

15 March 2008

The Committee Secretary

Inquiry into the Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill 2007

Community Affairs Committee, Dept of the Senate

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Dear Secretary,

Re: Inquiry into the Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill 2007

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill 2007. We wish to comment on aspects that relate specifically to youth drinking.

Lack of suitable Government policies have contributed to the hazardous and harmful use of alcohol by Australian youth in recent years. These include: liberalisation of alcohol laws in many States that has increased availability (longer opening hours, more outlets where alcohol is available); cheap alcohol via supermarket related outlets and via happy hour promotions; a failure to control the manufacture and marketing of premixed alcoholic drinks (alcopops); a failure to control alcohol marketing in general and support of an ineffective Alcoholic Beverages Advertising Code (ABAC).**

The proposed Bill has particular relevance to reducing hazardous and harmful use of alcohol by youth including those under the legal drinking age. Our rationale for focussing on youth is based on the following data on alcohol consumption:

- *In Australia, alcohol is the most commonly used licit and illicit substance among young people.¹ According to the 2005 Australian School Students' Alcohol and Drug (ASSAD) survey data, 86% of 14 year olds had tried alcohol, and 70% of 17 year olds had consumed alcohol in the month prior to the survey.*
- *The Australian Alcohol Guidelines² recommend against adults and adolescents drinking seven or more drinks in one day for males and five or more drinks in one day for females. In Australia, among current drinkers, 30% of 15 year olds and 44% of 17 year olds had consumed alcohol at these levels in the previous week.³ Studies conducted between 2000 and 2004 also found that more than 40% of 15-17 year olds had consumed alcohol at these unsafe levels on their last drinking occasion.⁴*
- *In Australia, 90% of 18-24 year olds drink at levels that place them at high risk of acute harm, such as assault, sexual exploitation and accidental injuries.⁵ Data from longitudinal studies suggest that adolescents who drink excessive amounts of alcohol are at increased risk of becoming heavy users of alcohol in adulthood.⁶*

Secondly there is a growing body of evidence that links the advertising and promotion of alcoholic beverages and hazardous and harmful use of alcohol.⁷⁻¹¹ This is of particular relevance to the youth market (both underage as well as young adults):

- *The vigorous promotion of mixer drinks (eg Coke and Bourbon) is apparently aimed at young drinkers. The annual reports of some alcohol manufacturers (eg Fosters) illustrate the rapid growth of sales of such drinks in recent years, and an indication by the industry that continued growth in this area is likely.*
- *The current system relying on the Voluntary Advertising Code (Alcoholic Beverages Advertising Code) does not provide for adequate control over the type or level of promotions of such beverages*^{7,9,11}

We believe that a more rigorous control process over the advertising and promotion of such alcoholic beverages in Australia is required urgently.

Accordingly we support the Objects of the proposed Bill with the addition of a representative of the public health professions to the Responsible Advertising of Alcohol Division.

We also agree that a comprehensive approach that includes dealing with the issues raised at the beginning of our submission**, above, is required for a significant reduction in hazardous and harmful use of alcohol by youth to occur.^{12,13} We also acknowledge the ongoing vested business interests that oppose proven measures which make it difficult for politicians to enact them. In conclusion, we strongly urge your support for the proposed Bill, as an initial step in the creation of an Australian alcohol policy that will support a low risk drinking environment.

Yours Sincerely

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