

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE INQUIRY
ON THE ALCOHOL TOLL REDUCTION ACT 2007 [2008]
Mrs. Glenda Amos – World & National Director for Children’s Work
(Woman’s Christian Temperance Union)
Member of the WCTU (Newcastle Union)

I would like to submit my support for the Alcohol Toll Reduction Act.

The Bill aims to create a culture of responsible drinking, and to facilitate a reduction in the alcohol toll resulting from excessive alcohol consumption. To achieve this aim the Bill will:

1. Require health information labels on all alcohol products;
2. Restrict TV and radio alcohol advertising to after 9pm and before 5am, to stop alcohol being marketed to young people;
3. Require all alcohol ads to be pre-approved by a government body comprising an expert from the medical profession, alcohol and drug support sector, accident trauma support sector and the alcohol industry;
4. Ban alcohol ads which are aimed at children or which link drinking to personal, business, social, sporting, sexual or other success.

Australia has developed a culture where the drinking of alcohol to excess is regarded as something to be proud of. Just last year, newspapers in Australia gloated that Australia had won back the title of the largest pub crawl in Maryborough, Queensland. This is a title we could well do without, when 2,800 drinkers drank at levels dangerous to their health, consuming at least one drink in every one of 10 city pubs.ⁱ

In a recent study by the Australian National Council on Drugs it was reported that one in ten 12-17 year olds were involved in binge-drinking each week.ⁱⁱ

It is of concern that the amount of alcohol being consumed by young women is also increasing to a rate above that recommended by the Australian Alcohol Guidelines. A postal survey of non-indigenous Western Australian women (n = 4839) was carried out during 1995 to 1997. The women were asked questions regarding the volume, frequency and type of alcoholic beverage they had consumed in the three months prior to pregnancy and during each trimester of their pregnancy. The study found that 58.7% of the women surveyed drank alcohol during at least one trimester of their pregnancy however, just over 40% reported that they did not drink any alcohol while pregnant. Of the women in the study, 46.7% had not planned their pregnancy and 79.8% reported drinking alcohol in the three months prior to their pregnancy. Approximately 10 to 14% of the women surveyed were drinking outside the 2001 Australian Alcohol Guidelines for pregnancy and 4.3% consumed five or more standard drinks on a typical drinking occasion at some stage during their pregnancy.ⁱⁱⁱ

During May 2007, I noted that in the SBS panel discussion television program “Insight” on the topic of Alcohol Consumption, many of the young women in attendance reported that they regularly drank at levels nearly two times that of the 2001 Australian Alcohol Guidelines. The majority of those in the studio audience stated that they would consume as many as 10 standard drinks at a time. Footage from this program also showed young female under-age teenagers bingeing on Sydney streets.^{iv}

The same program also highlighted some of the advertising that the alcohol industry was involved with and it was definitely targeting young people and even children.

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE INQUIRY
ON THE ALCOHOL TOLL REDUCTION ACT 2007 [2008]
Mrs. Glenda Amos – World & National Director for Children’s Work
(Woman’s Christian Temperance Union)
Member of the WCTU (Newcastle Union)

Comments on the aims of the Bill:

1. Need for Health Information Labels

Recently I attended the First National Conference on Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders and a number of the presentations made at that conference confirmed my belief that Australia needs to take measures to ensure the safety of the community or else we could find that as a government; as regulatory bodies; as industry interests and as a nation as a whole, we stand charged with “not taking reasonable care” in making sure that the community is informed and warned in regard to risk. One of these measures would be to make sure that alcohol products are labelled with the potential dangers associated with consumption. The industry may argue that it would not be effective but in the same way, the tobacco industry made the same assertions regarding labelling on its products and the truth is that it has had an impact. While there will always be people who ignore the warnings, at least we should make the warnings.

2&4. Restricting advertising of alcohol in the media, especially to young people and banning advertising to children or linking it with personal, sports, sex, business or social success.

“Advertising and the promotion of alcohol in the media and through sports sponsorships is a major contributing factor to the ongoing alcohol problem – in particular, advertising that appeals to teenagers, links alcohol with sexual and sporting success, and that encourage questionable standards of taste and decency. Such advertising seriously violates corporate duty of care toward the community.”^v

The writers of the book, “Uncorked”, that the quote above is taken from, go into more detail as to the impact that some of the linking of alcohol advertising and different forms of success have upon our youth and children. I would highly recommend that the committee take time to read this well researched book on the effects of alcohol on the community and the need for “duty of care”.

