

Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation

Australian Senate  
Community Affairs Committee  
Parliament House  
Canberra, ACT 2600  
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Submission to the Community Affairs Committee Inquiry into the *Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill* 2007.

### **General remarks.**

The Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation (AER) supports the intent behind the *Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill*. We believe the measures listed in the bill are an appropriate start to tackling the challenging issue of excessive alcohol consumption within our community. On their own, however, they will not reduce the alcohol toll unless supported by significant other measures, such as liquor licensing reform to the number of outlets and a reduction in trading hours as well as uniform alcohol taxation. Specific remarks against each section of the bill are detailed below.

### **Restrict alcohol advertising to between 9pm and 5am.**

AER supports a review of the current regime for alcohol advertising. A variety of studies have shown that children and young adults do not have the cognitive processing skills of mature adults. There have also been studies that show children under the age of 18 are less able to distinguish between advertisements and real-world situations. Therefore it stands to reason that these groups will be less able to make comparisons between advertising and real-world behaviour. Clearly, alcohol advertising should not be allowed to target children.

### **Health information labels on alcohol products.**

AER supports better consumer focussed information on alcohol products. From a consumer standpoint, AER believes that consumers have a right to be aware of:

- The fact that excessive consumption of alcohol has negative consequences for health eg falls and injuries, mental health disorders, chronic disease, cancer, diabetes, obesity, etc.
- The ingredients and calorific content of alcohol products.
- The number of standard drinks contained in the package, in a legible size.

The following comments about the labelling of alcohol beverages go to the issue of what is in the interest of public health and social outcomes in Australia of providing better information to consumers of alcohol about its potentially harmful effects. The Food Standards Australia & New Zealand is currently considering a standard to have a warning label about drinking while pregnant or breast feeding.

The first comment relates to the anomaly that a Food Authority is making a determination on a substance which is not a food. Alcohol is a psychoactive drug

with powerful biological and behavioural effects as well as social and public health implications. As the World Health Organisation states, alcohol is no ordinary commodity, and it is certainly not an ordinary food.

AER believes that a single health message label on alcohol beverages raises some important issues. Secondly, AER believes that a health message about alcohol and pregnancy applies only to women of child bearing age, and other alcohol consumers may see that as the only harmful effect of drinking. It also has the potential to stigmatise pregnant women in the eyes of others if they are seen to drink while obviously pregnant.

Thirdly, there are many other harmful health effects from alcohol consumption about which consumers should be warned. Just as tobacco not only causes lung cancer but also causes many other harms, so alcohol is implicated in many cancers, obesity, diabetes, heart & liver disease etc. Alcohol is also implicated in a range of social harms, including family violence, child abuse, sexual assault, personal assault, motor vehicle accident deaths, suicide, falls and other injuries.

The final point to be made relates to the desire of the Australian population for clearer information on the products we consume. Labelling of food products is clearly designed to provide information so that consumers can make an informed choice about using or consuming a particular product. No less a standard should be applied to alcohol.

**Require all alcohol ads to be pre-approved by a government body.**

As stated above, AER supports a comprehensive review of the Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code. Various studies both in Australia and internationally have shown that voluntary codes of advertising are an ineffective method of regulating advertising content. It is apparent from such studies and our own observations that the current regulation of alcohol advertising in Australia is seriously inadequate. We believe that re-regulation of alcohol advertising will enable the proper enforcement of an advertising code which will be in interests of the community's health.

AER looks forward to the opportunity to provide further oral evidence to the Inquiry.

Yours sincerely,



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Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation