

Tonga takes a tough new stand

Contributed by Administrator
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Nuku'alofa, Tonga, 13 November 2010—In a tough new stance against alcohol consumption, Tonga's new liquor legislation comes into force this summer introducing liquor licences and breath testing in an effort to reduce public drunkenness and to change irresponsible drinking attitudes.

Police Commander Chris Kelley announced on November 11 that legislation passed by parliament before it closed included the Intoxicating Liquor Amendment Act 2010 and the Traffic Amendment Act 2010 that would be gazetted by the end of the month, and be implemented in December 2010 for traffic, and January 2011 for alcohol.

He said that the new Liquor Act puts in place a new Liquor Licensing Authority that would oversee all aspects of liquor licensing including applications and renewal. It will be chaired by the Police Commander with representatives from the areas of health, labour and commerce and police.

He said there would be significant changes for some license holders, and that retail shops or falekoloa who are currently selling alcohol together with other products, would under the new law be required to have a separate liquor room for alcohol if they wanted to be eligible for a licence to sell it.

In January 2011 they will introduce seven categories of licence: wholesale; retail bottle store; club; bar; special events bar; restaurants; and nightclubs.

He said the set up required for a licence would be similar to that at the Molisi Tonga Supermarket, where alcohol is sold a separate locked room and that would a requirement for related bottle stores from 2011 onwards.

"It doesn't matter if you have a small store down the back road you still have to meet the licence requirement and if you do not there will be no licence issued."

1:00am closing time

There would also be change in times for selling of alcohol by licence holders as well as closing times for bars and nightclubs, which would be moved up to 1:00 am, he said.

He said police would hold an industry meeting at the Longlono Police Headquarter on November 15, to assist licences in relation to the new act.

"Clearly parliament had strong views to alcohol issues and problems associated with it therefore passing the new law where some current holders would see significant change but some would see no difference as they have already met the requirements," he said.

There will be changes in fees and all licenses would have to be renewed or a new application put in by December 31, 2010.

Random breath testing will be introduced under amendments to the Traffic Act to be enforced from December 6, 2010.

It gives the police power to breath test all motorists on any road at any time. Police are currently importing the equipment required similar to that used in New Zealand and Australia where it had been thoroughly tested in the courts.

He said under the current Traffic Act it is an offence to drive under the influence of alcohol.

The amendment is expected to be gazetted soon.

The police would be implementing and enforcing the new laws and are currently undergoing a setting up phase of training police staff in the new law.

Comdr Kelley pointed out that this new laws would address the issue that everybody agrees on and that is people drinking in public places and youth drunkenness.

Last weekend police arrested 39 people for drunkenness in public places and four of them were schoolboys.

"The new laws are about education and changing the attitude of drinkers to become responsible drinkers, especially in public places, because drinking is a choice but one has to be responsible," he said.—Matangi Tonga Online