The amount of exposure to alcohol use in media programs, sporting events, and not just advertising is alarming as this, in itself, contributes to the culture of alcohol use being the accepted norm.

The range of “soft drink” type alcohol products available are appealing to young drinkers as a recent Choice article illustrated:

“Many health and advocacy groups are concerned about the influence of premixed alcohols — known as ready-to-drinks (RTDs) — on teenage alcohol use. An RTD is part spirit or wine and part non-alcoholic drink, such as milk or a soft drink, bought in a premixed format. They’re also known as ‘alcopops’ or ‘designer’ drinks.

Research shows that alcopops are extremely popular with underage drinkers, and the drink of choice for underage binge drinkers.

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE INQUIRY
ON THE ALCOHOL TOLL REDUCTION ACT 2007 [2008]
Mrs. Glenda Amos – World & National Director for Children’s Work
(Woman’s Christian Temperance Union)
Member of the WCTU (Newcastle Union)

They’re the most commonly consumed form of alcohol among 12–17-year-old girls, are considered an initiation drink by many young people, and have been described by industry and concerned groups alike as 'bridging' or 'gateway' beverages for less experienced drinkers, who aren’t yet used to the taste of alcohol.”

Choice concluded that:

- “Alcopops are very appealing to younger people, and contribute to underage and binge drinking.
- In CHOICE's trial, 24% of the 18-19-year-olds thought there was no alcohol in the alcopops they tasted.”

While it was noted that the “the regulation of alcopops marketing — and of alcohol more generally — doesn't effectively protect teenagers” and that “parents need to get involved and keep the lines of communication open”; regulation at least assists in reducing the exposure to young people and children.^{vi}

Any moves to deal with the youth binge drinking epidemic must also deal with these ‘alcopop’ drinks. I would encourage the Senate Inquiry to take this into consideration.

3. Require all alcohol ads to be pre-approved by a government body comprising an expert from the medical profession, alcohol and drug support sector, accident trauma support sector and the alcohol industry.

This would help to regulate the advertising of alcoholic products. It would also help the industry itself to start to take responsibility and to be confronted by the costs and results of drinking its products as members of those organisations that have to deal with the problems contribute their perspectives.

When are we going to realise how much harm is caused by alcohol consumption, not just physically, but socially and economically. The former president of the Australian Medical Association, K Phelps noted that while the average Australian spends about \$A540 a year on alcohol and the government recoups around \$A2 billion in taxes, the economic cost of alcohol to the community is estimated at around \$A7 billion. The present alcohol situation is a major economic burden to the country to the tune of thousands of millions of dollars.^{vii}

With recent studies in Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders showing the huge impact alcohol may have on future generations, it is imperative that we take steps to address this potential crisis that our nation faces. While I believe there is still a lot more that could be done (e.g. raising the legal drinking age to 21, licensing of drinkers, prosecution of parents supplying alcohol to minors) this Bill would be one of those initial steps in addressing the crises.

Beryl Glenda Amos
4 Advance Drive
WOODRISING
NSW 2284
kgamos@dodo.com.au

18 March 2008

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE INQUIRY
ON THE ALCOHOL TOLL REDUCTION ACT 2007 [2008]
Mrs. Glenda Amos – World & National Director for Children’s Work
(Woman’s Christian Temperance Union)
Member of the WCTU (Newcastle Union)

ⁱ Sydney Morning Herald, June 11, 2007

ⁱⁱ “The Star” Newspaper, March 9-15 edition, PO Box 3250, Hamilton BC 2303

Email: editor.thestar@ruralpress.com

ⁱⁱⁱ Colvin, L., Payne, J., Parsons, D., Kurinczuk, J.J. and Bower, C. (2007) Alcohol consumption during pregnancy in non-indigenous Western Australia Women. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, **31**(2):276-284.

^{iv} SBS “Insight” program: May 18, 2007

^v Ashton, John & Laura, Ronald: *Uncorked! The Hidden Hazards of Alcohol*. Signs Publishing Company Victoria Australia. 2004; page 104

^{vi} Choice: <http://www.choice.com.au/viewArticle.aspx?id=106195&catId=100514&tid=100008&p=1&title=Alcopops>

^{vii} K Phelps, “Life!” Daily Telegraph Mirror (Sydney), September 13, 1993, page 40