

Social Tonics in Australia

August 2014



1.2% of the Australian population have used 'synthetic cannabis' in the past 12 months.

This equates to around 230,000 people.
(National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2013)

Since 2011, there have been around 40 new legislative instruments passed by Australian state, territory and Commonwealth governments which directly continue to address Novel Psychoactive Substances with prohibitory measures.

PREAMBLE

A 'social tonic' is the industry's description for a wide variety of mostly smokeable, herbal-mix products which may also contain cannabinoid receptor agonists.

We estimate that 75% of the social tonics that our members sell (according to anecdotal evidence that we have collected), produce a psychoactive effect that is no stronger or more intense than a couple of glasses of wine. Possibly 15% would be less than that and 10% would be stronger.

There has been significant media coverage of these products over the last three years which has painted a certain caricature of the product, its effects and its consumer. This same media coverage has, in our opinion, been partly responsible for the incredible explosion in the popularity of these products.

In the May 2013 issue of the *International Journal of Drug Policy* an article entitled, 'Kronic Hysteria: Exploring the intersection between Australian synthetic cannabis legislation, the media and drug-related harm' showed that the recent media attention around these products has created a moral-panic which has fostered a reactionary policy environment.

The issue of altering consciousness via psychoactive substances has been controversial but also extremely convoluted.

Anecdotal tales and inductive social reasoning from these tales has been the main driver behind the moral panic in the media. Both the large body of anecdotal evidence that we have collected and the industry sales estimates for social tonics don't match up with the popular media's narrative.

We asked all of our members who retail in social tonics how frequently people purchased a pack and what size they purchased.

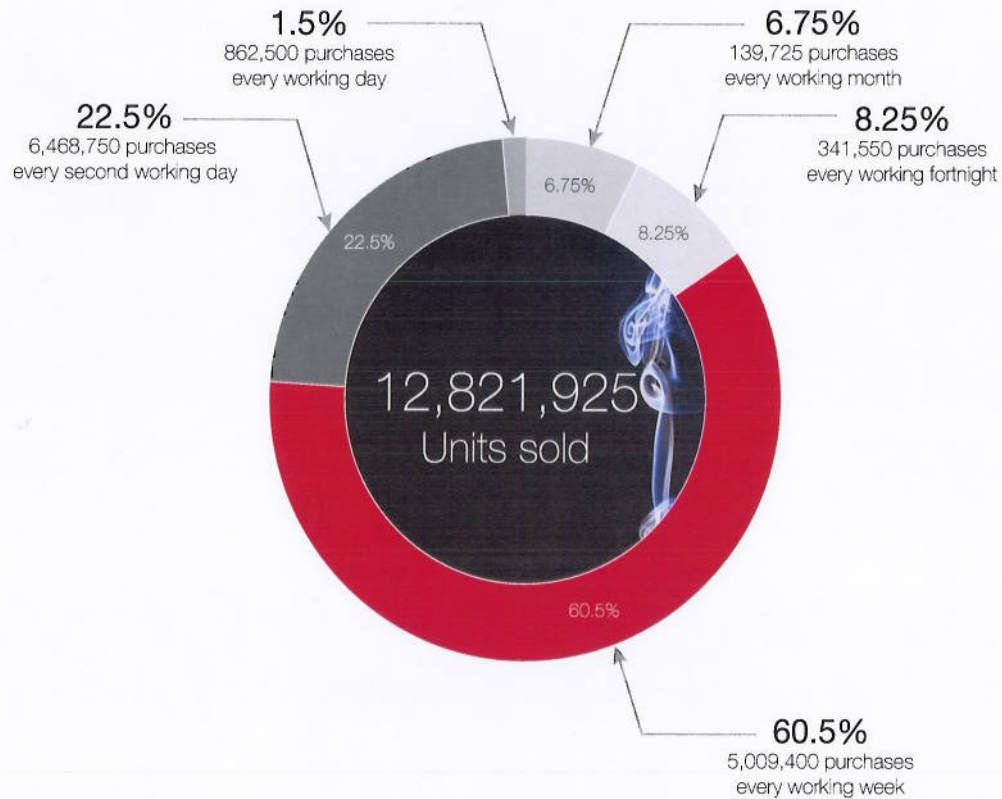
“ *Moral panic first involves a person, group, episode, or situation being framed by the media as a threat to society*

