

Submission to the Inquiry into the Regulator of Medicinal Cannabis Bill 2014

TAKE THE POLICE OUT OF HEALTH CARE PLEASE

Dear Sirs. Thank you for this opportunity. The HEMP Embassy where I work in Nimbin is incredibly busy these days and we cannot keep up with the inquiries that keep flooding in, by phone and email and in person. The word is out on medical cannabis and many many people are asking us for help as their Pharmaceuticals are either not doing the job or causing nasty side effects. We hear many inspiring healing stories from people using cannabis.

I have been involved in cannabis law reform efforts for over twenty years and President of our non profit group for most of that time and also the Australian HEMP Party, our political arm. It has given me a unique insight into Aussie pot culture. It is much bigger than most think as the majority of people keep their choice of medicine deeply buried for fear of losing their job mostly. But also, who wants trouble with the police? Or the judgment from your neighbours and family?

Nimbin is a bit like a refugee camp from the war on drugs and in particular cannabis. Pot smokers have gathered here like lepers for nearly five decades now. We dont judge each other because of our choice and in fact we understand and support one another and neighbours dont dob you in here! That may sound silly but the majority of police busts are from "information". The police are only as good as their informers. Very un-Australian really. I have talked to a lot of Police over the years and many many of them find the drug war an embarrassment and demoralising. Many of their mates smoke pot and many of them did themselves once. We have helped many police and ex police access medical cannabis for family members.

I have written thousands of words on this subject for years and have become cynical about the vested interests who profit enormously from prohibition and can afford to endlessly lobby politicians. Don't we all really agree drug use is a health issue? People only use drugs to feel better don't they? To have less pain, to have a good time, to relax. How can this be a criminal offence? Seems to me this war is a fight over the profits to be made from pain relief. Probably the most profitable business on Earth.

Outlawing the best pain relieving herbs our ancestors gathered knowledge on for centuries was a master stroke for Big Pharma profits. Less than a hundred years ago the opium poppy, cannabis and coca plants were the best and most popular pain relievers and now look at the criminal gang empires who tax free profit from these 3 crops. I've read cannabis was in up to 80% of pain relieving medicines a century ago. The last thing Big Pharma profits wants is people growing a plant in their backyard that will prevent headaches. Ironically you, us, the Government pays a lot of the health bills. It's important for this committee to realise the incredible profits to be made by some from keeping cannabis illegal.

The police also will lobby hard to maintain prohibition as well as the alcohol industry, jail guards 'union' etc. Prohibition was and is today all about money and profit. We need you to stand up to the greed and corruption that has grown with the popularity of the plants, which of course hasn't changed.

Cannabis is not only a medicinal herb with an extraordinary range of healing potential, it also has many other uses. And all other reasons why it was taken out of the market place in the 1930's when petrochemicals and pharmaceuticals arrived and starting moving into the market place. It was the beginning of synthetics verses natural I guess. Hemp (same plant different strain) is very fast growing and has a unique long and flexible fibre which makes top quality paper and clothing. The banknotes and Bibles were all printed on hemp for long wearing. The word canvas comes from cannabis. The seed is highly nutritious, very high protein and loaded with easier to digest omegas than fish oil. Hemp seed could replace fish oil and do a better job I believe while helping the ocean restore depleted fish numbers.

As for its medicinal properties I know of a number of cancer sufferers who are completely healed, the plant clearly has anti-cancer properties. It is a miracle for many epilepsy and other seizure sufferers, Parkinson's and other autism spectrum ailments. By miracle I mean almost instant change after years or even decades of nightmares with pharmaceuticals. I personally know of many children who are alive today and functioning pretty well, solely because of cannabis. It completely changes not only the childrens lives but all of those around them. How can we not help?

I have to say I see the plant as having medicinal properties whether it is used by dying people for pain relief or young people for relaxation. I'm no doctor but it seems that anti inflammatory properties in the plant can work wonders for all sorts of common pain like arthritis and rheumatism. So much pain is from inflammation and most of us need relaxing in this busy world. Isn't that why alcohol is so popular? I used to drink and hardly ever do now and there are thousands of Australians like me who prefer pot.

