Very high rates of injury and death during the 1990s were linked with increased alcohol availability and misuse in discrete Indigenous communities in rural and remote Queensland (Australia). To address widespread concerns about a public health crisis, from 2002, the Queensland Government implemented alcohol control strategies known as 'Alcohol Management Plans' (AMPs) in 19 of these communities. Although resources for prevention and treatment were promised, AMPs became increasingly focused on local prohibition, restricted access to alcohol and punitive measures for breaching restrictions. An examination of legislation, regulations, explanatory notes, and published documents indicates this focus evolved across four phases over since 2002. The first phase, from 2002 to 2004, saw 'restricted areas' with alcohol 'carriage limits' introduced, restricting the amounts and types of liquor permitted within some communities. The second phase (2002 to 2007) featured evaluations and reviews by the Queensland Government bringing recommendations for more stringent controls. Additionally, beyond the 'restricted areas', licenced premises situated within the 'catchments' of the targeted communities, mainly located in the nearby regional towns, became subject to 'minimising harm' provisions. These more stringent controls were implemented widely in the third phase (2008 to 2011) when: the operations of seven community-managed liquor outlets were terminated; the trading arrangements of two others were modified; Police powers to search and seize were increased; and 'attempting' to take liquor into a 'restricted area' also became an offence. Some communities have seen a reduction in alcohol-related harms that have been attributed to these alcohol control strategies. However, there may be unintended consequences, and these are just beginning to be understood. This commentary maps the recent regulatory history of Queensland's alcohol controls targeting discrete Indigenous communities highlighting some examples of unanticipated impacts of punitive measures and possible increased criminalisation. With AMPs in Queensland currently under Government review, and with community resolve for change rising, the limits to Government controls and punitive measures may have been reached.

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