*Kronic Hysteria:
International Journal
of Drug Policy 24 2013*

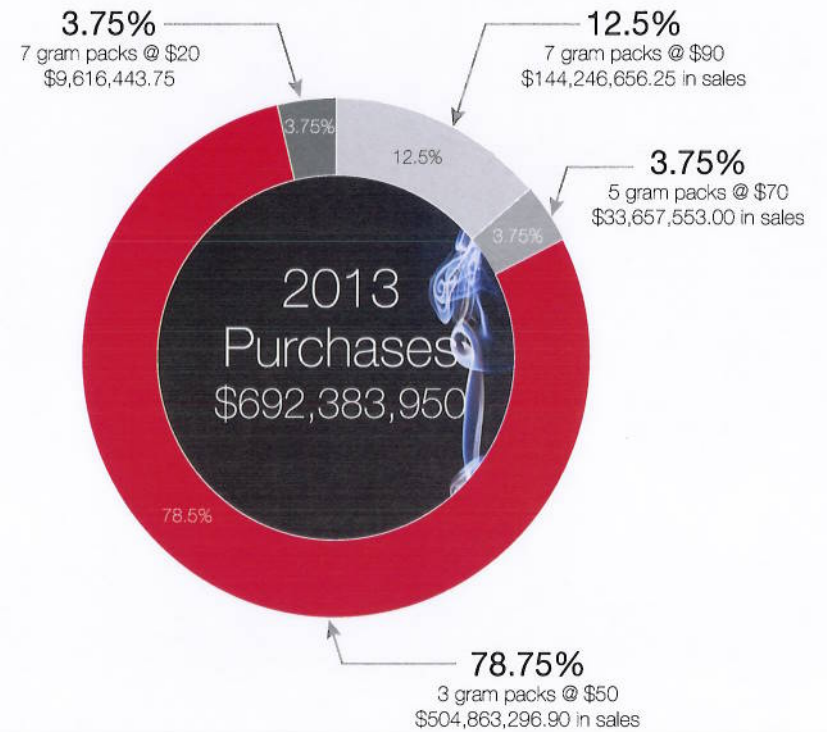
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Australian Unit Purchases Estimate 2013

Total purchases 2013/14



Sales estimate 2013/14



The median age of social tonics consumers, according to 'Patterns of synthetic cannabinoid use in Australia' published in the Drug and Alcohol Review 2012 is 27 years old. Our own market research shows a wide age demographic, focused in the 25-35 year old age range.

Our research showed that consumers primarily enjoy the relaxing, personally therapeutic effects of social tonics. Many also indicate that they substitute alcohol use for a social tonic instead.

In our market research, one third of respondents indicated concern over the lack of regulation on the industry.

CONCLUSION

According to the *National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2013*, 1.2% of Australia's population have used 'synthetic cannabis' in the past 12 months.

Those 1.2% made close to 13 million individual purchases in 2013, spending a total of close to \$700 million. GST alone collected nearly \$70 million off these products and there is scant evidence of significant costs to the community from social tonics.

If these products were regulated properly and included an excise similar to that on another popular Australian psychoactive product, alcohol, the federal government could be putting \$150-\$300 million back into the community.

Proper regulation of the industry for social tonics would allow the government and businesses to ensure that a high quality, low-risk product with appropriate warnings and product content information was available to the 1.2% of Australians who choose to consume a social tonic.

Many of the current risks associated with social tonics are market failures which are being caused by legislative uncertainty and an uncritical prohibitionist approach to the industry.

Australia has an opportunity to see this issue for what it really is and approach it without the fanfare of an artificial moral panic.

