

27 April 2000

To: Parliamentary Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs

Dear Committee Members

I am writing to add my voice to those that call on the federal and state governments to do more to counter nicotine addiction. Although tobacco cannot reasonably be banned a great deal more could be done to discourage smoking, and in particular discourage young individuals from taking up the habit. I would like to see governments adopt the position that they strongly oppose smoking and will act to reduce its prevalence. As a member of the general public I see little emanating from state or federal government to this effect.

The issue of revenue stands out as an obstacle to governments genuinely opposing tobacco addiction. In my view it serves the tobacco industries interests to be paying large amounts of money to the government. A similar situation prevails with gambling: if you are a significant enough source of revenue to a government you have to be protected. I would like to see the government set a time scale for weaning itself off tobacco revenues with all money raised eventually going to counter nicotine addiction and treat tobacco related illnesses. Once this is achieved governments will not be dependent on tobacco taxes.

In my view far more could be done to discourage tobacco use. I would like to see the government set up a well-funded body devoted to the task of identifying and implementing strategies to this end. With so much money coming in from the tobacco industry expense should not be an issue.

I would like to see novel ideas developed, tested and be introduced. No doubt others could identify more potent ones than me that would counter the 'sexy' or trendy images of tobacco products but, for example, the products could be stripped of brand names by replacing names with a registered identification code - that cannot be used for any advertising or promotional purpose. Manufacturers could all be required to use identical packaging, apart from the codes. All display and advertising, and associations between smoking and any other activity could be banned. Cigarettes could be made to look less appealing, for example brown paper rather than white could be made compulsory. Smoking in public places, such as hotels, cafes, etc could be banned.

There are two distinct phases to smoking. The pre-addiction phase during which peer pressure, image and such things as the desire to appear adult mediate the behaviour. Once smoking has begun addiction takes over, continuance requires no encouragement and, as you will appreciate, it is very difficult to stop smoking. I have heard of heroin addicts saying it is easier to

stay off heroin after the initial withdrawal than it is to stay off cigarettes. For this reason it is essential to stop young people starting to smoke. The sorts of strategies I have outlined above might help to 'de-sexify' smoking and discourage young non-smokers from seeing it as an attractive behaviour.

Please make it clear in your report that it is apparent far too little is being done to counter tobacco addiction.

I would like to add my 'vote' to one other issue, should it be considered by your committee: a zero BAC level for drivers aged up to twenty-one, which if successful could later be extended.

Yours sincerely

Geoffrey Grantham

Dear Committee Members

I would like to briefly draw to your attention something I see as missing from the current debate about heroin addiction - a consideration of solutions sufficiently radical that they might succeed given that minor changes such as a small increase in police funding or the prescription of heroin to a small group of users (which I support) will not have a major impact.

Firstly, a key question is: what would the cost of a successful law and order policy be?

On the 7.30 Report in February 1999 it was estimated there are 300,000 heroin users in Australia. If we add to that the number of individuals above users in the supply hierarchy this is obviously a very large number of people to 'catch' and punish.

How many people would need to be identified and dealt with under a law and order policy for it to be the case that some significant progress had been made? If it were half of the 300,000 that would be 150,000 individuals sentenced to say one year in prison at \$40,000 each. A total of \$6,000,000,000. This is without taking account of the non-users involved in heroin supply. I would very much like to see your committee formulate a model of a successful law and order campaign. By this I am referring to the identification of how many individuals are involved in the heroin supply and use hierarchy, and what level of punishment would be imposed on the various categories of individuals in the hierarchy through from major traffickers to users. It is beyond my resources to formulate and cost such a model but I believe it should be done. The general public could then be made aware of what the potential, or hypothetical, cost of the government's current strategy is. I believe it may be the case that we simply could not afford a genuinely successful law and order solution at all.

On this basis one radical option would be to abandon it altogether and replace it with something that might work and which we might be able to afford if it did.

Trying to think beyond more effective policing and heroin trials (which I support and believe would be useful in a proportion of cases) I wonder whether an ongoing amnesty might have some merit. In brief, the possibility of a 'trade off' between society and heroin addicts, including those who engage in supply to meet their habits. The trade off would be that heroin addicts come forward and demonstrate their commitment to change by accepting treatment and ongoing monitoring and by identifying their source of heroin. In return they are not given custodial sentences but might be required to remain in residential rehabilitation. Long-term ongoing monitoring could ensure any relapses are promptly responded to by a return to treatment. Treatment and monitoring can be delivered a lot more cheaply than the process of tracking down and imprisoning a criminal.

Where heroin suppliers who are not addicts are concerned I would propose a

similarly radical approach. The trade-off here would be the supply of information as to where they obtain heroin in exchange for a significant but non-prison sentence, ie many years of home detention, 'high-tech' monitoring of their whereabouts, monitoring of their finances, behaviour and whatever else is necessary to ensure they do not revert to supplying heroin or substitute criminal activities. This aspect of the amnesty would, if successful, allow a push up the heroin supply hierarchy. It is not my intention to propose any change to the right to silence, individuals who do not want to take on the general principles of the amnesty could be dealt with in the traditional manner.

The basic principles underlying my proposals are that society let go the desire to punish and replace it with a desire to end the criminality currently associated with heroin addiction through treatment and prevention. Secondly, I would like to see us create a situation in which it becomes very difficult to remain a supplier of heroin because the incentive for addicts and 'lower down the hierarchy' suppliers to reveal their source of supply far outweighs the incentive not to do so. However, I assume that the rules of supply and demand apply and it will only be through drying up the demand for heroin that supply will eventually be reduced.

Yours sincerely

Geoffrey Grantham