



OPEN LETTER TO THE WAGIN COMMUNITY

Regarding the Proposed Cellarbrations Liquor Store at Wagin Co-op / FoodWorks

To the Wagin community, the Shire of Wagin, the Board, management and shareholders of Wagin District Farmers Co-Op / FoodWorks, and all interested parties,

Why we are writing

We are writing to formally and strongly object to the proposal by Wagin District Farmers Co-Op Co. Ltd to establish a Cellarbrations liquor store within the existing FoodWorks supermarket at 17-19 Tavistock Street. This letter sets out the Palace Hotel Wagin's position and the reasons for our objection.

We recognise and respect the long history of the Wagin District Farmers Co-Op in our community. This is not a dispute about which business is more local, nor is it an attack on FoodWorks, its management, staff or shareholders. We want a strong local supermarket and we want local people to continue shopping locally.

Our concern is specifically about whether Wagin needs another takeaway liquor outlet, whether increasing the convenience and availability of takeaway alcohol is appropriate for a town of our size, and what the longer-term consequences may be for the community and existing local businesses.

Competition is part of business. Every business, including ours, must continue to improve, invest and earn the support of its customers. We accept that. But in a small regional town, we also believe it is reasonable to ask whether additional supply creates a genuine community benefit or simply divides an already limited market.

What is actually being proposed

The development application describes a change of use of part of the existing FoodWorks supermarket to a 'Liquor Store - Small'. The applicant proposes a branded Cellarbrations store integrated with the supermarket.

The applicant's own submission states that the liquor store is intended to trade during FoodWorks opening hours to provide packaged liquor to complement food purchased in the store. It expressly identifies 'one-stop shopping' for FoodWorks customers as the reason for seeking the licence.

The proposed liquor trading hours stated in the application are 8:00am to 6:00pm Monday to Friday and 8:00am to 5:00pm Saturday, with Sunday trading only when permitted through gazetted additional trading hours.

The applicant also submits that there is limited potential for detrimental impact from additional liquor supply because Wagin already has a trading liquor store, while arguing that the locality's amenity would be enhanced by having a packaged liquor outlet connected to a grocery store.

Those statements identify the central questions we believe the community should consider: if Wagin already has access to takeaway liquor, what unmet community need requires another dedicated outlet, and is integrating liquor purchasing into routine grocery shopping from 8:00am genuinely an improvement for our town?

We are part of this community

The Palace Hotel Wagin has been operating under current management since 1993. Kristi and Greg Seaton were raised locally and have been part of this community throughout their lives. Over more than 30 years, the Palace has grown and changed, but its commitment to Wagin has remained.

The Palace bottle shop has operated as part of that wider business and has traded under different liquor banners over the years before becoming Thirsty Camel. The name above the bottle shop may have changed, but the local people behind the business and their commitment to Wagin have not.

Our bottle shop supports a wider hospitality operation

The Palace bottle shop is not simply a stand-alone retail outlet. It forms part of the wider Palace Hotel operation, alongside our restaurant, cafe, public bar, pet-friendly beer garden and accommodation.

These parts of the business support one another. Revenue and customer traffic across the different areas help us maintain facilities, employ people, improve our food and hospitality offering and continue investing in the property. The Palace is also the only place in town continuing to provide hospitality service to the community after 7:00pm.

For that reason, the effect on one part of the Palace cannot always be considered in isolation from the rest of the business.

We continue to invest in Wagin and local tourism

We are not asking the community to support a business that is standing still. We continue to invest because we believe Wagin has a future worth investing in.

Our bottle shop has recently been refurbished. We continue to improve our restaurant, café, food and service, and we are planning further improvements to our accommodation.

We want residents to have quality hospitality options locally, and we want travellers to have reasons to stop in Wagin rather than simply drive through. Every visitor who eats here, stays here, buys fuel, purchases groceries or spends money with another local business contributes to the local economy.

We believe improving the Palace contributes not only to our own business but also to Wagin's broader hospitality and tourism offering.

Supporting local people and organisations

For more than 30 years, the Palace has supported local sporting clubs and community activities, including both junior and senior sport. We have also supported our local fire brigade and continue to employ local people throughout our operation, including in the bottle shop.

We believe businesses in small regional communities have responsibilities beyond simply making sales. Local businesses employ our neighbours, support sporting clubs, community groups and emergency-service volunteers, contribute to community activities, purchase goods and services locally and provide facilities that residents and visitors rely upon.

When those businesses are sustainable, they have the confidence and capacity to continue investing locally.

Wagin is a small market

Wagin is a small regional town with a limited population and a limited commercial market. That matters when considering additional retail supply.

In a large metropolitan area, another liquor outlet may simply be another operator serving a very large customer base. In a small town, there are only so many customers and only so much local expenditure available to support the businesses operating here.