I used to be a migraine sufferer, never any more. Old people who try cannabis often have their best sleep in decades. Others discover they can still get horny! But also different plants, say with a higher proportion of CBD, have a different effect, and are good for nerve damage, epilepsy, autism etc. So far more than a hundred cannabinoids have been discovered and it seems research is just getting warmed up. Then these cannabinoids all react on each other and are affected by multiple factors in the environment they grow in as well. The sooner real and open and honest research with no hidden agenda is undertaken the better. I urge you to make this a priority. We are far behind in Australia. Israel has medical cannabis in some aged care homes and its biggest hospital now. America has university degrees in cannabis!

I often think the trial is happening right now across Australia under our noses and if you legalised personal use and took the fear away there are thousands of cannabis users who will happily tell you why they use it and how it helps and you can monitor their use forever. So it is worth "registering" medical users and doing say an annual survey of us all.

Unquestionably the biggest dangers from cannabis use come from it being illegal and the problems that has caused for many people is too sad to discuss here. The laws have ruined thousands of careers and marriages.

No one has ever died in the history of cannabis use which is as far back as recorded history goes, yet thousands have died from prohibition of the plant. Suicides are down in America where pot is re-legalised, as are car accidents and alcohol use and crime figures almost across the board. The changes in America have quickly woken the public up to the lies behind prohibition and it will be the same here I am sure.

There is such a demand for cannabis that it created a synthetic cannabis market which is solely chemical and extremely dangerous and addictive even it seems. I have tried it and it was nothing like real cannabis at all.

Cannabis is fantastic for getting off other drugs. Junkies I know love nothing more than a couple of good quality ounces to handle their withdrawals. History says humans have always used plants to change how they feel. Who didn't drink tea or coffee this morning? Prohibition has glamourised the plants it tried to stop people using. Force creates resistance. Education is the key but the people have been lied to about cannabis and now they mistrust advice on all drug use. If cannabis is treated as a medicine it may even deglamourise it for some youth. Currently under prohibition young people are using it extensively in an unhealthy way, ie hydroponic chemically grown cannabis smoked with tobacco, and from the age of 12! Prohibition has created wide spread disrespect for laws and authority. One bad apple can set off the whole box.

A big problem we have currently in the medical cannabis world in Australia is that there is no way we can legally test products. It would be a huge health aid if we could analyze and label percentage of THC and CBD for example. Currently its all guess work and experience. Quality control will arrive with legalisation and regulation. It could be so simple as to allow adults to grow their own for medical use but if you want to sell then get a licence, pay tax etc, like alcohol. Very few brew their own even though we all walk past the legal brewing kits in the supermarket. Growing good cannabis is an art, experience is needed and fortunately there are thousands in Australia with that skill. A legal medical cannabis industry would create thousands of jobs, employment we call it, and that's why its important the supply side remains a cottage industry.

Good quality organically grown cannabis is important. The hype about stronger cannabis today is absurd. We smoked Thai 'buddha sticks' back in the seventies that were hallucinogenic! And the stronger the weed the less you inhale of course to get the desired effect, which means less health and lung damage.

It makes total sense to me your Bill to create a medical cannabis regulator as from my understanding the TGA Board is made up of representatives from the Pharmaceutical industry and they have a beyond a vested interest in never letting people grow a plant that will prevent most headaches!

The NSW Govt trials are terrific but they don't end for 6 years and this issue cant wait. Many thanks for your time and effort on the importance of allowing cannabis to begin its journey back into legality. It has the potential to save the government millions in health costs, dont underestimate it. The photo below is of "Smoulder", Daryl Brunson, being searched by police on the street in Nimbin. He had severe cerebral palsy and loved pot. He died last year and buying pot kept him broke all his life.

Sincerely, Michael Balderstone
President Nimbin HEMP Embassy

