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Barkly fuel ban to stem sniffing

Matt Garrick

REGULAR unleaded petrol could be outlawed in Tennant Creek as early as January, in a bid to completely stamp out petrol sniffing in the Barkly.

This comes as the Federal Government exercises the use of the *Low Aromatic Fuel Act 2013* by banning the sale of regular unleaded in the remote Queensland community of Palm Island.

Indigenous Affairs Minister Nigel Scullion said it was the first time a region had been designated as a low-aromatic fuel area under the Act.

"The roll out of low-aromatic fuel is a high priority for the Australian Government as part of a proven strategy to reduce harmful petrol sniffing," Senator Scullion said.

Since the Act passed in 2013, government officials

have been consulting community counterparts in remote regions including the Barkly Council area, which includes Tennant Creek.

Blair McFarland, a long-term advocate for low-aromatic fuel and manager of the Central Australian Youth Link-Up Service, believed all Tennant Creek petrol stations were set to be switched on to Opal fuel in early 2016.

"I've heard ... the paperwork is going through, and they will be swapping over to Opal by the end of January," Mr McFarland said.

"It's definitely on the way.

After Palm Island, that's the next cab off the rank."

Manager at the Tennant Creek Service Station Kylie Smith said she had also received word the changeover would be happening in the new year.

"We don't agree with it, but we'll go with it," Ms Smith said.

"We get a lot of tourists who ask for straight unleaded ... it's the tourist trade we think about."

Ms Smith said she had been informed by Canberra bureaucrats her business would be subsidised to facilitate the changeover.

"As far as I know, speaking with the people that came from Canberra, Nigel Scullion wants it to happen now," she said.

"But we won't be stocking it until the work is done on the bowsers."

The Menzies School of Health Research has found that where low-aromatic fuel has been introduced, sniffing rates have decreased by up to 88 per cent.

According to Senator Scullion's release, there are now more than 150 locations in remote and regional areas in the

NT, Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia that sell low-aromatic fuel.

"It's definitely on the way. After Palm Island, that's the next cab off the rank."