



24 August 2012

The Government's back down this week from regulating ready-to-drinks (RTDs) in favour of more industry self regulation has turned the alcohol law reform process into a farce, says Alcohol Healthwatch director Rebecca Williams.

She says it is yet another illustration of how out of touch they are with the evidence and community expectations.

During the lengthy and thorough investigation into our alcohol laws by the Law Commission, the community clearly expressed deep concern about the level of harm alcohol is causing, and their frustration at the failure of our laws to protect them from this. Thousands of submissions called for stronger laws.

The public process for engagement in alcohol law reform ended with the completion of the select committee process over a year ago. By allowing supermarket and alcohol industry giants undue influence on this process beyond this, the Government has abandoned its responsibility to project the health and safety of New Zealanders.

The multiple battles that will now play out at local level, as councils, agencies and communities attempt to implement the watered down new alcohol law, will increasingly pit local interests against those of multi-billion dollar global corporates.

Williams says that evidence clearly shows that industry self-regulation doesn't work. By way of example, she points to how the industry has responded to a request last year by New Zealand and Australian Food and Health Ministers to voluntarily introduce health warnings on alcohol, and giving them 2 years to do so. At the time DB Breweries here flatly refused to participate in voluntary labelling.

A recent independent audit* of 250 products in Australia found that:

- Only 16% carried the industry 'consumer information' messages.
- Most of the messages took up less than 5% of the label, many were only 1-2% of the label.
- Of products carrying the industry label most (59%) were at the back of the product.
- The labels were inconsistent and lacked uniformity.
- Most labels simply referred consumers to an industry website to "get the facts".

Auditors also found examples of the industry using this process to further promote their brand, rather than provide any substantial health warning, such as a vodka brand including the message "Enjoy with Absolut Responsibility".

Williams says alcohol advertising will also remain in industry hands despite voluntarily content codes doing nothing to limit the exposure of alcohol marketing to young people.

Williams says these are classic examples of how the alcohol industry treats public health and safety with contempt.

For further comment contact Rebecca Williams, Director Alcohol Healthwatch on (09) 520 7035 or 021 862 250

*www.fare.org.au