



New NWT Liquor Regulations

What's Changing for Communities

A plain-language guide to what the proposed Liquor Regulations would change.

*All figures and dates below are **proposed** and may change. Section references are to the new Liquor Act (Bill 83, assented 2023) and the proposed Liquor Regulations (draft). Where this guide and the legislation differ, the legislation governs.*

Why we're sharing this

In short. The new Liquor Act has passed but is not yet in force. It will take effect when these regulations are finalized. This guide provides a high-level overview of the main proposed changes for communities. It highlights the main changes for communities, so you can tell us what you think before the rules apply. Each change refers to the section behind it, so you can go directly to it in the regulations instead of working through every section.

Things that are staying the same are not repeated here, and the step-by-step "how to" detail will follow later in handbooks and manuals.

How to comment. [Complete the survey today.](#) Responses will be accepted until October 16, 2026. All feedback will be reviewed and considered, though not every suggestion can be adopted.

What is staying the same

Communities would continue to have the main tools they use to shape how liquor is managed locally. Plebiscites on restriction or prohibition continue, the Sahtu liquor-store provisions carry over, and licensed-premises bylaws remain (Act, ss. 42–48).

1. Who you deal with

Now. A single Liquor Licensing Board issues licences, holds compliance hearings, while inspections are carried out by the Manager, Enforcement and inspectors.

Proposed. A **Registrar** handles licensing, a **Chief Inspector** leads inspections and issues administrative monetary penalties, and a **Liquor Appeals Board** hears appeals only (Act, ss. 2, 89, 128–129). Both the Registrar and the Chief Inspector are integrated under the Northwest Territories Liquor and Cannabis Commission (NTLCC), Policy and Legislation Division.

What it means for you. Your community engages with the Registrar on local licensing questions and with the Chief Inspector on enforcement, instead of with one Board for everything.



2. Local-authority resolution to allow a licence class

Now. Whether premises licences can be issued in a community is governed largely through plebiscites on premises licences.

Proposed. Before the Registrar can issue a licence of a given class in a community, the local authority must pass a resolution allowing it. This requirement applies only to communities that do not already have licenced premises. The six that already have licences (Fort Simpson, Fort Smith, Hay River, Inuvik, Norman Wells, and Yellowknife) are exempt (Act, s. 49; Regs, s. 189). If a community resolves to restrict a class, it is held to that for two years (Act, s. 49(3) – (4)).

What it means for you. Outside the six listed communities, your local authority will have to decide by resolution which licence classes are allowed locally, giving communities a more direct tool than relying solely on a plebiscite.

3. Broader bylaw powers

Now. Communities can make licensed-premises bylaws.

Proposed. The bylaw powers are expanded (Act, s. 48; Regs, s. 190). A municipal council can now make bylaws on operating hours and days by licence class, holiday restrictions, seasonal areas, minors' access, ferment-on-premises operations, the hours and activities of special-occasion events, and the location, number, and type of retail outlets. Where a bylaw conflicts with the regulations, the bylaw prevails (Act, s. 48(3)), and some bylaws are locked in for four years (Regs, ss. 190-192). **The proposed regulations would remove territory-wide Sunday and holiday closures. Communities could instead decide whether to establish restrictions locally.**

What it means for you. Your community has more scope to tailor local rules for licensed premises.

4. Temporary prohibition orders, with clearer limits

Now. A community can request a temporary prohibition order from the Minister.

Proposed. Temporary prohibition orders would remain available, with clearer and defined limits: a 15-day request window, a maximum 30-day order, a 15-day gap between orders, and the majority consent of affected licence holders and vendors (Act, s. 47; Regs, s. 193). Breaching such an order is an offence and liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding \$2,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 30 days or to both (Act, s. 47(8)).

What it means for you. Communities can still seek a temporary prohibition, now within set timelines and consent requirements.

5. Plebiscites to close an outlet or cancel licences

Now. The Act allows plebiscites on premises licences and the cancellation of licences.



Proposed. Residents can trigger a plebiscite to close all liquor retail outlets in the community (Act, ss. 26–27) or to cancel premises licences, on a 20% petition, with six months' notice before a cancellation takes effect (Act, ss. 50–51).

What it means for you. There are defined petition thresholds and notice periods for community-initiated plebiscites.

6. A say over new liquor retail outlets

Now. Liquor stores are established and located by the Commission. A community's formal levers are the plebiscite and, in the Sahtu, the liquor-store provisions.

Proposed. Liquor is sold at retail through vendors designated by the Commission, now including smaller outlets such as a dedicated wine store. Before a vendor can be designated to run a new retail outlet in a community that has none, the local authority must request it by resolution (Act, s. 24). Before an existing outlet is changed, the community must be given notice and its views considered (Act, s. 25).

What it means for you. No new liquor outlet can be set up in a community that has none unless your local authority requests it by resolution, and you must be notified and consulted before an existing outlet changes. If your community does not currently have a retail outlet today and wants one, this resolution is how the local authority can request it. Closing or restricting an existing outlet is covered in sections 4 and 5.

7. One “local authority” for each community

Now. The current *Act* works through several bodies: “community,” “municipal council,” “band council,” and “community council” and in many places lets a band council or a municipal council act on its own.

Proposed. The *Act* uses a single defined “local authority” for each community: the municipal council where there is one, or, for a community without a municipal council, an authority the Minister designates as representative of that community (Act, s. 1).

What it means for you. Each community would have one recognized local authority for liquor decisions. Where a band council and a municipal council both exist, the separate dual-track routes are replaced by the single designated local authority.

8. The alcohol-education committee system is ending

Now. A community can choose among four liquor management systems by plebiscite: unrestricted, restricted-quantities, a locally elected alcohol-education committee system, or prohibition.

Proposed. Communities would choose from three systems instead of four: unrestricted, restricted-quantities, or prohibition. The alcohol-education committee system is not carried forward (Act, s. 42).

What it means for you. No community currently operates under the alcohol-education committee system, so removing it as an option has no practical effect today. The three



remaining systems: unrestricted, restricted-quantities, or prohibition would continue to be available by plebiscite.

What happens next

After the engagement period closes, all feedback will be reviewed and considered. The regulations will then be finalized, and the *Act* and *Regulations* are expected to come into force together.

This guide is a plain-language summary of proposed changes only. Where it differs from the legislation, the official Liquor Act and Liquor Regulations govern.