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The Secretary
Senate Community Affairs Committee
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SENATE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO READY-TO-DRINK ALCOHOL BEVERAGES

Synopsis:

Increasing consumer cost is not a sensible approach to curb consumption. Industries, which produce and promote harmful consumer products, should contribute to public health funding by paying the Medicare Levy.

1. The proposed changes in excise appear to be an adhoc, punitive tax rather than a part of a consistent taxation or excise regime. The possible increase in prices is inflationary. There needs to be a stronger moral, logical and legal relationship between taxation and purpose.
2. Even if there is evidence which supports the inverse relation between juvenile alco-pop consumption and increased consumer cost, the proposed increases in excise are seen as opportunistic fund-raising, rather than a means of direct funding for agencies that deal with the harm that results from alcoholic consumption.
3. I submit that focussing only on the end consumer will fail to curb the production of alco-pop beverages and therefore fail to curb juvenile consumption. Unless the profit margin is substantially eroded industry will simply manipulate the cost base to maintain consumption.
4. The issue of youth consumption of alcohol is one aspect of a much wider drinking culture, which is supported and promoted not simply by the Australian consumer but particularly by the industry that profits from alcoholic production.
5. Excessive alcoholic consumption should be seen as a culturally incubated health issue, not just a one-off unforeseen event. Australians learn from an early age that consumption of alcohol beverages is a “normal” Australian behavior.
6. **Every Australian taxpayer must contribute to health cost for the harm resulting from alcoholic consumption through the Medicare Levy, but what about industry? Some industries have both a moral and logical responsibility to contribute to the rehabilitation of their client consumers. The legal enforcement of compensation for asbestos injury shows the Australian legal system is cognisant of this existing relationship between industry and consumer.**

7. **I submit that industries, which produce and promote harmful consumer products such as alcohol, tobacco, gambling etc., should be listed in an additional schedule to the Medicare Levy Bills, which enable the Australian Government to raise public health funding in Australia to combat the harm resulting from the products they promote.**
8. I submit the best way to reduce alcoholic beverage consumption in pubs and clubs is to reduce the length of time consumer can purchase and consume them. This does not mean the venue must close when purchase of alcohol finishes, but that the time limit for purchase is controlled and the rate/volume of purchase be limited simultaneously.

Thankyou for your attention

Stephen J. McIntosh