

13th March 2015

Att; committee secretary, senate legal and constitutional affairs committee

Regarding the moderator of medical cannabis bill 2014

I am writing to voice my concerns over the harms done to society by our current national drug laws, with a particular focus on the issue of cannabis laws.

The Expense & Futility of Prohibition

The first issue is the futility of the current approach. We have been pursuing prohibition for many decades now, during which time illicit drugs have become cheaper, more potent, more widely used and more socially acceptable.

Prohibitionists argue that prohibition keep the levels of drug use down, which has never been backed up by any evidence. Every year we spend truly staggering amounts of taxpayers money on enforcement, prosecution and incarceration, whilst making absolutely no progress towards harm minimisation or curtailing drug use.

If the current approach has no impact on drug use and availability, why on earth are we still adhering to it?

The Hypocrisy of Prohibition

Every impartial analysis of cannabis rates it lower on the scale of harms (both to society and the individual) than two of the most widely used drugs in our society, alcohol and tobacco. While these drugs remain legal, any rational thinking person will see the prohibition of cannabis for what it is- stunningly hypocritical.

Prohibitionists use the argument that cannabis is harmful as a basis for keeping the status quo. Whether or not cannabis is harmful is a matter of debate (despite many decades of governments desperately throwing money at studies trying to prove it's harms) and is also irrelevant.

We allow plenty of things in our society that are harmful, so even IF cannabis is proven beyond any doubt to be harmful, it is still an invalid and blatantly hypocritical argument as long as alcohol and tobacco (not to mention skydiving, mountain biking, or any other dangerous activity) remain legal.

The Harm to Community Relations With Police

Due to this blatant hypocrisy of the drug laws, large segments of the community now quite rightly see Police as persecutors rather than protectors. Spending millions on persecuting people for exercising freedom of choice regarding which recreational drugs they use is immoral and counter-productive. Drug dealers become heroes to the local youth, seen as standing up to a corrupt system. This breakdown of trust and respect is incredibly harmful to our society as a whole and is an inevitable consequence of enforcing unjust laws.

The police do a wonderful and incredibly stressful job, and would be looked upon by society as heroes if not for the current drug laws, that unfortunately cast them as oppressors to large segments of society.

Corruption Within the Judiciary and Law Enforcement

Corruption within our system has proven to be rife during previous investigations by internal Police investigations. The vast amounts of money at stake in an unregulated market make it inevitable that civil society will be corrupted at various levels.

The Funding of Violent Organised Crime

Just as happened with the prohibition of alcohol in the 1930s, the prohibition of drugs has led to a vast market (3.2 billion per year in Australia by the latest estimates) being entirely controlled by criminal syndicates, directly resulting in homicides, violent assaults, muggings and break ins. It also results in sales to minors and overdose deaths due to the absolute lack of regulation.

Almost every national legal and medical association recommends treating drug use as a health rather than a criminal issue- why are governments not listening? Why do governments continually ignore the results of research into drug strategies which they have commissioned themselves - such as the report issued in the UK by David Nutt?

The Erosion of Civil Liberties

Raids on private properties and strip searches were incredibly rare before the drug war, and populations then would have quite rightly regarded it as a shameful abuse of power by the authorities. We have now become used to this intrusive harassment, and see it as normal, a very sad state of affairs.

The Financial Cost of Prohibition

Truly staggering sums are spent each year on the utterly futile strategy of prohibition. A very large percentage of Police resources and time are spent on the war on drugs, money that could much better be used to combat real crimes such as domestic abuse, homicide, etc etc. Then there is the amount spent on judicial proceedings, and on jailing, tying up resources that could do far more good elsewhere.

Not to mention the money that could be made by government regulation and taxation- billions in revenue every year that is currently being given to organised crime.

The Crime of Denying Effective Medicine to Sufferers

Cannabis has now been more closely studied than many TGA approved drugs, so the argument that more evidence is needed is preposterous.

The US government holds patents on cannabis as a medicine. Thousands of studies around the world have shown cannabis is effective in treating a vast number of diseases and illnesses. Approving it only for use of terminal patients as a palliative care measure is preposterous.

Cannabis has been proved effective by peer reviewed scientific studies as a treatment for MS, epilepsy (and associated illnesses) tumour growth inhibition and metastasis, and a huge number of other conditions. The science is clear.

Denying patients access to an effective treatment will quite rightly be seen as criminal by future generations.

Regards

Angela Dawe