

PARLIAMENT of AUSTRALIA

Submission to

Community Affairs Committee, Department of the Senate

INQUIRY INTO THE ALCOHOL TOLL REDUCTION BILL 2007

by

Anglicare Victoria and Melbourne Anglican Social Responsibilities Committee

20 March 2008

This is a joint submission by Anglicare Victoria and the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne's Social Responsibilities Committee in response to proposed alcohol toll reduction legislation.

Concerted Government efforts to address the negative impact of alcohol abuse are to be commended, and the *Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill* is an important part of a national strategy to encourage a culture of responsible drinking.

Advertising restrictions and health warning labels on products will establish important standards for the supply and marketing of products containing alcohol. It is hoped that such legislative controls will help to reduce the problematic behaviour associated with alcohol abuse in our communities.

Legislation, Education and Community Events

Government regulation and legislative enforcement function most effectively where these operate alongside educative campaigns within the community. A range of programs are needed to support, educate and inform families and the community of the broader issues surrounding problematic alcohol use, and implement strategies to address its effect on Australian families.

There is also a need for education programs and community events that encourage a fundamental shift in attitude – a culture change that shifts alcohol consumption away from a peer-driven emphasis (eg. through pubs, clubs, parties and events where binge-drinking may be encouraged) towards informed and responsible individual drinking choices.

Community-based information campaigns of the 1970s around the need to wear seatbelts was one example of a successful approach to cultural change that led to significant changes in Australians' thinking about safety. It was the legislative requirements, together with penalties for non-compliance, that ensured that educative campaigns were effective in setting new standards for the long-term.

While the *Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill* is to be commended for its potential to reduce the incidence of problematic alcohol use and minimise harm to Australians and their families, any legislation must operate in such a way that all Australian adults are able to take responsibility for their individual alcohol consumption and to accept responsibility for how their own behaviour may impact on young people. Recognising the importance of responsible drinking at home, and the example this sets for young people, is an indispensable part of the alcohol toll reduction equation.

Thus, what would be required to fundamentally shift Australians' attitudes towards responsible alcohol consumption goes beyond government regulation or legislative enforcement. Enormous financial and human resources (potentially from a range of sources including all three levels of

government as well as alcohol industry bodies) ought to be invested in a variety of long-term, community-based programs and activities that discourage binge-drinking or other irresponsible alcohol consumption.

The most effective way to bring about social change will always incorporate a range of strategies:

- legislation and penalties for non-compliance;
- tighter control measures for the advertising and supply of alcoholic beverages;
- an increased need for the alcoholic beverages industry to demonstrate a more responsible attitude towards product marketing and to incorporate an awareness of the consequences of problematic alcohol use into marketing strategies;
- addressing the manufacture of sweet beverages ('alcopops') specifically marketed to young people;
- education campaigns promoting responsible consumption and informed decision-making; and
- the promotion of community activities that do not encourage excessive drinking.

A combination of all of these strategies is needed in tackling alcohol abuse and its detrimental consequences across all ages and a range of culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Australia.

Product Labelling

The Bill proposes that health warning labels on alcohol products contain information regarding "the impact of drinking on populations vulnerable to alcohol". We would be concerned that Australia's Indigenous communities not be inappropriately stigmatised or disproportionately targetted through such product labelling.

Responsible Advertising of Alcohol Division

It is suggested that representatives of the alcohol suppliers industry and their advertisers also be included in the Division's membership. These representatives ought not be drawn from the relevant peak bodies but directly from the suppliers (eg. Carlton & United Breweries, Foster's Group) and advertising corporations directly involved in the marketing of products containing alcohol. Membership of a Responsible Advertising of Alcohol Division must include representatives of industry bodies who have a much more significant influence on the supply and marketing of alcoholic products than the retail industry (whose activities are largely determined in response to product supplies and advertising).

Corporate Sponsorship of Australian Sport

While it may be beyond the scope of the current Inquiry, we urge the Government to review the corporate sponsorship of significant sporting events in Australia. This issue is one of the most significant and problematic aspects of alcohol marketing: corporate sponsorship of sporting events (eg. AFL, horse racing, Formula 1, cricket etc) and the effect this has on shaping cultural attitudes. A fundamental change in alcohol marketing and consumption cannot be achieved unless the insidious nature of alcohol-related corporate sponsorship is dealt with. It is conceivable that additional legislation may be required in order to address this significant issue.

Revd Dr Ray Cleary

CEO, Anglicare Victoria
and
Chair, Social Responsibilities Committee,
Anglican Diocese of Melbourne