

11 November 2021

## Industry Communiqué

### Security at fuel retail sites

#### SYNOPSIS

On Tuesday, 9 November 2021, the national peak body for fuel retail and fuel wholesale businesses convened a national forum to discuss growing industry concerns about the rising incidence of security incidents at service stations. The Forum was prompted by a sharp increase in the number of security-related incidents at fuel retail sites in the Northern Territory, giving rise to concerns about the safety of staff and customers alike.

The purpose of the forum was to better understand the nature of the incidents (and possible causes), to discuss the efficacy of remedial measures that have been implemented in response, and to explore what else might be done to address this problem.

This Communiqué summarises the key themes arising from the national forum and foreshadows a future cooperative approach to be explored with the NT Government (and enforcement agencies and community groups) to provide better protection of service station staff and customers alike.

#### KEY THEMES

- 1. There has been a dramatic increase in security incidents at service station sites in the Northern Territory over the past 12 months, with the biggest concern relating to late evening and early morning trading at sites in Darwin and Palmerston. This increase has been sustained over the past 12 months and is several orders of magnitude higher than the relatively small increase in incidents reported in all other Australian States and Territories.**
  - Fuel retail businesses in the Northern Territory have reported a 300% increase in security incidents during 2021, as compared to the previous year. Most of these incidents are occurring during the late evening and early morning trading periods.
  - The increase in security incidents in the Northern Territory is much higher than the average 15% increase in security incidents being reported in other Australian States and Territories
  - Industry feedback suggests that the problem is particularly acute in Darwin and Palmerston, with a much lesser increase in Alice Springs and Katherine.
- 2. While some of this increase can be attributed to theft of goods, most of these incidents involve aggression toward staff and customers and wilful destruction of property. Alarming, retailers are reporting that staff members are being specifically targeted by**

**offenders and their cars are being damaged when they take action to secure the retail store and protect themselves and their customers from harm.**

- Most of the increase has been attributed to social unrest with offenders damaging property in store and then becoming more destructive when they are removed from the store and locked out. Numerous incidents have involved damage to the windows and doors of the store, damage to pumps and other elements of the dangerous goods storage systems as well as damage to staff vehicles parked at the premises.
- Most alarmingly, several retailers are reporting that individual staff are being targeted by offenders in repeat attacks giving rise to significant concerns about staff safety attending work, during work hours, and travelling home after hours.
- The aggressive nature of these incidents is also creating genuine unease for service station customers.

**3. While service station businesses have taken all reasonable additional precautions – short of closing the store – these measures have not proved effective against the nature of these incidents. Further, enforcement authorities appear unable/unwilling to assist with these issues with the few offenders that are arrested often returning to the site within hours in retribution.**

- All service stations have introduced additional measures to complement already significant security measures (including extensive CCTV, staff 'safe rooms, and duress alarms, additional safety training and in some cases operating the business only via a 'night window' from late afternoons onwards). The recruitment of security staff has also been considered but retailers have reported significant difficulty in securing the services of external security staff, before even considering the substantial additional business costs of same.
- While an option exists to close the store and revert to unmanned card access to fuel for customers during night-time periods, this measure has been shown to be ineffective given the extensive damage to windows, pumps and other elements of the dangerous goods storage systems and is in fact considered to arguably be a potential escalation point given that many customers seek access to non-fuel services and locking down the store may only increase wilful damage to property and/or increased frequency of break-ins.
- All retailers have reported substantial difficulty in getting NT Police to attend incidents, with retailers being issued with 'Promise Notes' of Police attendance after the event. Such action, while understandable in terms of Police resourcing and prioritisation of offences, is merely serving to embolden offenders who are recognising that there are no consequences for their actions - and putting staff and customers at risk.

**4. The nature of these incidents (i.e. apparently driven by wider social issues) cannot be addressed by the fuel retail industry alone and requires a cooperative approach involving the NT Government, NT Police and Community Groups. ACAPMA is therefore calling on the NT Government to establish a tripartite (i.e. Government, Industry and Community Groups) Taskforce to address these issues to improve staff and public safety at service stations**

- It appears that the underlying cause of the dramatic increase in security incidents relates to systemic social issues that cannot be addressed by the fuel retail industry – or indeed any industry – working alone. The *round-the-clock* nature of petrol convenience businesses means that it is not practical to close our doors during late night/early morning periods (or revert to fuel-only mode supporting credit card and debit card payments only) – as such action may simply result in increased damage to unattended property.
- Fuel retail business (and their staff) have the right to trade without intimidation of staff and customers and without incurring constant losses due to wilful damage to business and staff property.
- While the industry understands that NT Police resources are constrained and must rightly be focussed on serious crime, the nature of the security incidents is of concern and if left unaddressed could result in physical harm to staff and/or customers.
- The current problems are already creating additional unanticipated costs on fuel retailers, with a failure to address these issues likely to further increase operating costs and place upward pressure on consumer prices in the Northern Territory as businesses seek to remain viable.
- ACAPMA is therefore calling on the NT Government to convene a Task Force comprising NT Government officers (including the NT Police), Community Groups and representatives of the Fuel Retail industry to work together to advance measures that address the current issues and prevent further escalation.
- As the national peak body representing petrol-convenience business in Australia, ACAPMA will devote all reasonable resources to assisting with the formation of this group and providing the necessary coordination and intelligence to support the operation of the Task Force.

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## About ACAPMA

The Australasian Convenience and Petroleum Marketers Association (ACAPMA) is the national peak body representing the interests of the petroleum distribution/wholesaling and the petrol-convenience retail industry. These two industry sectors generate annual revenues of around \$77B and employ an estimated 58,500 Australians.

The Association directly represents business that account for approximately 95% of the fuel that is wholesaled in the country and directly and indirectly (via franchisees and distributor-owned retailers) around 5400 of the 7100 service stations (i.e. 76%) operating in Australia.

The scope of ACAPMA's membership extends from the 'refinery gate' through to the forecourt of Australia's national network of service stations and petrol convenience outlets – including fuel importation, fuel wholesalers, fuel distributors, fuel retailers, petroleum equipment suppliers, and petroleum service providers.