Wagin's history also demonstrates the realities of operating hospitality and retail businesses in a very small market. There was a time when the town supported multiple operating pubs; today, the Palace is the only pub continuing to provide regular hospitality service to the community after 7:00pm. We are not suggesting

that competition alone caused other venues to cease operating - businesses close for many different reasons. However, a small population can support only a finite level of expenditure. When the same limited customer base is divided across an increasing number of businesses offering substantially similar products or services, each business has a smaller share from which to meet wages, maintenance, compliance costs, improvements and continued investment.

That is why competition in a small regional community cannot always be viewed in exactly the same way as competition in a large metropolitan market. More outlets do not necessarily mean more sustainable choice in the long term. If the underlying market is not large enough to sustain them, the eventual result can be fewer viable businesses and fewer services for the community. We believe the same consideration is relevant when assessing additional takeaway liquor supply in Wagin.

Once a pub, restaurant, shop, retail service or accommodation service disappears from a small town, replacing it is not necessarily easy. Healthy competition can encourage businesses to improve. An oversupplied market, however, can ultimately leave a community with fewer sustainable businesses rather than more.

We are not claiming that approval of this proposal will automatically cause that outcome. We are asking that the sustainability of a very small local market be taken seriously.

Our concern about early alcohol access is genuine

We also want to address the proposed 8:00am commencement of liquor sales.

The Palace bottle shop is legally able to commence takeaway liquor trading from 6:00am on six days of the week. We choose not to exercise those early hours because we genuinely do not believe our small community needs access to takeaway alcohol from that early in the morning.

That decision means foregoing a trading opportunity that is legally available to us. We make that choice because responsible alcohol retailing, in our view, involves more than simply trading for every hour the law may permit. It also involves exercising judgement about what is appropriate for the community in which we operate.

The FoodWorks proposal expressly identifies liquor trading from 8:00am Monday to Saturday. Our concern is therefore not hypothetical. Our question is not simply whether those hours may be legally available, but whether making takeaway alcohol available as part of routine grocery shopping from 8:00am is necessary or desirable for Wagin.

If our only objective were to maximise liquor sales, we could already open our own bottle shop considerably earlier. We choose not to.

Alcohol and the 'one-stop shopping' proposition

The applicant expressly states that the proposed liquor store is intended to provide 'one-stop shopping' and packaged liquor to complement food purchased in FoodWorks.

We understand why convenience can be commercially attractive. However, we do not believe convenience should automatically be treated as a community benefit when the product involved is alcohol.

Families visit supermarkets for bread, milk, fruit, vegetables, meat, school lunch supplies, children's products, toiletries and everyday household necessities. Integrating a dedicated liquor store into that routine shopping environment inevitably makes alcohol more convenient and visible as part of an ordinary grocery trip.

There are also residents who do not drink alcohol, who do not purchase takeaway alcohol, or who may prefer a grocery environment focused on food, families and everyday essentials. For those customers, adding liquor provides no additional value to the grocery experience.

It is also worth noting that supermarket shopping and takeaway liquor do not necessarily have to be combined in regional communities. Coles operates a full-line supermarket in nearby Narrogin without an attached liquor outlet. Narrogin residents nevertheless have access to takeaway liquor through existing

licensed businesses. This demonstrates that a supermarket can provide a comprehensive grocery offering without liquor being an essential component of the shopping experience.

If a larger regional centre such as Narrogin can have a major full-line supermarket without liquor forming part of that supermarket offering, we believe it is reasonable to ask why a much smaller community such as Wagin requires takeaway liquor to be integrated into its local grocery store. A supermarket is first and foremost a place where families and residents purchase food and everyday household essentials. We do not believe the addition of takeaway alcohol is necessary for FoodWorks to continue providing that important service to our community.

Convenience alone should not determine whether increased alcohol availability is beneficial to a small community. The more important question is whether Wagin genuinely needs it.

We therefore respectfully disagree with the proposition that connecting packaged liquor with grocery shopping necessarily enhances the amenity of Wagin. We believe reasonable people can reach a different view about what constitutes an improvement to the community.

The Palace is a family-friendly venue

The Palace Hotel itself serves alcohol, and we make no attempt to avoid that fact. At the same time, we work hard to maintain the Palace as a family-friendly hospitality venue.

Families dine in our restaurant. Parents bring their children. People celebrate birthdays and special occasions with us. Visitors stay in our accommodation, and our café and food operations serve many people who have no interest in drinking alcohol. We also provide a pet-friendly beer garden, giving locals and travellers another welcoming space to enjoy the venue with their pets.

We believe responsible alcohol service can coexist with family hospitality. But accepting alcohol as part of hospitality does not mean that increasing the number of opportunities to purchase takeaway alcohol is automatically beneficial to the community.

We acknowledge the applicant's safeguards

We acknowledge that the application proposes operational safeguards, including CCTV, RSA-trained staff, a harm minimisation plan, an incident register and an approved manager during operational hours.

Our concern is therefore not an allegation that FoodWorks is incapable of operating a compliant liquor store. Our concern is the more fundamental question of whether establishing another dedicated takeaway liquor outlet of this nature is necessary or appropriate for Wagin.

