enough nor lengthy enough for me to form any firm opinion on binges among Tennant Creek Aborigines. However, the takeaway sales from one outlet showed remarkably little variation from week to week and more money was spent on alcohol in an off-pay week.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4 weeks in October - one outlet</th>
<th>Takeaway sales - Aboriginal people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st week (pay) total sales -</td>
<td>$2,211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd week total sales -</td>
<td>$2,940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd week (pay) total sales -</td>
<td>$2,697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th week total sales -</td>
<td>$2,324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$10,172</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is impossible however, to draw any firm conclusions from such a limited sample of time and liquor outlet. Occasions when large amounts of alcohol are sold appear to be related more to the influx of Aborigines from elsewhere (ie in January - March when the station workers are not working and ceremonial activity is at its peak) than to the same number of people drinking more alcohol.

Fights and altercations are common when Aborigines in Tennant Creek drink. As in other locations, intervention occurs (if at all) only when weapons are picked up and when the issue at hand and the location of the dispute are conducive to intervention. Bell and Ditton (1980, 70-74) have documented the taking of 'partners' in fights in Tennant and the role of women. Women at The Mulga told me that they prevented people from picking up rocks when they were fighting and phoned the police for help. They added that when the police go away, the fighting starts again. Drunks get shouted at by others, usually from a safe distance. Like Europeans, Aborigines realise that drunken people are likely to perform irrational and sometimes violent actions, and do not want to become involved. People hide potential weapons when a situation looks volatile. The view of drunks as being 'beyond reason' (and thus being difficult or impossible to influence or control) is supported by the use
of the term waranga by the Warramungu. Waranga is used to describe one who is drunk, for it also means 'deaf', 'deformed' and covers the range of meanings associated with the unconventional or atypical. As with the Pitjantjatjara term pina wiya ('no ears' - indicating that they will not listen so there is no use in trying) the term absolves both the actor and the observer from responsibility. Drunks are also said to be 'mad', a term which incorporates a notion of social and emotional incapacity rather than anger.

Fights do not only arise as a result of 'intertribal conflicts' which is the common assumption among Europeans in Tennant. Naturally, there are years-long grievances between the different language groups - some of which, it should be stated, have been precipitated by European interference. For example, the Warlpiri immigrants at Ali Curung have 'paid heavily in cash and ritual exchange items for their residence at Warrabri' (Bell 1982b, 203). That the Warlpiri ever moved so far east at all is due to their fearful dispersal after the Coniston massacre. Nevertheless arguments of a more personal nature also come to the force when people drink together - in fact this point was stressed to me by more than one informant. Refusing to give another man a drink was cited as a cause for a fight, and 'woman trouble' as another. By suggesting that 'tribal' differences are the sole cause of fights to the exclusion of all other factors is to suggest that the structure of Aboriginal culture itself is intrinsically to blame for the trouble (ie blaming the victim). The repeated focussing on 'tribal conflicts' by Europeans in Tennant took on a decidedly derogatory air.

Fights then, begin and are conducted according to certain rules. Violence is directed towards a limited range of people. For example, despite the regular number of inebriated Aboriginal people who frequent the area around the Headframe and the supermarket where Europeans shop, there have been no violent incidents directed towards Europeans, to my knowledge. A large number of European informants, while complaining about the 'look of things' have added that they never feel frightened of assault. As one prominent member of the white community explained, 'there's nothing worse than tourists seeing gins screaming and bucks fighting ... but there's no danger of whites getting hurt ... the blacks here are OK ....'.

Access to vehicles is a problem for Tennant Creek Aborigines, who as a consequence accomplish their drinking arrangements on foot. This means that they constitute more noticeable aggregations of people from the point of view of the public and police, and have more opportunity to attract police attention while covering the distance from pub, liquor outlet or drinking place to home camp. This issue of
Figure 3: Map to show areas claimed in the Warramungu Land Claim
visibility has been considered in detail elsewhere (Eggleston 1976, 19).

These factors constitute a disservice to Aboriginal drinkers who may be, for a variety of cultural and political reasons, both more visible and more audible than other Tennant Creek citizens (see Williams v Pinnuck 1983). Not only this, their visibility and audibility is open to interpretation by other citizens. As Heath points out, it is altogether probable that Europeans today (like early missionaries) misinterpret some social forms (eg shouting, calling out) in a way that makes 'the outcomes of drunkenness among non-western people appear more socially disruptive than the natives themselves felt was the case' (Heath 1975, 37).

Racial Tension

As a postscript to this section on social groups, it is necessary to point out that the most obvious division between social groups, that between Aborigines and Europeans, is frequently a source of racial tension. Evidence of this racial tension in the town is presented below. It is perhaps noteworthy that the concern expressed about Aboriginal drinking arose in the early months of 1983, immediately after the land claim hearings had ended, and at a time when the local paper carried letters and items expressing racial intolerance.

In November 1982 the hearing of the Warramungu Land Claim began in Tennant Creek before the Land Commissioner, Mr Justice Kearney. Having lost both 'Reserves' proclaimed for them to pastoral, mining and urban development, and having been 'shuffled from one piece of marginal territory to another, herded together in refuge-like camps on land which is not theirs' (Bell 1982a, 1), this was an attempt by Aborigines to gain title over what little land was left available to claim. Claims may be made to unalienated Crown Land under the Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act 1976, and accordingly land which lies predominantly east of Tennant Creek as far as Dalmore Downs was claimed (see map). However, the proceedings were halted after two days when the NT government announced that it had alienated eight of the 10 portions of the claim (see Bell 1982a for a full account).

Many Europeans in Tennant Creek found the notion of a land claim on nearby land very threatening, and informants report that there were many rumours and much misinformation circulating at the time of the claim. For example I was told that 'they' were claiming the hobby farms which lie on the outskirts of Tennant. These hobby farms were, in fact, exempted from the claim in a show of Aboriginal willingness to accommodate Whites' needs (Bell 1982b, 8). A certain amount of racial tension was aroused, fuelled by a locally
Plate 7: The Pebble was located here in 1980 as a tourist attraction. After Aboriginal objections, it was later removed.

Plate 8: Aboriginal shoppers were forced to sit on the ground outside the supermarket after the removal of benches.
organised 'Concerned Citizens' group who campaigned against the claim. Meetings were organised and much publicity given to the group. Throughout January, February and March of 1983, letters and articles appeared in the local paper claiming that land rights were synonymous with apartheid and, more significantly, that the claim 'will seriously affect the future development and prosperity of Tennant Creek'. (Tennant Creek and District Times, 21 March 1983). Anti-land rights material also appeared on 25 February and 5 March.

It is hard to ascertain how widespread was the support for the anti-land rights (anti-Aboriginal) movement in the town: after the first meeting, public support evidently waned. However there have been other incidents in the town which have roused Aboriginal resentment. One of these involved the installation in March 1980 of one of the 'Pebbles' from north of the town as a tourist attraction in the centre of town. Aboriginal people objected to the rock being removed and demanded its replacement. A bitter argument developed in the press and finally, realising that the negative publicity would harm the town, the Tourist Promotion Association and Town Council had the Pebble replaced. A prominent Aboriginal man died in the meantime, and his death is associated by local Aborigines with the disturbance caused by the removal of the rock.

The creation of a recreation lake, the Mary Ann Dam, also provoked Aboriginal/White tension - Aboriginal people were not consulted (so I was told) about the flooding of the area; and the Dam is said by them to have affected the water level of Tjunkurakuru water hole. The dam was opened in April 1981, and 'improvements' continue to be made to the area (Tennant and District Times, 16 September 1983).

Some Europeans in Tennant Creek expressed bewilderment that Aborigines seemed to want 'the best of both worlds', in that they enjoyed the benefits of town and European goods whilst also 'demanding' land rights. Those expressing such attitudes rarely acknowledge that the businesses of the town benefit by receiving thousands of dollars worth of Aboriginal business just as businesses do in Alice Springs (Heppel and Wigley 1981, 42-47). Attitudes in Tennant Creek vary widely from those Europeans who utilise such terms as 'gins', 'bucks' and 'picaninnies' with impunity, to those who frankly admitted that reactions to the land claim revealed 'sheer racism' on the part of Whites.

Summary

This section has examined the organisation of drinking within the social and racial groups in Tennant Creek. We have seen that, to some extent, a double standard exists
whereby social life in town is resolutely centred around alcohol, whilst members of the community direct attention to 'others' among whom, it is said, the 'real' problem lies. Frequently, Aboriginal drinking is denounced in this way. It is clear that the rules by which to drink, which are established by each racial group, provide clues to the understanding of the intolerance of one group towards another. Greater visibility, audibility, and the lack of formalised avenues for intra-group differentiation whilst drinking, mark Aboriginal drinking sessions. Europeans, on the other hand, exist within a culture of outback isolation which proclaims and rationalises the rightness of their style of drinking and drunkenness. Clubs, organisations and a variety of premises provide choices for Europeans in Tennant Creek within which their friendship, work and class groupings can be reinforced. Aboriginal drinkers have limited formal venues and must construct their social groupings elsewhere, at a decreasing number of 'safe' drinking places out of sight of police and public.
CHAPTER 3

DRINKING AND SOCIAL DISORDER

One should not, like rustics who have not been to court or lived among refined and honourable people, relieve oneself without shame or reserve in front of ladies, or before the doors and windows of court chambers or other rooms. Rather, everyone ought at all times and in all places to show himself reasonable, courteous, and respectful in word and gesture (Written in 1570 from The History of Manners, Elias, 1982).

