

## **A Submission to the Inquiry into the Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill 2007**

First, I wish to express my gratitude and support to the Senate for giving its attention to the alcohol toll in our society which is one of our most serious and inadequately addressed social problems.

I endorse the four areas of action which have been proposed to help create a culture of responsible drinking.

I would also urge the Committee to consider the following matters:

1. The growth of the alcohol culture in our society is not only (and I would think not primarily) attributable to direct advertising but to the indirect influence of other media presentations which further the assumption that Australia is an alcohol-dependent society. Television programmes directed to the general public tend to foreground the drinking of alcohol as a necessary part of having a good time and being an accepted member of a social group. There need to be guidelines for media outlets to ensure that such indirect promotion of an alcohol-dependent culture does not take place at any time of day or night.
2. The social and health consequences of alcohol abuse need to be treated with the same seriousness as the health consequences of smoking. A "Quit" campaign on smoking has helped to shift public opinion and behaviour with respect to smoking in Western Australia. We need a similar initiative with respect to alcohol. Of course such a campaign should not be seen as promoting "wowsersism," but rather as giving people, and those they love, better control over their lives.
3. The alcohol lobby has changed public behaviour considerably in recent times by marketing alcohol in small bottles and cans designed to be carried by the drinker while drinking. This attempts to blur the distinction between alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks and greatly increases the practice of public drinking by pedestrians, resulting not only behaviour which can be rowdy and a traffic hazard, but also in a significant litter problem, with alcoholic cans and bottles littering street verges. Legislation needs to be introduced to either prohibit the marketing of alcoholic beverages this way, or to increase the obligation on the alcohol marketers to pay for the social consequences of their actions.
4. The increasing incidence of binge drinking among the young, especially in association with school functions, suggests that consideration needs to be given to the raising of the legal age for consuming alcohol, as in the United States.

Ian Malcolm.