

## **Inquiry into Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill 2007**

### **Submission by Family Drug Support**

Family Drug Support supports all the aims of this bill as we are alarmed at the continued increase in alcohol consumption in Australia, particularly by young people.

There is no question that binge drinking is reaching alarming proportions, Our National telephone helpline takes support calls from around Australia. These are the number of calls regarding alcohol since our service began in 1998—9.

1998-9	233
1999-2000	712
2000-2001	1497
2001-2002	1647
2002-2003	2092
2003-2004	2900
2004-2005	3753
2005-2006	3738
2006-2007	4191

### **Other Factors**

- Alcohol is now representing 16% of all calls received
- Most alcohol related calls are about people under the age of 25
- By the time people ring our service there is evidence of problematic or dependant use.
- Many alcohol users are also users of other substances.
- Many calls relating to alcohol also have a co-existing mental condition.

As well as the evidence from the telephone helpline I do many presentations at high schools – public and private around Australia. In this presentation I ask young people which drugs they use and the extent of their use. Whilst most high school students – from year 7 to year 12 – are reluctant to admit to illicit drug use, over 80% are proud to admit to regular use of alcohol. Many of them admit to binge drinking. These percent apply no matter which school or which area I am presenting.

I attended the NSW Alcohol Summit some years ago and was appalled at the ‘spin’ employed by the industry and the lack of action that came out of that event.

Whilst parents and teachers have to play a part in being role models and educating young people around responsible consumption full responsibility can not lie at their feet.

Nor can young people themselves be expected to resist the social, peer and cultural pressures which lead them not only to drink but to drink to excess.

We have a very greedy industry which is marketing products at youth. There are hundreds of ready made missed drinks in the market. These are not sold in single bottles but in four packs, six packs or cases. They are colorful and sexy looking. Most of them contain more than one standard drink per container.

Young people's palettes are not developed enough to appreciate or enjoy the taste of beer, wine or spirits. Whilst people have indulged in under age drinking for decades, the taste of alcohol did inhibit the amount consumed until the advent of the new products. Alcohol now tastes like soft drinks, fruit juice or milk shakes. A recent survey by Choice magazine has determined that 25% of young people aged 19-23 cannot identify alcohol in many of these drinks. One can only imagine that the percentage for younger drinkers is higher.

Australia does things hard. We excel at science, music, art, medicine. literature and above all sport. We also do the negatives hard – drug use, drinking and other youthful risk tacking activities abound. Our heroes are larrikins – Ned Kelly, Breaker Morant, Shane Warne, and Ben Cousins etc.

While not wanting to damper youthful exuberance we need to be aware of the risks.

We know from evidence that the earlier young people start abusing alcohol – the more likely they are to become problem/dependant drinkers. They are also more likely to get into trouble with other substances.

Young people are not the only problem drinkers of course and alcohol causes problems throughout our society and is involved in:

- One in three drownings
- One in four motor vehicle accidents
- Three in four violent assaults
- One in three rapes
- One in three divorces
- Major contributor domestic violence
- Contributor to child protection incidents
- The major killer of people under 30

It is also a numbers game – one in ten regular drinkers becomes dependant or a problem drinker. We are sitting on a public health time bomb and no-one is prepared or willing to take strong actions.

As a former member of the Australian National Council on Drugs and a member of the committee responsible for the previous drugs campaign I was appalled that the Howard government removed alcohol from the campaign against the advice of the committee.

I believe we have to target alcohol in the way we have successfully targeted nicotine by:

- Banning of all television and radio advertising of alcohol products
- Banning the promotion of sporting and recreational events by companies
- Warning labels on product

We can do this without prohibition and without lessening the beneficial effects of social drinking.

Everyone is afraid of the liquor industry – particularly governments. We used to be afraid of the tobacco- industry but the world has not collapsed and we are a healthier community with fewer smokers.

This bill is a step in the right direction and should be supported by all politicians with a social conscience.

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