In this section and the one that follows I will present quantitative data gathered from a variety of official sources, in an attempt to document the extent of the impact of alcohol on people living in or around Tennant Creek.

In this description of social disorder associated with alcohol, I shall draw on data collected from the following sources: Division of Community Welfare, Police Force, and the Magistrate sitting at Tennant Creek.

Definitions of Anti-Social Acts

The performance of certain drunken acts by Aboriginal people has been the cause of some public concern in Tennant Creek. Nevertheless, while pursuing my investigations of these events, I found a surprisingly wide range of reactions from Europeans in the town, ranging from phlegmatic acceptance to outrage. Among Aboriginal people themselves many actions deemed unacceptable by Europeans pass unremarked, while others are frowned upon as bringing their people into disrepute. There are also behaviours by Europeans that Aboriginal people find offensive. These appear to be rarely raised in a public forum.

While consideration should be given to public expressions of 'concern' about Aboriginal drinking behaviour in public, it is also important to place concerns in context. Members of the European community, particularly those in public positions, often feel that they are there to uphold values and maintain order in the face of the rough and ready temperament of an outback town. Tennant Creek is a small oasis both geographically and metaphorically, in an unrelenting environment. It is important to many residents, that standards be maintained and that civilised behaviour is imposed upon this potentially chaotic situation. Evidence
Plate 9: Paterson Street, Tennant Creek, has little shade. The benches are rarely used.

Plate 10: A shady entrance in the main street. Local businessmen voiced objections to Aborigines sitting here.
of this lies in the degree of concern expressed about 'bad language', about litter, and in the preoccupation with the beautification of this 'tidy town'. Notions of order and civilization were expressed to me with reference to the good old days when The Village had grass and trees, and when Warrabri settlement grew vegetables in extensive market gardens. Moveable camps, loose gatherings of Aborigines in central areas of town, and public displays of dispute and argument threaten this desired order.

Behaviour which is found offensive by Europeans includes drunks urinating in public, lying around in public, overt sexual behaviour, fighting and swearing, and generally shouting and milling around outside the pub and supermarket. Other Aboriginal behaviour not necessarily associated with alcohol is also found offensive by some town people. Examples of this sort of action are - sitting around on the ground or on the now-removed benches outside the supermarket; sitting, eating and drinking in sheltered doorways of main street premises; washing at taps and fire hydrants; taking short cuts through the school grounds; and sitting in the shade of trees on the school oval.

In order to prevent some of these things from happening, some business owners have made, or are planning to make, structural changes to their premises. For example, one shop owner is planning to remove a shaded precinct in front of premises he owns in order to prevent Aborigines from sitting there. The spot is popular as it is next to a takeaway chicken shop. Alleyways have been blocked off to prevent drinkers from having access to secluded backs of buildings. This has occurred at the side of the Goldfields Hotel. Perhaps the most noticeable change that occurred during my research was the removal of benches from outside the supermarket. The benches, in a shaded and central spot, had been the resting and talking place for Aborigines doing their shopping and other business in town. Because the supermarket is virtually next door to the Headframe bottle shop, some Aboriginal drinkers would inevitably be in the area around the entrance.

The overnight removal of the benches caused a stir in town - European reactions on the whole were of relief, it would 'stop them from hanging around' because the provision of seating 'encouraged' this.

The Aboriginal people now use the same area, but sit, amid their shopping, on the ground.

From some residents of the town I gained the impression that large numbers of Aboriginal people are disliked in themselves. People spoke negatively of the influx of outsiders from Ali Curung, Hooker Creek, and the Tablelands
stations at certain times of the year. Some even gave the impression that a return to the old days when 'they' were only allowed in on certain days would not be such a bad idea. The layout of the central area of the town is such that there is the minimum of shaded, watered areas where Aboriginal people - on foot, with shopping and children, some who are visitors - may sit and talk. There are no public toilets in the main street. There are roadside benches at certain central locations, all in broad sunlight. Two small nature reserves on the main street are the only grassed areas where Aboriginal people may congregate. The hospital, however, has a pleasant shady grassed frontage which provides a sitting place for patients and visitors.

Public Disorder

Arguing and fighting in public are not usually considered as problematic by Aboriginal people. A public fight in fact has certain by-products associated with it: bystanders are enabled to prevent (or attempt to prevent) serious physical harm, to shout encouragement or dissuasion, to intervene, disarm, or to take partners. As Sansom explains, social exposure is a necessity of camp life (to keep people 'on guard' of word and deed); and fights are other people's business to be watched carefully (Sansom 1980, 104-5). For those reasons people often come running to see a fight. In fieldwork observations in other parts of Australia I have seen people fetched to attend a fight, and watched others arrange themselves for a grandstand view - usually at a safe distance. A fight constitutes an event in a sometimes mundane daily round. Long-term European residents of Tennant Creek, however, know that such fights are unlikely to involve Whites, and their concern is for the image of the town: 'people from down south don't put up with that sort of thing - we've got to protect our businesses', I was told.

Demonstrable actions such as fights can also involve breakages, and several main street retailers I spoke to complained of broken windows as a result of Aboriginal drunkenness.

On investigation it emerged, however, that a proportion of broken windows were as a result of 'smash and grab' burglaries - not necessarily associated with either Aborigines or alcohol.

In some of these cases the race of the offenders remains unknown, but police records show that 75 per cent of break, enter and steal charges from January - September 1983, were laid against Europeans rather than Aborigines. Certainly many windows are smashed as a result of drinkers' altercations - the Swan Hotel had had all its windows broken over a six week period (September/October 1983) according to
the owner, and he is replacing them with perspex which 'pops' out and can be put back. Large plate-glass windows are expensive and some businesses are now installing 'armourplate' windows which do not break. They are more expensive to buy but last longer. The Pioneer milk bar has a door and two windows which are still boarded up four months after the breakage. The bar has large plate glass windows which cost $600 a piece - not a good design for a place that attracts youth and after-pub goers.

In an attempt to establish how widespread window breakage was in Tennant Creek (amid widely differing reports), I collected figures on the expenditure on new glass ordered for the town.

Costs of glass replacement in Tennant Creek have fluctuated over the years and these changes were interpreted as follows by the proprietor of the firm which is the main source of glass in the town:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cost (1975)</th>
<th>Cost (1980)</th>
<th>Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>$4600-$6700</td>
<td></td>
<td>Many transients in town as a result of Cyclone Tracy; rise in crime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>$4700-$6500</td>
<td></td>
<td>New housing - youth gangs breaking windows.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>$5800-$6800</td>
<td></td>
<td>Median strip in town created of rocks, which were used as missiles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td></td>
<td>$5900</td>
<td>Rocks in median strip replaced with grass.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td></td>
<td>$4800-$7600</td>
<td>Partly price rise, but also drunkenness and vandalism (Aboriginal and European). Breakages at Government Centre, Swan, Pioneer etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total cost of glass replacement = $64,700 over 10 year period, 1973-1983.

Break, enter and steal offences are similarly not necessarily associated with alcohol. Over the period January 1981-September 1983, 61 such offences were proceeded against. Of these, 16 (26 per cent) were committed by alcohol affected people. However, Table 3.1 shows that when Aborigines committed break, enter and steal offences, it was more likely that they were affected by alcohol than were non-Aborigines. More Europeans were charged with the offence than Aboriginal people; however it must be remembered that Aborigines are still over-represented in these figures.
because they are a small proportion of the total population (19 per cent) of the town.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1</th>
<th>Break enter and steal charges and alcohol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aborigines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol affected</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-alcohol affected</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol affected</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-alcohol affected</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Malicious damage offences, on the other hand, were more likely to be associated with alcohol than not, and the majority of cases (43 or 60 per cent of the total number of cases) involved Aborigines. Over the period January 1981-September 1983, 72 of these offences were proceeded against and of these 44 (61 per cent) were committed by alcohol affected people. These figures are given in Table 3.2(a) and (b).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.2(a)</th>
<th>Malicious damage charges and alcohol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aborigines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol affected</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-alcohol affected</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol affected</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-alcohol affected</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2(a) shows that during the period 1981 to September 1983 there has been an increase in malicious damage charges among alcohol affected Aborigines. Over this period of almost three years, 61 per cent of the malicious damage charges were associated with alcohol.
Table 3.2(b)

Malicious damage charges affected by alcohol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1981</th>
<th></th>
<th>1982</th>
<th></th>
<th>1983</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>affected</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not affected</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Police Data

The interpretation of criminal statistics is problematic—they reveal only those activities which come to the attention of the police, and are highly susceptible to increased police activity (either because of heightened surveillance or changes in deployment). Nevertheless it would be foolish to reject them entirely for these reasons. Jock Young discusses the disadvantages of a wholesale rejection of criminal statistics (on the grounds that they merely provide a head-count of those who have been labelled), saying that they do contribute to the debate on fluctuations in the crime-rate (Young 1975, 67, 72).

