

Submission

to the

Australian Senate – Community Affairs Committee

Inquiry into the Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill 2007

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1. Introduction – Australian Sports Commission

The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) is Australia's primary national sports administration and advisory agency, and the cornerstone of a wide-ranging national sports system. The Commission's roles and responsibilities are laid out in the Australian Sports Commission Act 1989, and the organisation is governed by a board of Commissioners appointed by the Australian Government.

The ASC funds and works closely with a range of national sporting organisations, state government agencies, schools and community organisations to ensure sport is well run and accessible so that everyone can participate and enjoy the benefits. It also works with these organisations and through the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS), which is a division of the ASC, and state and territory institutes and academies of sport, to develop sporting excellence at the elite level.

Protecting the health and safety of all sports participants is paramount to the future of Australian sport. The sports industry is taking action to address inappropriate behaviour such as abuse and harassment, and to promote the positive values of honesty, integrity and respect. The Australian Sports Commission is working with national sporting organisations through *The Essence of Australian Sport* to create a fun and safe environment in which all participants may enjoy a positive sporting experience.

The Essence of Australian Sport has been drafted by the Australian Sports Commission, in consultation with the sports industry as a statement on what sport in Australia 'stands for' through its core principles and values. Sporting organisations have a responsibility to ensure the playing environment is fun, safe and fair for all participants. *The Essence of Australian Sport* recognises that the safety and welfare of every member of a sporting club is vital to the future growth and viability of national sporting organisations.

The Essence of Australian Sport encourages participants at all levels of Australian sport to uphold the following principles and values:

Fairness

Operating within the spirit of the rules, never taking an unfair advantage and making informed and honourable decisions at all times.

Respect

Recognising the contribution which people make to sport, treating them with dignity and consideration, as well as caring for the property and equipment they use.

Responsibility

Taking responsibility for one's actions and being a positive role model at all times.

Safety

Encouraging healthy and safe procedures, preventing and reporting dangerous behaviour, while demonstrating concern for others.

In Australia we are proud of our sporting ability and our reputation as a nation of good sports. Our society expects high standards of behaviour from all people involved in sport and it is vital that the integrity of sport is maintained. The main responsibility for this lies with the decision makers at every level of sport who should ensure that all policies, programs and services are based on the principles of fairness, respect, responsibility and safety.

The Essence of Australian Sport aims: to provide a consistent and positive foundation for the development of codes of conduct and policy, strategic planning and program development; to remind and focus people on the positive aspects, value and benefits of sport; and to reinforce that everyone has a role to play in promoting and displaying good sportsmanship and fair-play values.

As *The Essence of Australian Sport* has been developed by and for the sport industry, it is not intended to be a regulatory or prescriptive document. The Australian Sports Commission assists sporting organisations, through its numerous programs and resources, to adopt and implement this positive initiative into their daily activities, processes and policies.

2. Executive Summary

The ASC is pleased to provide this submission to the Senate Inquiry and acknowledges the importance of this debate within Australian society and, in particular, the potential consequences for the Australian sports industry.

Sport plays a major role in shaping Australia's identity and culture. It helps to maintain the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities and it builds personal and national pride. It contributes to the economy through employment and tourism. Sport helps to bind us together. It teaches us important life skills such as leadership, friendship, teamwork, respect, fairness, responsibility, resilience and how to engage with people from all walks of life.

The ASC is committed to the development of an inclusive, robust and self sustaining sports system. With this commitment, the Commission is uniquely positioned through its leadership and collaboration with the National Sporting Organisations (NSOs) to facilitate cultural and structural changes in sport. This role is focused on NSOs being accountable, having good governance, sound structures, effective management and growing their sport through good business practices and developing sustainable links to the corporate and community sectors.

Alcohol plays an important role in the Australian economy generating substantial employment, retail activity, export income and tax revenue. Alcohol also has an important social role. It is a familiar part of traditions and customs in Australia and is often used for relaxation, socialisation and celebration. It should also be acknowledged that in regional and rural areas of Australia the retailers of alcohol (i.e. mainly pubs and clubs) are often the major financial supporters of grass roots sport.

It is also the most widely used drug in Australia and its misuse leads to intoxication, dependence and a wide-range of associated and significant harms to the community including health problems, violence, accidents, injury, premature death and a negative change in social behaviour.¹

Alcohol and sport are historically closely linked in Australia with the "links between sport and alcohol fairly entrenched in the national psyche, particularly in rural and regional areas"². Many sporting competitions and teams promote and advertise alcohol consumption and a large number of clubs depend on revenue from alcohol to finance club activities, either through the direct sale of alcohol and/or through sponsorship.

The Australian Sports Commission is concerned that if the advertising of alcohol was only to be permitted between 9pm and 5 am, that this will lead to a significant reduction in the level of sponsorship for sporting bodies and events in the future. If this change to the advertising of alcohol were to be passed by the Senate, there would need to be a phasing in period that would allow sports the opportunity to attempt to seek alternative revenue streams.

