

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
5TH COUNCIL, 30TH SESSION

SESSIONAL PAPER NO. 6-30

TABLED ON JUNE 14, 1965



30 April, 1965.

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

SESSIONAL PAPER NO. 6
(Second Session, 1965)

SALE OF OVERPROOF RUM
IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

DISPOSITION

Accepted as read.....
Amended..... See Text.
Rejected... **JUN. 21 1965** See Text.
Deferred..... See Text.
Not considered.

SALE OF OVERPROOF RUM

IN THE NORTH WEST TERRITORIES

The Council of the Northwest Territories requested at its February 1965 Session that the Northern Health Service prepare a brief on the medical aspects of the sale of overproof rum in the Northwest Territories. "Proof" spirits are 57% alcohol. Ordinary whiskey, rum, gin, etc. is 40.1% alcohol. "32-Overproof" rum is 75.3% alcohol.

The Chief of Northern Health Service has reviewed the literature on the subject and has also consulted with the Alcoholism and Drug Addiction Research Foundation of Ontario and with the Inspector in charge of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Yukon Territory, where overproof rum has been on sale for many years.

The result of these enquiries may be tabulated as follows:

- (a) To date, the availability of overproof rum has not created any problem in the Yukon Territory as only 20% of rum sales were of the overproof variety, and the Indian population still prefer to purchase the cheaper fortified wines, (20% alcohol).
- (b) There is no evidence that there is a higher rate of alcoholism in countries in which overproof, as opposed to underproof, spirits are available, although there is evidence that countries which have a high spirit consumption have a much greater alcoholism problem than those with a high beer or wine consumption.
- (c) The risk of death due to acute intoxication tends to increase when there is any appreciable consumption of liquor having an alcohol content higher than 40%.

Most Canadian Provinces set the alcohol content of distilled spirits at 40% by volume as a wartime measure to curb drunkenness among the military. According to the Registrar General of the Province of Ontario, deaths were considerably more prevalent prior to the establishment of the 40% limit.

The harsh climate of Northern Canada is likely to cause death from exposure to intoxicated persons who venture outside in inclement weather.

According to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police reports, 30% of deaths due to violence in 1963 were associated with excessive consumption of alcohol.

- (d) People who drink their liquor "straight", - i.e. undiluted, probably would continue this practice with overproof rum -- if they did it would probably increase the amount of organic damage - especially to the surface of the alimentary tract.
- (e) There is a strong economic barrier to the purchase of overproof spirits by the Indian and Eskimo population of the Territory and therefore no problem exists at the moment even in areas where overproof spirits are available. However, if this barrier disappeared, there would be danger in having two strengths of the

same type of beverage available to illiterate persons.

- (f) Acute alcoholism (intoxication) plays an important part in the high incidence of suicides and attempted suicides in the Northwest Territories and Yukon Territory -- 30% of all suicides and 61% of recorded attempted suicides, during the six year period 1959 - 1964, were carried out under the influence of alcohol.

On the above findings, it is suggested that serious consideration be given to the advantages and disadvantages of the sale of overproof spirits in the Northwest Territories. The Chief Health Officer suggests that the disadvantages outweigh the advantages and that it is advisable for the Territories to follow the example of the Provinces and restrict the sale of spirits with an alcohol content in excess of 40%.