Presented in Table 3.3 are data from police records on offences committed in Tennant Creek over the period January 1981-September 1983.

Table 3.3

Total alcohol related offences, 1981-September 1983

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1981</th>
<th></th>
<th>1982</th>
<th></th>
<th>1983</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons proceeded against</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Streets etc.</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwellings, bldgs</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>481</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>568</td>
<td></td>
<td>430</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affected by alcohol</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginals</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>332</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>406</td>
<td></td>
<td>281</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not affected by alcohol</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginals</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>149</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>162</td>
<td></td>
<td>149</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Total offences over this period numbered 1479 of which 1019 (69 per cent) involved alcohol affected offenders.

In each year, more Aborigines than non-Aborigines were affected by alcohol when charged, as can be seen in Table 3.4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1981</th>
<th>1982</th>
<th>1983 (to Sept.)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aborigines</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>594</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,019</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In a sample period of one month (October 1983) the Tennant Creek police investigated 50 alcohol related offences (see Table 3.5). Some of these were as a result of public complaints and enquiries, but according to the officer-in-charge, many others were police generated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alcohol related complaints - October 1983</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noisy parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic disturbances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital disturbances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel disturbances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street disturbances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malicious damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prowler offences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is probably safe to assume that 'street disturbances' involved Aborigines, rather than Europeans. They constituted 34 per cent of the complaints recorded for October.

Since the official complaints made in March 1983, the police in Tennant Creek have encouraged members of the public to report incidents more regularly and have evidently also stepped up their investigations. The police reported
that they cannot do their job unless the public makes complaints. This heightened awareness may be responsible for the increased rate of people taken into protective custody for both races from 114 in January 1983 to 235 in October 1983 (a rise of 106 per cent).

Taking people into protective custody under Section 128 of the Police Administration Act is a way of making an apprehension without arrest. No criminal record exists for such people. They may be apprehended when a police officer 'has reasonable grounds for believing that a person is intoxicated with alcohol or a drug and that that person is in a public place or trespassing on private property' (Police Administration Act Section 128). From an Aboriginal point of view, however, despite the ostensibly non-criminal nature of the protective custody legislation, they are 'arrested' and 'put in goal'. The fact that they have no criminal record for such an episode may well be irrelevant.

Aborigines far outnumber Europeans under Section 128 apprehensions. Between January 1981 and September 1983, 3578 Aborigines were apprehended as compared to 224 Europeans (ie Aborigines constituted 94 per cent of the total). Table 3.6 gives details.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1981</th>
<th>1982</th>
<th>1983 (to Sept)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aborigines</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1,064</td>
<td>884</td>
<td>695</td>
<td>2,643</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1,524 1,205 1,073 3,802

(* refer to Appendix 1 for a full table)

An examination of the locations at which protective custody apprehensions were made shows that the Swan Hotel receives a good deal of police attention. Table 3.7 gives details of these locations over a five month period, June-October 1983.
Table 3.7
Locations of protective custody apprehensions made between June and October 1983

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Swan Hotel</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paterson Street</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter's Place Supermarket</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purkiss Reserve</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Station</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldfields Hotel</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pioneer Milk Bar</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headframe Bottle Shop</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Locations in Town</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>702</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of those taken into protective custody from the Swan (33 per cent of the total) increased dramatically in October 1983 as shown in Table 3.8.

Table 3.8
Protective custody cases at Swan Hotel, 1983

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reasons for this increase would have to be discussed in detail with the police however the figures reinforce my earlier comments that the Aboriginal bar at the Swan is a volatile and highly visible location for Aboriginal drinkers. Some thoughtful structural changes and a range of alternate facilities would undoubtedly reduce the number of apprehensions.

Locals, Visitors and Camp Disruptions

It has already been stated in this report that both Aborigines and Europeans in Tennant Creek blame 'outsiders' for drinking trouble. As far as disruptions in the camps are concerned, only verbal reports are available. We know
that in general, people from Nguradidji stay at Karguru, people from Ali Curung stay at The Village and the Barkly Stations people stay at The Mulga – although other camp sites also host visitors. There have been particular complaints about the difficulties experienced by those at The Village in controlling the behaviour of visitors, and some old people have moved out of The Village because of this. Blankets and food were 'stolen' and houses damaged by visitors. Others have reported that The Village has no recognised leaders (H of R, 10 Dec 1981, 1390) as if to suggest that this would make a difference.

In my experience the presence of so-called leaders does not have much impact on the drinking behaviour of others, although, as a result of certain people's presence, there may be more retribution in the form of public denunciation and criticism after the event. Intervention in drinking behaviour and its sometimes violent aftermath does not fall naturally under the jurisdiction of anyone or any structure, even those who are respected as 'elders' or ritual leaders. Their skills and jurisdiction lie elsewhere. It is perhaps worth stating again, although it has been said elsewhere, that what other Aborigines do in respect of drinking is largely considered to be their own business (Milliken 1974, 51; Brady and Palmer 1984). As Sansom states, 'just fighting is the "own business" of the protagonists unless others who witness the engagement choose to make it their business as well' (Sansom 1980, 104), and 'fighting is not action that third parties have to check'. Whether outsiders or residents, those present are not necessarily interveners who are willing or desirous of preventing physical conflict which is triggered by drinking.

Moving now from the in-camp 'private' sphere, to the streets of Tennant Creek, the figures on protective custody cases show that the majority of apprehensions are of people giving The Village as their address. In a five month period (June–October 1983) 182 protective custodies were of Village people (not 182 different individuals). A breakdown of protective custody cases and their given addresses is presented in Table 3.9.

The Village has a resident population of approximately 40 and The Mulga approximately 80, so the protective custody figures of 182 and 168 respectively indicate either a small number of individuals who are repeatedly picked up, or numbers of visiting people who stay at the leases long enough to give them as their address. By comparison with the numbers giving local town leases as their addresses, (594), those from Ali Curung constitute a small number, 68 (11 per cent). This is interesting in view of the perception by both Aborigines and Europeans the Ali Curung people cause all the trouble.
Table 3.9
Addresses of those taken into protective custody,
June-October 1983

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Address</th>
<th>June</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>August</th>
<th>Sept</th>
<th>Oct</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>town</td>
<td>rodeo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mulga</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karguru</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dump Camp</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blueberry Hill</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drive-in Camp</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ali Curung</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockhampton Downs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murray Downs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other stations etc.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are undoubtedly incidents which never come to the attention of the police, and it may be that the type and quality of disturbance from visitors occurring at The Village is considered to be more problematic by its residents. It has been very difficult in the time available for this research, to analyse in detail the fluctuations in populations, and the impact of this movement on the level of discord at the various leases.

In-Camp Disturbances

For the reasons stated earlier, Aboriginal residents of town leases prefer to call the police when serious fighting occurs within their area. By doing so, they are relieved of the responsibility of the unpleasant and delicate task of intervening in drink related violence. However, this is a right enjoyed by all citizens in the town, and few Europeans are willing to intervene in similar situations occurring in their suburb or next door house. Indeed it often appears that Europeans expect Aboriginal people to take control of a situation merely because it involves other Aborigines. This is an unrealistic expectation.

At present the residents of the town's special purpose leases have differential access to the police. The Mulga, now fenced, is from a police point of view, considered to be 'less protected' as it is a 'private' area, as are other private homes. The police may enter The Mulga at any time, but are restricted in their actions. As a police officer stated 'it is not an offence to fight in your own home'.
The protective custody legislation applies only to public places or to trespass, so a fight in which the police can voluntarily intervene must occur in a 'public place'. If a fight occurs on a special purpose lease, the police must be invited to attend. An action designated as an assault can be attended by the police wherever it occurs. People at The Mulga use the telephone in a nearby petrol station to call the police.

The Village, on the other hand, is not at present a 'private' area. The police can bring the protective custody legislation into force because of this and can take all actions that refer to public places (i.e. objectionable words, indecent language). People at The Village complained that they did not have a telephone box and had to walk to one a short distance away. So-called 'illegal' camps on crown land are 'public' places, so the police have total access to them.

Bell's women informants (Bell & Ditton 1980, 71) complained that the police did not help as much as they should in dealing with drunken and violent men, that they did not respond promptly or even listen. Certainly the Tennant Creek police are wary of investigating assaults - as I was told, 'we don't want to look stupid the next day if the wife decides she doesn't want to lay charges'. The police stated that Aboriginal people were happy to call them to break up a fight, but were very unwilling to make a statement (without which the police cannot proceed to make charges). This is a significant aspect of Aboriginal views of fighting and of the role of the police. The police are needed by Aboriginal people to deal with fights but it was considered that their job ends there. It was not their job to judge the circumstances of the incident, or to attempt to make others do so. (Police experience similar attitudes associated with domestic violence incidents among Europeans - women are unwilling to lay charges against violent husbands.)

