

Removing Dry Areas and Plebiscites

Background

At the end of prohibition the entire province was dry (no alcohol for sale). There could be no liquor stores (NSLC) and no Lounge licenses unless a plebiscite was held to convert the area from dry to wet. An area could have an Eating Establishment (alcohol only when sold with a meal) if a public hearing was held for each individual business.

Areas were originally in alignment with electoral boundaries but some of these boundaries have changed over time. The plebiscite process for NSLC stores and Lounges are separate, although a joint plebiscite is sometimes held.

There are 105 dry areas remaining in the province for Lounges. There is roughly one plebiscite held per year (2 in 6 years). Many of the areas are sparsely populated and would not sustain a Lounge.

For Lounges a vote can only be held once every three years for the same area. For NSLC stores a vote can only be held every five years for the same area. Areas which are unsuccessful in converting from dry to wet hold typically hold successive plebiscites until they are successful.

Nova Scotia is the only province in Canada that restricts the permissible locations of alcohol licenses by provincial legislation; in other provinces where there are restrictions it is accomplished by municipal zoning or by-laws.

The following is a chart showing the participation and costs associated with holding recent plebiscites.

Year	Event	Total Eligible Electors	Turn Out	Total Cost	Cost Per Vote
2012	Kings D 2 Plebiscite	3,111	308	\$ 11,312	\$ 36.73
			10%		
2013	Lockeport Plebiscite	482	166	\$ 10,086	\$ 60.76
			34%		
2013	Advocate Plebiscite	136	30	\$ 6,452	\$ 215.06
			22%		
2013	General Election	720,077	419,091	\$ 6,274,406*	\$ 14.97
			58%		

Issue

The system of restricting the permissible locations of licenses and stores in Nova Scotia is outdated and offside with how the issue is handled in other provinces. The plebiscite process is costly and time consuming and an impediment to the growth of business.

Proposed Solution

Alcohol, Gaming, Fuel and Tobacco (AGFT) and the Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation are proposing making amendments to the Liquor Control Act that would make the entire province wet and remove the requirement for plebiscites. We would recommend that the legislative amendments not be proclaimed for one year to allow municipalities to introduce zoning or by-laws to restrict any areas that are currently dry that they would like to remain dry.

Benefits

This will remove red tape for business and government and harmonize Nova Scotia with other Canadian jurisdictions. It will reduce the cost to government of holding these plebiscites.

Consultation

We welcome your feedback and comments in relation to this proposal.

Please send comments by July 3rd, 2015 to:

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Alcohol, Gaming, Fuel and Tobacco Division
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