Compliance is important, but the fact that an operation can be conducted lawfully does not by itself answer whether additional liquor supply creates a genuine need or community benefit.

Yes, there may be a commercial impact – and we acknowledge it

We understand that some people may say the Palace is objecting because another liquor outlet could compete with our bottle shop. We acknowledge openly that another dedicated takeaway liquor outlet will have a commercial impact on our business.

We are not going to pretend otherwise. But acknowledging a commercial impact does not make the broader questions irrelevant.

Our bottle shop helps support a wider hospitality operation that provides local employment, restaurant and café services, a public bar, accommodation, late-evening service to the community, community sponsorship and ongoing investment.

If expenditure within a small and relatively fixed market becomes increasingly fragmented, there can be consequences for the ability of existing businesses to continue investing and maintaining employment and services.

We are not asking to be protected from ordinary competition. We are prepared to compete by improving. We simply believe the community and decision-makers should consider whether additional liquor supply is responding to a genuine unmet need and what the longer-term effects may be in a town of Wagin's size.

We are prepared to compete by improving

Operating the Palace Hotel since 1993 does not give us an automatic right to anyone's business. Customers have choices, and we have to earn their support.

We will continue improving our bottle shop. We will continue improving our restaurant, café, public bar, food and service. We will continue working toward improvements to our accommodation. We will continue employing local people, supporting local organisations where we can and working to attract visitors to Wagin.

Our response to competition must be to keep becoming better. At the same time, as a long-standing local business and members of this community, we believe we have every right to participate respectfully in a discussion about whether increased takeaway alcohol availability is in Wagin's long-term interests.

To Wagin Co-op and its shareholders

We respectfully recognise the Co-op's long history and importance to Wagin. We want FoodWorks to succeed.

We ask its shareholders to consider whether takeaway liquor is essential to the future success of the grocery business; whether Wagin currently lacks reasonable access to packaged liquor; what additional community benefit another liquor outlet creates; and whether the same investment and energy could create greater value for families through the grocery offering itself.

This should not become Palace versus FoodWorks. Both businesses have longstanding connections to Wagin and both can contribute positively to the town. Our disagreement is specifically about the expansion of takeaway alcohol availability within our local community.

To the Shire and relevant decision-makers

We understand that the current development application before the Shire concerns planning approval for the proposed 'Liquor Store – Small', and that a separate liquor licence process is required if development approval is granted.

We respectfully ask that the current proposal be considered carefully within the relevant planning framework, including its relationship with the existing supermarket, the nature and scale of the proposed use, the amenity of the locality and any other relevant planning considerations.

At the appropriate liquor licensing stage, we believe the questions of existing liquor availability, proposed trading hours, community need, harm minimisation and the public interest will also deserve careful consideration.

To our community

We are not asking residents to choose between the Palace and FoodWorks.

We want a strong supermarket. We want a strong Palace Hotel. We want successful cafés, retailers, trades, accommodation providers and other local businesses. We want local jobs, supported sporting clubs and community organisations, improved buildings, visitors coming into town and businesses confident enough in Wagin's future to continue investing.

We also want responsible access to alcohol without assuming that greater availability must always be better.

That is the conversation we believe Wagin should be having.

Our position

Our position is straightforward.

The Palace Hotel Wagin has been operating since 1993. For more than 30 years, the Palace has served the Wagin community, supported local people and organisations and continued to invest in the town.

We support strong local businesses. We support Wagin Co-op / FoodWorks succeeding. We support healthy competition that encourages all of us to improve. We support responsible and appropriately regulated access to alcohol.

But we question whether Wagin needs another dedicated takeaway liquor outlet and whether making alcohol increasingly convenient – including from 8:00am and as part of everyday grocery shopping – provides a genuine additional benefit to our small community.

This is not about attacking another local business. It is about asking what Wagin actually needs, what is sustainable, and what we want our local business community to look like 10 or 20 years from now.

The Palace continues to invest. We continue to employ. We continue to sponsor and support our community. We continue to improve. And we intend to continue doing so.

We simply ask the community, Wagin Co-op and its shareholders, the Shire and all relevant decision-makers to consider one fundamental question: does our town genuinely need another dedicated takeaway liquor outlet?

We believe that question deserves careful, factual and respectful consideration.

Reference to the current proposal

Statements in this letter concerning the proposed Cellarbrations store, its stated purpose, proposed trading hours and operational safeguards are based on the August 2026 Development Application prepared for The Wagin District Farmers Co-Op Co. Ltd for the Shire of Wagin.

Respectfully,

Kristi Seaton
Director / Owner
Signature: _____
Date: _____
13 SEPTEMBER 2026

Greg Seaton
Director / Owner
Signature: _____
Date: _____
13 SEPTEMBER 2026

Raeen Racasa
Executive Chef & Group Food Operations Lead
Signature: _____
Date: _____
13 SEPTEMBER 2026

PALACE HOTEL WAGIN | THIRSTY CAMEL WAGIN