The unwillingness to take such matters further can also involve the matter of degree. The precipitating circumstances of an argument that becomes violent may be justified in Aboriginal eyes - an insult, or an affair uncovered. However the degree of violence in the reaction to such a wrong, may not be justified, but is out of control anyway (because of alcohol). Consequently, a victim may acknowledge that they 'deserved' some punishment, even if they did not merit an out-of-control assault. Associated with this is the common perception by Aborigines (and others) that the alcohol is 'responsible' for wrong actions or words rather than the person who has imbibed. Aboriginal people in Tennant Creek were frequently remorseful for their drunken actions, and I noted several examples. In one instance, a
man apologised to the manager of the Headframe bottle shop for 'anything' he had done the day before when he was drunk, saying he could not remember anything. All these factors contribute to an unwillingness on the part of Aborigines to lay charges against others, an unwillingness which is then understandable.

**Tennant Creek Rodeo**

The Rodeo is one of the limited number of large social and sporting gatherings of the year for the town and its region. As such, it is an occasion for determined drinking among members of both races. However, it is predominantly Aborigines who draw the attention of the police.

Over the weekend of the Rodeo (the first to be held at Tennant Creek) 27-28 August 1983, 83 people were taken into protective custody as a result of drinking at the Rodeo. The police thought that 'two or three' of these were Europeans.

Needless to say, the cells at the Tennant Creek police station were packed far beyond their designed capacity. There are three cells for males and an exercise area, and one cell for females with similar area. It is designated as a Police Prison, that is to say it may hold those under sentence for up to 28 days if they are remanded in custody. The police like to segregate Aboriginal and other prisoners.

There was some criticism of the performance of the police at the Rodeo. I was told that the rodeo was an excuse to 'clean up the coons', and another informant stated that the police had 'arrested' the Aborigines ('that's how they get their stripes') while ignoring drunken whites. At such events, with amateurs on the bar, there is little enforcement of the law on not selling alcohol to those who are intoxicated. Many of the Europeans who attend such events are from the pastoral properties in the Barkly region and, by early evening they are drinking spirits heavily, rather than beer. For this reason the Anglican minister of the town thought that there would be good reason to have only beer available at such events. On this occasion, the profits from bar sales went to Apex. Forty nine per cent of those Aborigines apprehended were from the Village, Mulga, Dump Camp and Karguru, and the remaining people (including Europeans) came from Ali Curung, Murray Downs, Rockhampton Downs, Epinarra, Brunette Downs, Banka Banka and other places.

**The Two Kilometre Law**

Section 45D of the Summary Offences Act concerns the drinking of alcohol in a public place or unoccupied private
land within two kilometres of any premises licensed under Part III of the Liquor Act. Areas may be exempted from the provisions of Section 45D. This legislation came into force on 1 January 1983 and has come to be known as the Two Kilometre Law.

There are no public places in Tennant Creek which have an exemption from the Two Kilometre Law. Organisers of special activities such as the speedway or particular functions held outside make special application for a limited exemption. The Mary Ann Dam, perhaps the most popular of Tennant Creek's recreation facilities, lies outside of the two kilometre area and is thus not affected.

The special purpose leases are considered to be 'private' land as far as this legislation is concerned. This means that unless a successful application is made to the Liquor Commission for the leases to be declared restricted or 'dry' areas, people are able to take alcohol into the leases freely.

In August 1981 the Warramungu Pabulu Association applied for the Village and Mulga leases to be declared 'dry' (NT Liquor Commission Memorandum 31 March 1983). However the application was not successful, partly because there was no consensus reached by those on the leases. At The Mulga the women were strongly in favour of the dry area, but acknowledged that it would be very difficult for them to stop men from bringing in liquor. An attempt to convene a meeting with the men at The Mulga (to discuss the proposed dry area) failed - such an absenting is a clear indication of lack of interest or of disapproval. With the advent of the Two Kilometre legislation, the possibility of making town leases 'dry' has receded even further. Such limitation would make it virtually impossible for Aboriginal people in Tennant Creek to drink anywhere (legally) other than the front bar of the Swan Hotel.

Government leaders advise that the public drinking legislation was introduced partly because of the expressed wish of some Aboriginal leaders that action be taken to remove the embarrassment and shame Aboriginal people feel when they see their fellows intoxicated in public. On the other hand, O'Connor, who carried out research in Alice Springs, has suggested that the Two Kilometre Law has encouraged drinkers to go back to the town camps, causing an increase in disruption and drunkenness there. By thus 'cleaning up the streets' (for Europeans and tourists) additional problems are presented to Aboriginal families, many of whom are not drinkers, on these leases.

It was impossible to discover whether this has also been the case at Tennant Creek. Certainly many Europeans
have stated that things are 'better' since the Two Kilometre Law was introduced, that not so many Aboriginal people were to be seen lying around drunk. In other words, a 'visual problem' has been solved for the businessmen and citizens of the town. One way of monitoring the impact of the Two Kilometre Law would be to research in detail police 'complaint and enquiry' entries for a period of time before and after the legislation was introduced, to deduce whether the number of assaults or fights at the camps had increased. Casualty records at the hospital could be similarly monitored. It is difficult to know how else a meaningful assessment of its impact could be achieved. Individual 'impressions' are not adequate for such an undertaking.

As stated earlier, there are several drinking places around town which are reasonably safe from police interference, despite the fact that they are, strictly speaking, illegal. The majority of two kilometre apprehensions in Tennant Creek have taken place on streets (33.6 per cent) so it may be that the police are focussing their attention on areas visible to the public.

Over the period since the inception of the Two Kilometre Law, 1 January 1983 to 4 October 1983 (9 months) there were 107 apprehensions in Tennant Creek. These were located as shown in Table 3.10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Place</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Street</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant private land</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sporting ground</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public park</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|          | 107    | 100.0   |

Males predominated among those apprehended.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex of drinkers</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>86.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|          | 107    | 100.0   |
Aborigines predominated over other races.

Table 3.12
Race of drinkers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aborigines</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>79.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>107</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was a tendency for those apprehended under the Two Kilometre Law to be affected by alcohol at the time.

Table 3.13
Affected by alcohol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affected</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>68.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not affected</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>31.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>107</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Individuals were more likely to be picked up under the Two Kilometre legislation on Fridays, Wednesdays and Thursdays in that order.

Table 3.14
Days of the week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>107</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The daily differential may be related to pay days for Aborigines (unemployment benefits on Wednesdays, endowments on Tuesdays and Thursdays) or to increased police activity mid week rather than at weekends.
There was also a fluctuation in the numbers of people apprehended each month, with the highest number of individuals being apprehended soon after the law was enforced (February 1983).

**Table 3.15**

*Frequency related to month*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of days</th>
<th>cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>54</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Beer was the drink most commonly consumed in public.

**Table 3.16**

*Type of liquor*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beer</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wine</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirits</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>107</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general it would seem that Aboriginal drinkers in Tennant Creek have successfully adapted to the Two Kilometre Law - although figures from the local police show that 23 apprehensions were made in the street outside the Swan Hotel, which remains a risky place to drink from the point of view of police surveillance. Aboriginal drinkers have withdrawn from view.

In the first three months of its operation, Tennant Creek provided only 16 per cent of apprehensions made under the legislation in the entire Northern Territory, whereas Alice Springs had 54 per cent.
Alcohol and the Welfare of Children

It is often assumed that people who drink heavily, particularly Aborigines, neglect their children. Certainly this can be the case, as I shall show shortly. However a definition of 'neglect' can also be inappropriate if, despite a materially impoverished home environment a child has a stable emotional and social life (Hamilton 1982, 62 for a discussion of this).

An investigation of cases currently on the files at the Division of Community Welfare in Tennant Creek showed that at October 1983 there were 24 children whose circumstances were being monitored by staff of that Division. Of those 24, 17 were 'alcohol related' in various ways, (ie 70 per cent) 5 were not associated with alcohol, 1 possibly involved alcohol, and 1 was of a petrol sniffer.

The cases include two children who were accidently hit while their parents were drunk and arguing (1 European family and 1 Aboriginal). There were six children who had been assaulted by their parents and four of these were while the adults were drunk.

The two other assault cases did not involve alcohol (both Europeans) and the children involved had appeared at school with black eyes. There were four cases which could be designated as neglect - these were all Aboriginal children whose mothers had abandoned the child to the care of others (some elderly and not able to give adequate care), and one child was from a 'multi-problem' family. These children were suffering from malnutrition, some grossly, and the poor prognosis for such children was noted. One child had been abandoned by his Aboriginal mother while she had been drinking heavily for two weeks; she had also been in police custody for disturbing the peace. Another Aboriginal woman who had not yet successfully brought up a child (earlier children had been passed onto relatives) had allowed her child to become malnourished partly because she needed support and training in child care. After hospitalisation and with follow-up help from the Homemakers, the child has improved.

