



Press Release – 23 July 2013

Trade deal will undermine public health efforts to reduce alcohol-related harm if it limits the scope and role of alcohol warning labelling.

Round 18 of negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) are currently underway in Malaysia. Alcohol Healthwatch director Rebecca Williams says her organisation has just learnt that trade negotiators are discussing text for inclusion in the TPPA that could limit the role of alcohol warning labelling, and this has serious implications for public health in New Zealand.

Williams says that public health experts have been calling for labelling on all alcohol containers for years to ensure that consumers have the real facts about the risks they are taking.

A New Zealand application for labels warning of the risks of consuming alcohol during pregnancy, first made in 2006, remains undecided following delay after delay. In December 2011 the alcohol industry were given 2 years to voluntarily introduce labels. Both New Zealand and Australian governments are undertaking a review of their efforts.

Best practice for health warnings require them to be mandatory, prominently placed, have horizontal orientation, include both text and graphics, cover a specified percentage of the label and have rotating warnings. An independent audit undertaken in Australia showed that alcohol industry voluntary efforts were totally inadequate. The audit* of 250 products in Australia found that:

- Only 16% carried the industry 'consumer information' messages.
- 98% 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".

Research released last week showed that breast cancer is the leading cause of alcohol-related death for women, and road traffic injuries for men. Williams says that we must be in a position to provide accurate advice to people of these and other risks. "This is a matter of health and must be determined on this basis. Any limits placed on labelling by trade interests will go against the best interests of New Zealanders."

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

*www.fare.org.au

Connor, J., R., Kydd, R., Rehm, J., Shield, K. (2013) *Alcohol-attributable burden of disease and injury in New Zealand: 2004 and 2007, Research report commissioned by the Health Promotion Agency*. Wellington: Health Promotion Agency. A copy of the full report can be found at www.hpa.org.nz