¹ National Alcohol Strategy 2006-2009; Australian Institute of Health & Welfare 2005; NSW Summit on Alcohol Abuse 2003

² Inquiry into Strategies to Reduce Harmful Alcohol Consumption – Discussion Paper, Drugs & Crime Prevention Committee, Parliament of Victoria, October 2004

3. ASC Initiatives

Over recent years, the Commission has had some involvement with initiatives that attempt to deal with the issues around alcohol and sport. These include:

- Proactively working with a broad range of sports industry representatives to develop *The Essence of Australian Sport*.
- Developing 'model' codes of conduct for utilisation at all levels of sport
- Jointly producing with the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre the *What's the Score – the facts on alcohol, drugs and sport* publication in 2004
- Linking to the *Good Sports – Managing Alcohol in Sport* program via both the Club Development and Membership Growth Unit's initiated free web based Club Development Network and the Sport Ethics area
- Providing information regarding the effects of alcohol at different levels on the ASC website

4. Sponsorship, advertising and education in sport

Sponsorship of sporting events in Australia is worth approximately \$1.25 billion per year and alcohol companies are represented among the top 40 sport sponsors.³ These companies use advertisements to link their product with a sport, team, athlete and/or event. As mentioned previously, sporting organisations would need considerable time to develop additional or alternative sponsorships. Without leveraged advertising it is hard to see how sponsorships with sport and alcohol companies could continue at anything close to present levels.

It should also be noted that the Bill only covers television and radio advertising and makes no reference to other avenues such as print media, bill boards, mobile technology and, in particular, the internet (which is now being used more broadly to broadcast sporting events).

Research has shown that approximately 94% of sports broadcasting time is allocated between 5am and 9pm and, under the proposed terms of the Bill, it would mean that effectively the majority of alcohol advertising would be eliminated. The conclusion can then be drawn that this could lead to the elimination of sponsorship via alcoholic beverage companies in the future.

Sports, and in particular the professional codes, receive approximately 25% of their income from alcoholic beverage sponsorship agreements or associated income. In many cases involving sport at the community level the figure is more likely to be 100% and any immediate reduction in this income would have a deleterious effect at all levels of a sport and especially the provision of resources to grass roots, participatory and inclusion programs.

Unlike tobacco related activities, alcohol promotion, advertising and sponsorship is permitted with little restriction in Australia. The only legislative control is around the advertising of alcohol on television under the standards set by the Australian

³ Victorian Government's response to the Drugs & Crime Prevention Committee: 'Inquiry into Strategies to Reduce Harmful Alcohol Consumption'. September 2006

Communications and Media Authority. The standards stipulate that all forms of alcohol advertising are permitted during programs of any classification, except during ‘C’ (children) classified programs.⁴

Currently, the only other restrictions are through alcohol industry self regulation – namely, the Alcoholic Beverages Advertising Code (ABAC) – and through the broad standards for all advertisements that are articulated in the Advertiser Code of Ethics. There is debate within government, industry groups and public health advocates about whether associating alcohol with sport contravenes the spirit of the ABAC. The ABAC states advertising must not depict any direct association between the consumption of alcohol, other than low-alcohol beverages, and engagement in any sport; that is, it must not depict the consumption or presence of alcohol as a cause of or contributing to the achievement of personal, business, social, sporting, sexual or other success. Also, it must not have a strong or evident appeal to children or adolescents.

Obviously, the Bill is designed to ensure that the above will become enshrined in law rather than a voluntary code of conduct. The ASC does not believe that this is the most appropriate way to manage the issue and that educative programs will ensure far better community outcomes.

It is evident there is no simple and consistent approach around the world to the advertising of alcohol, as can be surmised via the information provided by the Institute of Alcoholic Studies in the UK factsheet.⁵ The current approach in Australia is very similar to that in New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Canada i.e. one of self regulating voluntary codes. In the European Union, there is very much a mixed approach to the regulation of alcoholic advertising, ranging from the use of voluntary codes to regulatory controls at a legislative level. It would appear that the desire of the European Union is to attempt to harmonise the various laws and codes but with little observable effect.

The ASC is supportive of an advertising framework that ensures a responsible attitude to the consumption of alcohol and supports using educative rather than punitive methods to teach participants and spectators of sport at all levels about the dangers of excessive alcoholic consumption. The ASC will be proactive in working with the sports industry, especially NSOs and other relevant Government and non-Government agencies to ensure a consistent approach with regard to sensible alcohol usage.

⁴ Australian Broadcasting Authority 2002

⁵ IAS Alcohol and Advertising Factsheet, 2007

5. Conclusion

The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) fully supports and encourages efforts to address alcohol misuse and other problems associated with alcohol, particularly in sport. It does not believe prohibition is required across the board in sport although it does support the banning of alcohol and the promotion of alcohol-free events for some competitions, athletes and/or sports, where appropriate and necessary.

The ASC also believes that the restriction placed upon advertisers by this Bill will have a detrimental effect on the income streams for the majority of sporting bodies through the loss of sponsorship agreements.

The ASC also encourages sporting organisations to undertake the Australian Drug Foundation's (ADF) *Good Sports* accreditation program, to conduct regular and relevant education sessions for its players and participants on the responsible consumption and management of alcohol, to provide access to counselling and rehabilitation services where necessary, and to implement and enforce codes of conduct that include specific reference to alcohol. The ASC is keen to work more closely with the ADF and the Goods Sports program in the future to ensure the delivery of a consistent message to the sports industry.

The ASC will continue to monitor the various issues and may, if it considers necessary, modify its position.