Other cases involved welfare because domestic arguments associated with alcohol were splitting the families, or because a child had got into trouble with the police. The cases not involving alcohol included fostering arrangements for an orphan and care of an interstate ward.

The Homemakers, members of the Division of Community Welfare, visit the camps offering advice on child care and nutrition; they also and follow up welfare cases and provide cheap hot meals for elderly people in the camps. There are
Homemakers at Ali Curung, Elliott, Lake Nash, Borroloola, and Tennant Creek. In Tennant Creek they employ six women who work for 15 hours a week between them. They serve an average of 15 pensioners a day with hot lunch for $1.00, which they take out to house or to the camps. They also provide sandwich and fruit lunches for Aboriginal children at Karguru school. For this, parents pay 70 cents a lunch. There is an assumption on the part of some Europeans, including an Alderman in Tennant Creek, that Aboriginal children received free meals 'just because they were Aboriginal'.

The school with the highest enrolment of Aboriginal children is Karguru School (70 Aboriginal children in a total enrolment of 360 - about one-eighth of the school). The school has a special Aboriginal unit which draws on children from different grades throughout the school for particular classes. A school bus collects children and stops at The Mulga and Village as well as stopping in town. The principal commented that from time to time approximately 12 or 15 Aboriginal children might arrive late for school because of lack of sleep from drinkers' noise the night before. He estimated that absenteeism increases by about 5 per cent during pay week. Hungry children are 'not endemic' to the school, but perhaps ten children come to school hungry. The canteen does not open until 10.30 am recess. However the Health Department provides free milk and biscuits to approximately 70 children at the school. The principal thought that 5 or 6 European children were 'neglected' because of parental drinking and described them as 'latch key' children. The Anglican minister also referred to the number of Europeans who went out to the pub leaving the children with half a dozen videos and '$5 for a hamburger at the Pioneer'.

The Tennant Creek Preschool has an enrolment of 33 children of whom only 2 are Aboriginal children (last year there were 8 Aboriginal children). One of the two Aboriginal children has not been back to school all term and their teacher thought that his parents were 'alcoholics'.

It is through the schools that some child abuse cases come to the attention of the Division of Community Welfare and several principals I spoke to gave instances of reporting black eyes.

The Little Sisters of Mercy who have four resident nuns in Tennant Creek transport Aboriginal children to school and also act as an informal creche for children while teaching their mothers to sew, to feed and wash their children.
Summary

In this section the impact of alcohol on social disorder has been considered. Definitions of disorder were explored and a description given of disruptive actions associated with drinking in Tennant Creek. Police data showed that over 1,000 offences of all kinds had been committed by alcohol affected people within a three year period in Tennant Creek and that slightly more than half of these were by Aboriginal people. However the data also showed that the police had evidently stepped up their activities with respect to protective custody of Aborigines.

The role of visiting Aborigines was also considered, and it appeared that comparatively few outsiders were arrested by the police for alcohol related incidents, although they may cause more trouble in the camps and town leases. The Two Kilometre Law was found to have affected Aboriginal people far more than Europeans, and had probably changed the patterns of Aboriginal drinking by limiting the number of 'safe' places where they may drink. The law seems to have had the effect desired by Europeans in the town - that of visually 'cleaning up' drinkers and drunks.

The impact of alcohol on children was examined, and it was shown that 70 per cent of the cases being monitored by Community Welfare were associated with alcohol. Alcohol did not, however, make a noticeable or serious impact on children at school although in some cases children were tired or hungry and six Tennant Creek children on Community Welfare's records had been hit (either deliberately or accidentally) while their parents were drunk.
CHAPTER 4

DRINKING AND PHYSICAL DISORDER

I feel no pain dear mother but Christ I am so dry please take me to a brewery, and leave me there to die (Sung by Alky Jack, in The Glass Canoe, Ireland, 1982).

In this section the impact of alcohol on the physical well-being of people in Tennant Creek is considered. Data have been collected on motor vehicle accidents in town and the surrounding area; on those people requiring emergency aerial evacuation to or from Tennant Creek, and on the type and number of cases treated at the Tennant Creek Hospital over a one month period. Alcohol related diseases will also be discussed in this section, with data on hospital admissions and nursing home clients being presented. Causes of death requiring coronial enquiry are also presented, with data covering a five year period.

Injuries and Fatalities in Motor Vehicle Accidents

Data on motor vehicle accidents (MVAs) are presented for a sample period of 15 months (from 1 June 1982 to 30 September 1983). However these accidents did not occur in Tennant Creek itself, or always involve Tennant Creek people. However they cover the region closely associated with the town and as such are part of the context within which the town can be viewed.

Over the 15 month period 145 accidents were reported, of which 85 (58 per cent) involved injury or death. In these 85 accidents, 8 persons were killed or died subsequently, and 130 were injured. Alcohol was involved in these accidents as shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alcohol involvement in vehicle accidents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 1982-September 1983</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fatal or injury accidents</th>
<th>No. of accidents</th>
<th>Number of injured</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with no alcohol</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with alcohol</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>85</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the eight fatal accidents in this period (involving the deaths of eight people) five were associated with alcohol and three were not. The blood alcohol levels of those five drivers involved in fatal accidents were .124, .216, .230, .248 and .318.

The highest number of accidents involving injury or death occurred in June 1982 (11), July 1983 (10) and January 1983 (8). The only month in which there were no accidents involving injury or death was March 1983. Police data print outs on MVAs do not identify race. A local police officer commented that Aborigines were to some extent protected from drunken car crashes because they were so inebriated they could not drive. Europeans, on the other hand, usually thought that they were capable of driving.

Drink-drivers seen in the Tennant Creek court at a session on 20 September 1983 were predominantly local Europeans. All received at least the minimum penalty of 6 months suspension of licence and four out of the six men seen received fines of at least $250. These men had consumed large amounts of alcohol: one man had been drinking for eleven hours, another had drunk a cask of Moselle with two other men (despite the fact that he had been diagnosed as having cirrhosis of the liver). The local newspaper has recently begun to print the names of those appearing in court, including drink-drivers, in the police 'On the Beat' column. This did not happen before November 1983 apparently as a result of an unwillingness to expose local people and their children to public disgrace. Proceedings at Tennant Creek courthouse were, however, sometimes reported in the Alice Springs, Centralian Advocate.

Coronial Death Enquiries and Alcohol

With the cooperation of the Alice Springs coroner, Mr John Murphy, SM, access was granted to records of inquests for deaths which occurred in the Tennant Creek area. The area extends to Elliott, and the Barkly region as far as the Queensland border. Inquests are conducted if there are uncertain or suspicious circumstances surrounding a death.

I was able to scrutinise records for a period of just under five years, from January 1979 to September 1983. My purpose was to discover the extent to which alcohol was found to be a contributing factor to the death under investigation. In many cases, as it eventuated, alcohol per se was not found to be the cause of death, however it was often implicated as being a partial contributor to the death itself, or to circumstances which led up to the death.

Over the period January 1979-September 1983 there were 100 coronial death enquiries carried out for the Tennant
Creek region. Of these, 32 deaths were either directly caused by alcohol as in the case of a motor vehicle accident driver with a high blood alcohol level; or alcohol was strongly implicated in the death, as in the case of a death primarily from 'natural causes' in which the coroner noted the contribution of chronic alcohol abuse.

Of the alcohol related deaths, just over half were Europeans. Table 4.2 gives a breakdown of alcohol involvement and race.

Table 4.2
Alcohol and non-alcohol related deaths in Tennant Creek region requiring coronial enquiry, 1979 - Sept. 1983

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alcohol</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-alcohol</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alcohol</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-alcohol</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cause if alcohol related

1979 - 6 cases -
4 motor vehicle accidents
1 suicide
1 natural causes and alcohol related illness

1980 - 4 cases -
2 motor vehicle accidents
1 natural causes and alcohol related illness
1 misadventure

1981 - 12 cases -
8 motor vehicle accidents
2 fights
1 natural causes and alcohol abuse
1 manslaughter

1982 - 7 cases -
4 motor vehicle accidents
2 natural causes and alcohol abuse
1 murder

1983 - 3 cases -
1 motor vehicle accident
(to Sept.)
2 acute dehydration
The two acute dehydration deaths of Aboriginal children were indirectly caused by alcohol. They became lost in the bush with their mother after leaving a drunk man of whom she was frightened (Information from verbal report of the mother, from Tennant Creek Hospital).

A further breakdown of the 32 alcohol related deaths shows that deaths requiring inquests were most commonly caused by motor vehicle accidents for both Aborigines and non-Aborigines.

Table 4.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causes of alcohol related deaths requiring coronial enquiry</th>
<th>Aborigines</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motor vehicle accidents</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural causes and alcohol abuse</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manslaughter charge</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misadventure</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The two misadventure deaths are from dehydration as mentioned before, indirectly related to alcohol. The one suicide case was an open finding of a man who shot himself. His behaviour was described as becoming more violent and distraught from drinking.

