



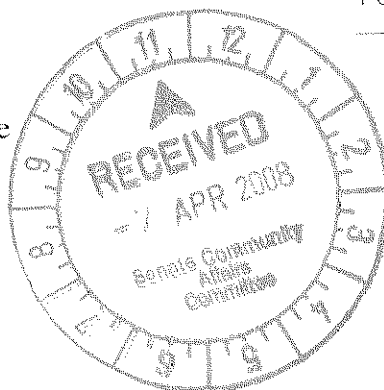
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MINISTER FOR HEALTH

ATTORNEY GENERAL: ELECTORAL AFFAIRS

FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Senator Claire Moore
Chair
Senate Community Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Senator Moore

Thank you for your letter dated 19 February 2008 regarding the Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill 2007.

In response to the aims of the Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill 2007, I submit the following for consideration by the Senate Community Affairs Committee:

1.0 Require health information labels on all alcohol products.

The potential benefits of placing health messages on alcoholic beverage labels has been recognised recently by two major inquiries into alcohol issues – the NSW Alcohol Summit and the *House of Representatives Inquiry into Substance Abuse in Australian Communities* – and warrants consideration at the national level.

There is an evidence base from overseas, demonstrating that the provision of health messages on alcohol containers raises alcohol consumers' awareness of those issues. However, there are limited evaluations that demonstrate warning labels lead to a change in drinking behaviour. The current standard drink labelling is particularly weak because of its size. Given the success of health warning labels on tobacco products, there is a case for having more research done in the area and for such a strategy to be supported.

It is recognised that in order to be effective, such an initiative should not be conducted in isolation and health messages placed on alcohol containers must be part of a comprehensive package of initiatives.

4th Floor London House

216 St George's Terrace Perth WA 6000

Tel: +61 8 9422 3000 Fax: +61 8 9422 3001

ABN: 61313082736

2.0 Restrict television and radio alcohol advertising to after 9pm and before 5am, to stop alcohol being marketed to young people.

Alcohol advertising can influence perceptions of what is viewed as 'normal' drinking behaviour and supports attitudes that contribute to risky alcohol use and related problems. There is a strong case for restrictions on alcohol advertising and the implementation of a legislated regulatory framework. It is recommended that any definition of alcohol advertising needs to include sponsorship and other forms of promotion.

3.0 Require all alcohol advertisements to be pre-approved by a government body comprising an expert from the medical profession, alcohol and drug support sector, accident trauma support sector and the alcohol industry.

There is evidence that self regulation of the voluntary code is not effective. For example, 2007 research associated with 93 magazines popular with 18-30 year olds found that:

- 2/3 contained at least one alcohol advertisement or promotion with 142 unique items identified; and
- 52 percent failed to comply with at least one section of the Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code. The two major apparent breaches related to the items having a strong appeal to adolescents and promoting positive social, sexual and psychological expectancies of consumption (Section B and Section C of the code respectively).¹

The above findings, along with many other consistent studies highlight the need to move away from having advertisements approved by industry, and the need for a properly legislated code which should be developed and regulated by government with the assistance of expert advice.

4.0 Ban alcohol advertisements which are aimed at children or which link drinking to personal, business, social, sporting, sexual and other success.

This item is already part of the voluntary code and the need to include it within the Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill reflects the inadequacy of the current self regulatory system.

It is of note that while alcohol advertisements may not blatantly target children, they still have an impact upon the perceptions and behaviours of children and young people. For example, research has found that adolescents who have greater exposure to alcohol advertising, and also enjoy the advertisements, are more likely to drink at harmful levels than young adults.²

¹ Donovan K, Donovan R, Howat P & Weller N 2007, 'Magazine alcohol advertising compliance with the Australian Alcoholic Beverages Advertising Code', *Drug and Alcohol Review (January 2007)*, 26, 73-81.

² Wyllie, A, Shang, JF, Casswell, S. (1998) Positive responses to televised beer advertisements associated with drinking and problems reported by 18 to 29 year olds. *Addiction*. 1998; 93: 749-760

The general exposure of children to alcohol advertising and the normalisation of alcohol consumption and other related impacts is of concern and is recommended for consideration as part of the Inquiry.

Changes to alcohol advertising requirements are welcomed. Effective regulation is required to stop inappropriate advertising and other marketing practices.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim McGinty". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

JIM MCGINTY MLA
MINISTER FOR HEALTH

25 MAR 2008