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Mr Graham Perrett MP
Chair
Social Policy and Legal Affairs Committee
House of Representatives,
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Graham Perrett

The Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) welcomes the invitation to provide information to the committee regarding its Inquiry into the Arrangements Surrounding Crimes Committed at Sea.

The ANCD understands that the inquiry arose as part of the government's response to the recommendations of the New South Wales coronial inquest into the tragic death of Ms Dianne Brimble. The presence of psychoactive substances in this case raised the issue of how drugs and alcohol contribute to crimes committed at sea, including the possession, use and supply of illegal drugs.

Although the ANCD has not commissioned research or developed briefing papers on this subject area it did seek to provide the committee with a review of all the available evidence in this area.

Unfortunately after extensive searches focused on both alcohol and drug issues on cruise ships there was no relevant information available. Whilst there has been some research on people who work on ships in various settings and alcohol use, as well as some literature on cruise ship passengers and problems encountered such as infectious diseases and falls overboard, there is no literature we could locate that was directly relevant to this case and inquiry.

The ANCD did locate anecdotal information on drug and alcohol use relevant to this inquiry but its unsubstantiated nature does not provide the confidence level required by the ANCD for referral to such an inquiry.

Nonetheless, there is information that may be indirectly relevant.

There is a limited research available on the higher levels of drug or alcohol use (and other 'risk-taking' activities) among people who are travelling or on holiday, without being specific to cruise ships. Higher consumption of alcohol or drugs among this group may relate to these activities being associated with pleasurable experiences or leisure time, to the use of alcohol or other drugs as social lubricants, to their role for some in celebrations, or to other factors. Some of the research has noted that drug use while away from home is regarded by some as being less risky than drug use at home. It could be inferred that higher levels of use on cruise ships (compared to use in the general population) would not be unexpected given this research. However,

there needs to be caution using this information given the clear differences that exist for cruise ship passengers compared to land based travellers.

There is also clear and reliable evidence which demonstrates that consumption of alcohol increases as price decreases. As alcohol may be available on cruise ships without the paying of excise duty, it may be lower in price to that available in other locations. We are also aware that some cruise lines provide unlimited alcohol during the cruise, the cost of which is factored into the prepaid fare. This too would make higher levels of consumption among cruise ship passengers unsurprising. Consumption levels are also strongly affected by other factors influencing the availability of alcohol, such as opening hours and the training of bar staff.

Alcohol and drug consumption are associated with increased risk of a range of acute and long-term harms. Increased levels of consumption of alcohol are reliably linked to increased levels of harm, and this may also apply to other drugs. Acute harms are those especially relevant in this context and this includes harms to those consuming alcohol or drugs and harm to others. For example:

- Increased levels of alcohol consumption are reliably and consistently linked in population-based studies to higher rates of accidents and injury.
- They are also linked to higher rates of violence (such as assaults, including sexual assaults).

Potential harms to others also include less severe harms such as nuisance from noise, being put in fear by an intoxicated person, or decreased amenity of public spaces.

Illicit drug use can also cause a range of acute harms such as overdose or other morbidity.

Where alcohol and drugs are combined there may be even more severe and less predictable health and safety consequences, with the potential for permanent injury or even mortality. While cruise ships do make medical care available, medical assistance on board for some of the potential emergency situations associated with such use may be more complicated than in other locations.

It is also worth noting that alcohol and some drug use is associated with higher impulsivity and more risk-taking behaviour, which may have negative consequences (for instance, engaging in unplanned and/or unprotected sex, which has also been indicated as occurring more often among travellers and holidaymakers than among comparison groups).

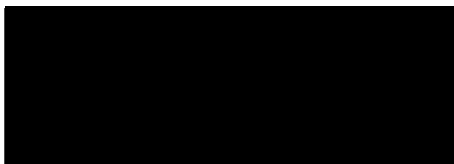
Given the large number of people travelling and holidaying aboard cruise ships it would seem reasonable to expect detailed data to be available on drug and alcohol consumption by passengers including related issues of violence, sexual assault and risky behaviour. It would be expected that total consumption of alcohol through sales on board would be available and provide an indicator of overall consumption (recognising

that it may not be possible to provide detail for specific drinking categories of passengers and crew.

This is a clear gap in our knowledge base that would be valuable in assessing what problems could be expected to arise from alcohol use on cruise ships and enable consideration of appropriate policy or regulatory responses.

I trust this information will be useful and am frustrated that we were not able to be more helpful to your committee for this important inquiry.

Yours sincerely



Dr John Herron
Chairman
Australian National Council on Drugs
23 November 2012