In some cases the car accidents were roll-overs on the Stuart Highway or Barkly Highway, or tyre blow-outs. Blood alcohol readings ranged from .137 to .313 (the two highest readings .311 and .313 were both of Europeans). A European man consumed six rum and cokes over a two hour period with no food intake, at the Wauchope Hotel, before his fatal accident. Another European who died in a collision with a roadtrain had been asked to leave licensed premises just north of Tennant because of his drunkenness. He passed out briefly while eating a meal at a roadhouse. Within 10 minutes of leaving the roadhouse he had hit a roadtrain head-on, as he drove on the wrong side of the road.

Aboriginal people involved in fatal accidents had also often consumed large amounts of liquor. Five people had apparently consumed two cartons of beer (48 cans) before an accident which occurred east of Ali Curung; and a young man who was so drunk he was 'almost falling over as he walked' was hit by a passing road train at Elliott.
In an accident near Avon Downs in August 1981 in which an Aboriginal man was killed, the driver and occupants (six people) had purchased and consumed a large amount of alcohol. They had also driven a long way - the trip started at Frewina, went to Rockhampton Downs, back to Frewina, to Alroy Downs, Delmore Downs, then to Barry Caves. The accident occurred 12 km east of Avon Downs. During this time six occupants of the car purchased four bottles of Bundaberg rum and four cartons (96 cans) of Carlton. It appears that most of this alcohol was consumed, although the visits to various stations probably meant that some of it was shared.

Despite the small number of cases overall, it is perhaps worth pointing out that deaths of Europeans in alcohol related accidents occurred more often on main roads (Stuart and Barkly Highways), and that Aboriginal fatal accidents took place on country roads.

Table 4.3 on inquests shows that more Europeans than Aborigines died from alcohol related physical ailments. For example in November 1982 there was a death from pneumonia in which the victim also had alcoholic liver disease; and in 1981 a Warrego man died of a pulmonary infarct but his chronic alcohol abuse was seen as a contributing factor. His room contained 13 empty and five full beer cans. A man died in Tennant Creek hospital in early 1982 of a perforated ulcer but he had also been a 'heavy drinker'.

Emergency Aerial Evacuations To and From Tennant Creek Hospital

An emergency aerial evacuation either from an outlying area into Tennant Creek, or from Tennant Creek to a larger hospital (usually Alice Springs) costs an average of approximately $1,000. Usually a doctor accompanies the patient if the evacuation is to another town, and flies with the aircraft to attend serious accidents within the hospital's region. It is then, an expensive, time consuming and sometimes dangerous operation.

Over a 12 month period (September 1982-August 1983) there were 112 individuals requiring aerial medical evacuations (medevac) to or from Tennant Creek Hospital. Of these, 53 per cent were Europeans, 47 per cent were Aborigines (from Dr J. Goodbourn, Medical Superintendent, Tennant Creek Hospital).

These evacuations were for the reasons shown in Table 4.4. As can be seen, motor vehicle accidents amounted to 21 (19 per cent) out of the total number of medevacs. The number of these evacuations that were necessary because of alcohol related causes (ie MVAs where a blood test revealed
more than .08) was ascertained, using hospital records and personal communication from medical staff.

Table 4.4
Causes of medevacs (12 months)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motor vehicle accidents</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reasons</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>112</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Definite or probable alcohol related medevacs accounted for 20 (18 per cent) out of the total number, totalling in very approximate terms a cost of $20,000. Of those medevacs with a firm association with alcohol, Aborigines and Europeans were equally represented (eight of each).

Table 4.5
Alcohol related medevacs (12 months)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alcohol involvement</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total alcohol related</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probable alcohol related</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not alcohol related</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>112</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

May and July 1983 were the months in which the highest number of medevacs took place (18 and 20 respectively) and July also had the highest number of alcohol related ones (4).

Alcohol Related Illnesses in Tennant Creek

It would be very hard to ascertain precisely the number of individuals suffering from alcohol related physical or mental illness in Tennant Creek. This would mean searching individual files on patients seen at casualty or outpatients, and would not include those suffering from preliminary symptoms who had not sought medical advice.

It is possible however, to obtain figures on hospital admissions and their diagnoses, and to extract from these, diagnoses which relate specifically to alcohol related disease according to the Manual of the International
Statistical Classification of Diseases, Injuries and Causes of Death (9th revision, 1975, known as the ICD).

Admissions to hospital in the Northern Territory are diagnosed according to a primary diagnosis or principal condition, with secondary and tertiary diagnoses as well. Those admissions which were diagnosed with an ICD coding which defined the disease as being primarily an alcohol related disease were noted.

In the Table 4.6, I have included in the total admissions to Tennant Creek Hospital which had an ICD classification of alcoholic liver disease or disease of the pancreas as one of the diagnoses - this means that their alcohol related symptoms were not necessarily the primary cause of their hospitalisation. This information was collected for a five year period 1976-1980 (from NT Department of Health records, Darwin).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Alcohol related admissions</th>
<th>Total admissions, all causes</th>
<th>Alcohol related admissions as % of total admission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>934</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>902</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>1084</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>1281</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>1444</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>481</td>
<td>5645</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over a five year period, the serious alcohol related diseases constituted 9 per cent of total admissions to Tennant Creek Hospital. These figures do not include the range of other diagnoses which can include alcohol as a significant factor (e.g., alcoholic psychosis, alcoholic cardiomyopathy, cancer of throat etc.), and merely use liver and pancreas disease as an indicator of the 'tip of the iceberg'.

There may, however, be a range of people hospitalised, whose conditions are influenced or prolonged by alcohol use in a variety of ways. For example cases of malnutrition, or dehydration through neglect; patients with wounds or sores
which have become infected or are slow to heal; cases of accident or collapse, fitting and so on.

A nursing home next door to the hospital at Tennant Creek was opened in 1983 and it is supported by the Uniting Church. Nine patients are currently in residence, all people who need constant nursing care and supervision. Of these nine patients all but one have alcohol associated with their admission in various ways. The one exception is a man suffering from confusion and amnesia so his history is not known (source: matron of nursing home).

Seven of the nine inmates are Europeans, and at least one is a well-known local man suffering from severe alcoholic liver disease.

When I discussed with the matron the nature of my research she commented that it was going to cost the Northern Territory Government 'millions of dollars' to support all the alcohol related illness she saw in the town.

Alcohol Related Consultations at Tennant Creek Hospital

With the co-operation and assistance of nursing and medical staff at the Tennant Creek hospital a one-month survey was conducted of all consultations including casualty and outpatients at the hospital (see Appendix II). Staff were asked to complete further details in the questionnaire if the consultation was for an alcohol related incident or illness. Despite the short-term nature of the survey (3 October-2 November 1983) it was hoped that such sample period would give some indication of the number of alcohol related incidents seen as a part of the daily work at the Tennant Creek hospital. The results of this survey are presented in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7
Consultations by age group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infant</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School age</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>654</td>
<td>101*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = rounding error

Over a one month period, 654 consultations for all reasons were noted on the questionnaires. Of these, 366
(just over half) were males and 288 were females. There were 162 Aboriginal consultations (25 per cent) and 492 non-Aboriginal consultations (75 per cent).

Place of residence was requested and these details, together with the alcohol or non-alcohol related nature of the consultation, are given in Table 4.8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Alcohol related</th>
<th>Not alcohol related</th>
<th>Not known</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tennant Creek town</td>
<td>24 36.9</td>
<td>415 73.1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>69.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>10 15.4</td>
<td>21 3.7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mulga</td>
<td>10 15.4</td>
<td>19 3.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karguru</td>
<td>2 3.1</td>
<td>2 0.4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other camp</td>
<td>3 4.6</td>
<td>6 1.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warrego</td>
<td>3 4.6</td>
<td>38 6.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other locality</td>
<td>11 16.9</td>
<td>51 9.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not known</td>
<td>2 3.1</td>
<td>15 2.6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>65</strong></td>
<td><strong>568</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td><strong>654</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The highest number of consultations both alcohol related and not were for people resident in Tennant Creek town. They constituted 36.9 per cent of the alcohol related consultations and 73.1 per cent of all non alcohol related consultations. Considering that Warrego has a visiting doctor and two resident nursing sisters, 41 consultations by Warrego people in one month seems high. Of town consultations, only 5 per cent were alcohol related; whereas of Village and Mulga consultations, about 30 per cent were alcohol related. However approximately 65 per cent were for non alcohol related problems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Alcohol related</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal</td>
<td>45 69.2</td>
<td>20 30.8</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not alcohol related</td>
<td>110 19.4</td>
<td>458 80.6</td>
<td>568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not known</td>
<td>7 14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>162</strong></td>
<td><strong>492</strong></td>
<td><strong>654</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 652 consultations over a month, 59 (9 per cent) were admitted to hospital. Of these, 7 (11.8 per cent) were alcohol related admissions.
Of the 654 consultations, 35 (5.4 per cent) were people who were intoxicated at the time of presentation.

