

## **Senate Committee on Community Affairs**

### **Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill 2007**

**HEARING DATE:** 15 May 2008

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**HANSARD PAGE:** CA 42

**SENATOR FIELDING ASKED:**

Does the Government have the power to enforce any advertising guidelines?

**ANSWER:**

The Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code is not an enforceable legal instrument. There are, however, provisions for investigating complaints of breaches and the Commonwealth may make a complaint. The only sanction provided is that the advertiser may be asked to modify or withdraw the advertisement. There are other applicable laws and codes which relate to alcohol advertising, but they are administered by another portfolio.

The contact in relation to other codes and legislation is Mr Joshua Davies, Acting Manager, Broadcasting Content, Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. He can be contacted on (02) 6271 1494.

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**SENATOR FIELDING ASKED:**

Are the reports the Monitoring of Alcohol Advertising Committee (MAAC) provides to the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy (MCDS) publicly available? Can we have copies?

**ANSWER:**

MAAC reports to the MCDS are confidential documents. I have been advised by the Secretary of the MCDS that no MCDS document can be distributed beyond the Members of the Council unless specific agreement is granted by all MCDS Members.

The Secretary of the MCDS has written to Members seeking their agreement to provide MAAC reports to this Inquiry. We are awaiting their responses.

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**SENATOR FIELDING ASKED:**

What are the MAAC Terms of Reference?

**ANSWER:**

Broadly speaking, the MAAC was established to undertake ongoing monitoring of the self-regulatory system for alcohol advertising to ensure that alcoholic beverages are advertised appropriately and according to community standards.

The Secretary of MCDS has requested Council Members' agreement to release the Terms of Reference.

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**SENATOR FIELDING ASKED:**

Since May 2006 what reports have been made public from the MAAC?

**ANSWER:**

None

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**SENATOR COLBECK ASKED:**

Have there been any MCDS Communiqués that carry information about the work of the MAAC or other work of the MCDS relating to alcohol advertising?

**ANSWER:**

Yes – there have been two relevant Communiqués which are enclosed (15 May 2006 and 23 May 2008).

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**SENATOR BOYCE ASKED:**

The Department was asked, “does your research tell you if these young women were drinking other drinks and switched to RTDs or whether they are new to alcohol because of the attraction to RTDs?”

**ANSWER:**

There has been a modest increase in the apparent consumption of RTD alcohol beverages over the past five years<sup>1</sup>. There is some evidence that shows the popularity of RTDs has come at the expense of beer and bottled spirits among young people<sup>2</sup>. Other evidence shows the decreasing age of initiation into alcohol consumption<sup>3</sup>.

In addition, there is some evidence that young people under 18 years find RTD products more palatable than other alcohol products; and that among the youngest drinkers studied (12-13 years), RTDs were most commonly the first used and most preferred alcohol products<sup>4</sup>.

When this evidence is considered in combination with the increasing popularity of RTDs, it suggests that RTDs may be playing a part in introducing young people to alcohol.

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<sup>1</sup> AIHW analysis of National Drug Strategy Household Surveys

<sup>2</sup> King, E., Taylor, J. & Carroll, T. (2005). Alcohol consumption patterns among Australian 15-17 year olds from 2000 to 2004. Department of Health and Ageing: Canberra.

<sup>3</sup> Ann M. Roche, Petra Bywood, Joseph Borlagdan, Belinda Lunnay, Toby Freeman, Lisa Lawton, Amanda Tovell, Roger Nicholas, *Young people and alcohol: the role of cultural influences* National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction. DrinkWise Australia.

<sup>4</sup> Copeland, J., Gates, P., Stevenson, D., & Dillon, P. (2006). *Young people and alcohol: Taste perceptions, attitudes and experiences*. Technical Report No. 241. Sydney: National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre.

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**SENATOR MOORE ASKED:**

The report, *Alcohol in Europe: a public health perspective*, was asked to be tabled.

**ANSWER:**

This was provided to the Committee on the day of the Department's appearance.

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**SENATOR SIEWART ASKED:**

A report on young people's taste and perception of ready-to-drink products was asked to be tabled.

**ANSWER:**

The report identified below is enclosed.

Copeland, J., Gates, P., Stevenson, D., & Dillon, P. (2006). *Young people and alcohol: Taste perceptions, attitudes and experiences*. Technical Report No. 241. Sydney: National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre.



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**SENATOR SIEWERT ASKED:**

The Department was asked about breaking down the notion of risk as it is used in current research and data.

**ANSWER:**

The *Australian Alcohol Guidelines: Health risks and benefits* was endorsed by the National Health and Medical Research Council in October 2001. Chapter 1 *Introduction*, and Chapter 4 of the report, *Levels of risk and benefit: Evidence from the literature* contain a detailed discussion of the concept of risk, benefit, and levels of risk as they are applied to alcohol consumption which has formed an important basis for alcohol research in Australia since that time.

A copy of the report is enclosed.

The National Health and Medical Research Council will release new alcohol guidelines in August 2008 containing a revised definition of low-risk drinking.

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**SENAOTR BIRMINGHAM ASKED:**

Is there a schedule set to replicate the study, *Alcohol consumption patterns among Australian 15-17 year olds from 2000 to 2004*?

**ANSWER:**

The Department is currently considering its alcohol research agenda for 2008–09.

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SENATOR COLBECK ASKED:

Do you have any longitudinal data on the number of drinks per session for different categories over time?

ANSWER:

The Australian Secondary School Students use of Alcohol Survey<sup>5</sup> has shown increases in the average (mean) number of drinks consumed by 12–15 years olds drinkers<sup>6</sup> per week between 1999, 2002, and 2005. For males this was 5.2, 5.7 and 5.9%, and for females 4.3, 4.6, and 4.8% for each survey year respectively. This suggests that 12–15 year old children drank progressively more alcohol between the years 1999 and 2005. No such increase was shown for the 16–17 year old group.

The National Drug Strategy Household Survey uses the short and long term risky drinking categories from the *Australian Alcohol Guidelines* as a framework for reporting on low, risky, and high risk drinkers. For example risky drinking in the short term by men is classed as 7 or more standard drinks per day. Page five of the enclosed *Australian Alcohol Guidelines* shows all risk levels for both long and short term harm. This data can act as a rough measure of average number of standard drinks per session.

The time series between 2001, 2004 and 2007 for short and long term risky drinking rates is enclosed. The trend for short-term risky drinking appears fairly stable overall which suggests there has not been a large increase in mean number of standard drinks consumed per session. However, there appears to be an increase in the proportion of females aged 20 years or over drinking at risk of harm in long term. Significance testing was not performed on these data.

An analysis of the mean number of standard drinks per session has not been done and may not be mathematically possible due to the way the Household Survey data are collected.

New alcohol guidelines to be released by the National Health and Medical Research Council in August 2008 and containing a revised definition of low-risk drinking may impact on the way risky drinking is defined and counted in future research.

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<sup>5</sup> White, V. & Hayman, J. (2006). Australian secondary school students' use of alcohol in 2005 Report. The Cancer Council Victoria.

<sup>6</sup> Drinkers refers to 'current drinkers' who drank in the week before being surveyed and who constitute between 20 and 29% of all 12-15 year students surveyed.