From Table 4.9 it can be seen that almost one-third of alcohol related consultations were by non-Aboriginals, (ie in one month, 20 Europeans consulted for alcohol related matters). Over two-thirds of alcohol related consultations were by Aborigines, which means that they are, (as approximately 19 per cent of the population) over-represented in this respect.

Of three possible types of alcohol related problem - injury, infection and illness - 43 (6.6 per cent of all consultations) were for alcohol related injury, and 12 (1.8 per cent) for alcohol related illness. Only 5 (0.8 per cent) infections were seen.

Community Health Centre

The Community Health Centre (CHC) was, in 1983, the base from which Aboriginal health workers worked in Tennant Creek, and which some Aborigines attended for medical help. [NB: The new Aboriginal controlled health service Anyinginyi Congress is now the focus for Aboriginal health care]. Unfortunately the staff at the clinic were unable to complete the questionnaire as hoped. There were probably alcohol related presentations at the clinic over the sample period of October. There would also have been people seen in the camps and town leases who had alcohol related ailments but data on this point could not be obtained.

It is hoped that a more decentralised and camp-based service can be developed, with health workers spending longer at the camps and treating non-serious complaints within the camp environment. The provision of simple shades such as those used by the homemakers at Ali Curung would provide a sheltered and practical spot from which health workers could work.

Such a camp-based emphasis would do much to provide support and a sense of security, particularly to women, who are living in camps where drinking takes place. Dealing with alcohol and its accompaniments will be made possible by strengthening and supporting existing Aboriginal social structures and even individual Aboriginal people. As it is not practicable to stop people from drinking altogether, the task at hand from the point of view of lease and camp dwellers, is to maintain a reasonable state of order in which people can sleep undisturbed and survive from day to day without coming to excessive physical harm.
The health workers and homemakers between them, because they have access on a daily basis to people's living areas, are in a crucial position in this regard. Not only are they in a position to monitor the physical results of alcohol related events soon after they occur, but they interact with those who live with these events. Because most of them are, women and are in 'semi-official' roles at that, it would be impossible to allot them a more interventionist role with those who are committed to a drinking lifestyle.

**Alcohol and Its Effects on Employment**

Quantitative data on the extent to which drinking causes problems at work, absenteeism, industrial accidents or low output were not available. However in discussion with personnel and health and safety staff at two major places of employment near Tennant Creek, Warrego Mine and the Meatworks, I was able to gather some informed comments.

Personnel staff commented that the awareness of the relationship between industrial accidents and output and alcohol is still in its infancy in the Northern Territory. Measuring work performance was said to be almost impossible in Tennant Creek with respect to alcohol - 'if you manage to turn up for work, it's OK'. Even if particular individuals are identified as having drinking problems which are affecting their work performance or safety, the special comradeship and mateship which exists makes it difficult to confront people with that aspect of their lives. Despite the 'mateship' network there is a strong worker-management split, (already discussed with respect to drinking venues) which makes it difficult for 'staff' to counsel or advise 'workers'.

**The Meatworks**

The Meatworks is situated 10 kilometres south of Tennant Creek on the Stuart Highway. This location was selected partly to avoid offensive smells from the works polluting the town, but it also makes it more difficult for the men to go into town at lunchtime to drink alcohol. Even so, some workers make the trip in order to have few beers at lunchtime. Paydays at the works were once on Wednesdays, but because of the high absenteeism this produced on Thursdays, pay day is now 1 pm on Fridays. The firm 'has trouble' keeping the men at work on Friday afternoons until the closing time of 2.30 -3 pm, because they tend to go to the pub immediately after receiving their pay.

The rule is no alcohol on the plant, and so alcohol is not allowed in beyond the gate. However men have been known to be drunk and/or asleep on the job and at least one man has been sacked for this reason.
Safety is carefully monitored – special footwear is required and sharp knives are in use and the workers have to be competent and fast. They are paid on a piece work tally, according to the number of carcasses they work, so it pays to be a fast worker. However it was described as being minimal job satisfaction work because of the 'production line' layout. It may be that this fact, together with the temporary nature of their worklife in Tennant Creek, contributes to the reportedly high alcohol intake of Meatworkers: Rum and Tequila were popular at the time. The men also complain that there is nothing to do in Tennant Creek (other than the Sporties Club and the Goldfields Hotel), and many men leave their wives and families behind down south.

Warrego

At Warrego too alcohol is not allowed beyond the fence and a worker is fired on the spot if he is found with alcohol beyond this limit (two men were sacked in 1982 for this reason). If a worker arrives at work drunk he is sent home with a warning; however the definition of 'drunk' is somewhat flexible, and a supervisor may not want to 'dob in a mate'. The bar at the Workers' Club is open at lunchtime (half an hour) but two foremen have suggested that it be closed at this time.

Company staff estimated that 70 per cent of absenteeism at the mine is from alcohol related causes, as is a considerable amount of sick leave. The work levels on Monday morning and Friday afternoon shifts are 'directly related' to alcohol, and as with the Meatworks, men sometimes 'blow the shift' to go drinking. There had been two motor vehicle accidents (roll-overs) near Warrego involving drink-drivers, at the weekend of my enquiries.

The nursing sister reported that there were cases of enlarged livers and of pancreatitis among mine workers, and that some men had a poor diet as they missed breakfast (ie could not eat breakfast because of drinking the previous night) and ate takeaway meals, going straight to the club after work.

Other Employees

The Tennant Creek Town Council employs 37 people and has a special wages programme. It also runs a Special Works Programme for Aboriginal people funded by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs – this currently employs nine Aboriginal people. Any worker who arrives at work drunk is sacked on the spot, and even a beer can on the job results in dismissal. The works supervisor estimated that 60 per cent of absenteeism was alcohol related, but there had been no job-related accidents over a two year period. The workers
are entitled to go home at lunchtime 'for a beer' and many Europeans do so. However a small number of the workers 'need a couple of charges' before work. The level of work performance was described as 'acceptable', but not stunning.

Unemployment

There were 252 persons receiving unemployment benefits (UB) in Tennant Creek at the end of October 1983. Seventy nine (31 per cent) were Aboriginal people and 173 (69 per cent) were non-Aboriginal (from Department of Social Security, Darwin).

Over the four month period ending September 1983, 19 vacancies were unfilled (from Graham Lucas, Commonwealth Employment Service, Tennant Creek). The same period saw approximately 420 people registered as looking for employment at the Tennant Creek CES. Of this 420, 93 (22 per cent) were Tennant Creek Aborigines. A further 47 Aboriginal people from outside Tennant Creek were also registered as seeking work. The majority of the vacancies (70 per cent) were in mining, retail and public service categories - and the Tennant Creek CES officer commented that there was a shortage of skilled labour in town.

It would be difficult to speculate on the extent to which alcohol use has an impact on the employment prospects of Aborigines or Europeans. However, having to some extent gauged 'public opinion' among business people and some town councillors, it is clear that Europeans have a poor impression of Aborigines because of their conspicuous use of alcohol and that because of this they are unwilling to offer them work.

However, the local supermarket manager, a man with an unusually flexible and humane approach to Aboriginal people, has successfully employed Aborigines on a casual basis in his shop and states that he will continue to do so.

The Warramungu Pabulu Association (WPA) has a workforce of 16 men, and presumably could employ more Aboriginal people if funds were available. Work which provides houses for people on town leases, or which provides resources for outstations, is socially and culturally relevant to Aboriginal people and as such can only assist in the mitigation of excessive alcohol use and the growth of pride in being Aboriginal. Potentially the WPA could become a major employer of Aboriginal people. Alice Springs' Tangentyere Council, for example, employs 40 people fulltime and 30 on a part-time basis and 1000 people have worked for the Council over a three year period (Nathan 1983, 125).
A representative council such as this could provide a forum for discussion for Aboriginal residents of Tennant Creek and locus of decision making which could provide those people with a greater degree of choice and involvement in decisions which affect their lives.

Summary

In this section I have provided quantitative evidence of the extent to which alcohol contributes to morbidity in Tennant Creek. With the time restraints on collecting and analysing data, this is of necessity a selective presentation which provides an overview of the types of fatality and illness that can occur.

Alcohol was associated with 20 per cent of motor vehicle accidents causing injury or death in the Tennant Creek region over a 15 month period, and was associated with eight deaths on the roads. Drink drivers seen at court had often consumed large amounts of alcohol and received stiff fines and suspension of their licences. Alcohol related emergency aerial evacuations to or from the hospital constituted 17.9 per cent of all such evacuations over a 12 month period, and those definitely known to be alcohol involved were spread equally between the races.

Hospital admissions for alcohol related diseases of the liver and pancreas constituted 8.5 per cent of all hospital admissions at Tennant Creek Hospital over a five year period and patients at the local nursing home have nearly all had alcohol as a major factor in their physical ailments. Hospital consultations for alcohol related injuries or illness over the month of October 1983, constituted 11.5 per cent of total consultations, and 43 per cent of these were for injuries. Alcohol related injuries were predominantly lacerations to the heads of Aboriginal people. These were caused predominantly by assaults or fights.

The Homemakers, by providing hot meals to pensioners and lunches for Aboriginal children, have a daily contact with many Aborigines who would not otherwise be seen by anyone in a caring or supportive way. Further and ongoing support for these services is strongly encouraged.

Included in this section are some general comments on the impacts of alcohol on employment in Tennant Creek. Workers at two major places of employment were reported to be regular and some were heavy drinkers with subsequent deleterious effects on their work performance and health. However, little substantive data are available on these issues.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This study of alcohol use in Tennant Creek has been a sociological one, in which both qualitative and quantitative data are presented. Some conclusions may now be drawn from the most significant findings of the study.

It has not been possible to establish definitely how much people in Tennant Creek drink. This would be an extremely difficult undertaking even for a long-term study. Licensees are generally unwilling to disclose their sales figures. The Liquor Commission does not make data available on individual licensees. Nevertheless, it is clear that Tennant Creek people substantially organise their social lives around alcohol, and that considerable physical and social problems exist in association with alcohol use by many in the town. There is evidence that the community tolerates a high intake of alcohol among its members and considers this to be unremarkable.

The report has documented the social context of drinking and how drinking is organised by different groups in the community, in order to present an understanding of the heterogenous nature of the town. People conduct their drinking at locations which are selected to meet with their membership of different social groups. Each group has its own standards and rules to which its members subscribe. Intake and inebriation are enacted within the customs set out as appropriate by each group. There are different levels of risk taking associated with drinking which are commonplace: for Europeans it might be illhealth, or the breathalyser; for Aborigines it is more likely to be a protective custody apprehension or an assault involving a head injury. There is considerable inter-group intolerance of behaviour associated with drinking, and this intolerance is not only directed towards Aboriginal people but towards other groups in the community with particular drinking styles.

In order to understand alcohol use in Tennant Creek, those in positions of authority and responsibility should ideally have access to enough information which will enable them to distinguish the presentation of fact from the reality itself. Tennant Creek is a small town and its members often ascribe truth to their presentation of it. The definition of the drinking problem in Tennant Creek was, in the first instance, a definition promulgated by those with a particular interpretation of reality. This
interpretation was guided (among other things) by concern for the protection of businesses and the presentation of the town as not just tidy, but safe and orderly. These are understandable preoccupations but are those of a particular segment of the community only.

In the report I have also noted the high proportion of alcohol related apprehensions of Aborigines by the police, particularly of protective custody apprehensions. However, the conclusions to be drawn from these high figures are not as simple as they seem. Aboriginal drinkers are far more visible and audible in the town for a variety of reasons which are touched on in the report. Other writers have voluminously documented reasons why Aborigines tend to come to the attention of the police more often than Europeans.

The Aboriginal open air drinking style has become subject to increased legislation (in NT) and to increased police activity (in Tennant Creek). In Tennant Creek the situation is exacerbated by the existence of only one legitimate and accessible bar at which Aborigines may drink and this bar, for physical reasons, contributes to the likelihood of their apprehension by the police. Some displays of drinking behaviour by Aboriginal people, although they are in effect 'private' displays (of argument or affray) often take place publicly, before a European audience which in turn finds such events disturbing, threatening and distasteful. The offence generally lies in the public nature of its performance, rather than in the act itself.

The report also documents (albeit for a limited period) the extent to which Aboriginal people sought medical attention at the Tennant Creek Hospital for alcohol related issues. Despite their small number in the overall population, they constituted 69 per cent of the alcohol related consultations. Drink related violence among Aborigines has caused some severe injuries seen at the hospital - of this there is no doubt. However there are other factors to be taken into consideration in this context. Presentation at the hospital by an Aboriginal person may be related to a number of circumstances. Wounds and sores take longer to heal when living circumstances are hard, bandages are torn and water has to be carted by hand. Those who drink heavily and those in poor nourishment exist closer to the threshold of sickness and infection than others.

It has not been the subject of this investigation to ascertain why people drink alcohol so that it becomes physically or socially detrimental to themselves or others. If we are to take ameliorative action with respect to Aborigines or any other groups described here, more research is needed to assist our understanding. Until we understand
more fully the reasons why people drink to a problematic extent, we will be unable to do very much about it.

It is hoped that this short study will serve to broaden the areas of concern and highlight those to which attention can be directed. It may also serve to deflect the stridency of a focus on one section of the community, to a mature appraisal of the totality of alcohol use and the diversity of its impact upon Tennant Creek.
APPENDIX I

PROTECTIVE CUSTODIES

TENNANT CREEK TOWN 1981-1983
Protective Custody (S.128)
Tennant Creek Town

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|        | 1,064  | 371    | 85     | 4      | 884    | 263    | 57      | 1      | 695     | 301    | 72      | 5    | 2,643   | 935   | 214    | 10     |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Totals | 1,435  | 89     | 1,147  | 58     | 996    | 77     | 3,578  | 224    |         |        |         |      |         |        |        |

|        | 1,524  | 1,205  | 1,073  | 3,802  |
APPENDIX II

QUESTIONNAIRE

ALCOHOL RELATED INJURY AND ILLNESS
ALCOHOL RELATED INJURY & ILLNESS

PLEASE COMPLETE FOR INITIAL PATIENT CONTACT ONLY

(Please place appropriate number in right hand column, where shown)

1. IDENTIFICATION

1.1 Date of contact

1.2 Day of week

1 = Mon  5 = Fri
2 = Tues  6 = Sat
3 = Wed  7 = Sun
4 = Thurs

1.3 Hospital registration no.

1.4 Name

1.5 Age group

1 = infant  4 = elderly
2 = school age  9 = not known
3 = adult

1.6 Sex. 1 = male. 2 = female.

1.7 Ethnic group. 1 = Aboriginal

2 = Other

1.8 Residence

1 = Tennant Creek town  5 = Other camp
2 = Village  6 = Warrego
3 = Mulga  7 = Other (specify)
4 = Karguru

....................
9 = not known

1.9 Drunk at time of presentation

1 = Yes.  2 = No.  9 = not known.

1.10 Admitted to hospital. 1 = yes. 2 = no.

1.11 Alcohol involvement in this patient contact

1 = alcohol related
2 = not alcohol related
9 = not known

IF ADMISSION, DOCTOR WILL COMPLETE SECTION 5 AT END OF QUESTIONNAIRE, WHETHER ALCOHOL RELATED OR NOT

IF THIS IS AN ALCOHOL RELATED PATIENT CONTACT, PLEASE CONTINUE. IF NOT, NO FURTHER QUESTIONS, THANK YOU. (UNLESS PATIENT ADMITTED, WHEN DOCTOR COMPLETES SECTION 5, PAGE 3)
What kind of alcohol related health problem is presented.

1 = injury
2 = infection
3 = other illness

IF INJURY, COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING

2.1 Types of injury. (Tick as many boxes as necessary)
1. Bruise
2. Laceration
3. Fracture
4. Burn

2.2 Parts of body receiving major injury. (Tick as many boxes as necessary)
1. Head
2. Forearm
3. Upper arm
4. Hand
5. Foot
6. Body
7. Thigh
8. Leg

2.3 Severity of Injury
1 = Minor. 2 = Medium. 3 = Severe. 4 = Fatal.

2.4 Cause of Injury
1 = motor vehicle
2 = assault/fight
3 = self inflicted
4 = other accident
5 = other (specify)
9 = not known

2.5 Whose intoxication/alcohol use responsible
1 = patient's own intoxication
2 = another person's intoxication
3 = both
9 = not known

2.6 If assault, sex of assailant
1 = male. 2 = female. 9 = not known/not applicable

2.7 Weapon used to inflict this injury
1 = fist
2 = knife
3 = firearm
4 = axe
5 = bottle
6 = other (specify)
9 = not known/not applicable
3 IF INFECTION, COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING
1 = boils & sores       5 = infected wounds
2 = cellulitis          6 = septicemia
3 = gastroenteritis     7 = combination of the above
4 = pneumonia           8 = other (specify)
                          ................
9 = not known/not applicable

4 IF Consultation IS FOR ILLNESS, GIVE DIAGNOSIS

..............................

5 FOR PATIENT ADMITTED TO HOSPITAL, DOCTOR WILL COMPLETE
THE FOLLOWING

5.1 Is this an admission for an alcohol related
illness/injury. (reasonable guess)
1 = yes.  2 = no.

5.2 Reason for admission
1 = injury.  2 = illness.

5.3 Suspected alcohol related illness.
1 = psychosis
2 = convulsions
3 = cirrhosis
4 = pancreatitis
5 = gastritis/peptic ulcer
6 = bleeding oesophageal varices
7 = clotting disorder
8 = bleeding piles
9 = acute myocarditis
10 = peripheral neuropathy
11 = malnutrition
12 = other (specify) ......................
13 = not applicable

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE.

PLEASE RETURN COMPLETED FORM TO MEDICAL RECORDS, TENNANT
CREEK HOSPITAL.

NT Drug & Alcohol Bureau
Department of Health
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