

News Views

The Newsletter of Alcohol Healthwatch

Bills, Bills, Bills!

In contrast to the unwelcome ones that tend to clog the letter box at Christmas time, these bills, if they are plucked from Parliament's ballot box, may be something to look forward to in the new year.

There are currently three Private Member's Bills in the ballot box, or the 'bikkie tin', as some MPs refer to it, that seek to raise the legal purchase age for alcohol. Concern about the impact of alcohol advertising on young people is also on the agenda of some MPs - with two bills aiming to impose increased restrictions on broadcast advertising.

The first purchase age bill to be introduced to the ballot was that of New Zealand First MP Ron Mark in 2002. His Sale of Liquor (Increase of Drinking Age) Amendment Bill has the purpose of returning the purchase age to 20 years.

Progressive MP Matt Robson's Sale of Liquor (Youth Alcohol Harm Reduction) Amendment Bill also proposes to raise the minimum purchase age to 20. It also strengthens provisions relating to the supply of liquor to minors, including repealing the exemption that allows adults other than parents to supply alcohol to minors at private social functions. Additionally, his bill seeks to put restrictions on broadcast alcohol advertising by changing the jurisdiction of broadcast liquor advertising from the Advertising Standards Authority to the Broadcasting Standards Authority, and forbids all broadcast liquor

advertising before 10pm. To achieve this, the bill amends the object of the Sale of Liquor Act which would become: "to establish a reasonable system of control over the sale, supply and broadcasting promotion of liquor to the public with the aim of contributing to the reduction of liquor abuse..."

United Future's Paul Adams is sponsoring a Private Member's Bill that would allow 18 year olds to buy alcohol from on-licences, while restricting the purchase of alcohol from off-licences to those over 20. Adams, while personally supporting a 20 year age for both on and off-licensed purchases, doubts the ability to achieve enough votes for it to pass. "However, I do believe a bill such as this one would have a reasonable chance of success," he says.

Green MP Nandor Tanczos has had a bill in the ballot since 2002 that would ban alcohol advertising through the broadcast media.

Raising the purchase age appears to be gaining widespread support. A ONE News Colmar Brunton poll shows 71% of people want the purchase age put back to 20.

The purchase age has also been the subject of vigorous debates on television recently, and may yet become an election issue. Matt Robson says that if his party is in the next coalition government, it will seek to negotiate an agreement with Labour that would allow Parliament the opportunity to reconsider the purchase age.



Kim Hill and Damien O'Connor air views about the purchase age

Tax Action

"Any Government that is serious about reducing alcohol problems would increase the price of alcohol. It's the one measure that will reliably reduce harm" (Smith R, British Medical Journal, 2004).

Alcohol Healthwatch has just released its fifth paper, *Alcohol Excise Tax - Changes to the New Zealand System*, completing a set of five that forms the basis for its Action on Liquor Campaign.

According to the World Health Organisation (2004), the most effective way to reduce hazardous drinking is to increase controls on the physical and economic availability of alcohol. Among the range of supply control options available, increasing the price of alcohol is recognised as one of the most important and effective strategies.

In response to this strong body of evidence, Alcohol Healthwatch has recommended tax changes as a key strategy

► to reduce alcohol-related harm. *Alcohol Excise Tax - Changes to the New Zealand System* discusses the current alcohol excise tax system in New Zealand from a public health perspective, recommending that alcohol excise be utilised more effectively as a tool to reduce excessive alcohol consumption, better meets the costs of alcohol-related harm and harm prevention efforts and integrates more effectively with a range of other strategies to reduce alcohol-related harm.

The paper recommends an overall tax increase. It reviews evidence that shows the link between consumption and price, especially in young people. It also points out that the approximately \$580 million a year currently collected from the tax on alcohol doesn't cover the direct healthcare costs due to alcohol misuse, let alone the cost to other sectors.

"Increasing tax places the burden of harm directly on those whose drinking is more likely to cause harm" says Director Rebecca Williams, who believes the public will support price increases if they can see that they, their families and communities are benefiting.

The paper recommends that more of the tax revenue be

used to support multi-agency approaches to harm reduction* and better support those health and social services that respond to the results of hazardous drinking.

Alcohol Healthwatch says that, while the proposed taxation changes would be effective on their own, their effectiveness would be enhanced if all their campaign policies are adopted. The background papers for each of the areas can be viewed (in PDF format) at www.ahw.co.nz and include:

- The Advertising of Alcohol – In Support of Increased Restrictions
- Reducing the Legal Blood Alcohol Concentration for Driving
- Alcohol Health and Safety Advisory Statements
- The Sale of Liquor in New Zealand – Recommended Changes to the Act
- Alcohol Excise Tax – Changes to the New Zealand System

* The alcohol excise tax that goes to the Government consolidated fund is a different revenue base to the small levy placed on alcoholic beverages sold, which funds the Alcohol Advisory Council and their activity.

Sobering Reports from Asia Pacific Nations

For many nations in the Asia Pacific region, accelerating globalisation is bringing with it increasing alcohol consumption and, along with it, a raft of negative health and social consequences.

In the least developed countries, the spread of western influences from people travelling back and forth from their homeland, tourism, marketing on the internet and cable TV are helping to breakdown traditional constraints on drinking. Also likely to increase alcohol consumption are the economic and social changes facilitated by free trade agreements.

The 'recolonisation' of vulnerable countries through the export of products, lifestyles and trade policies of developed countries such as New Zealand was brought sharply into focus at an Asia Pacific Meeting on Alcohol Policy attended by Alcohol Healthwatch in Auckland this September. The meeting was one of a series planned in the Pacific region to increase awareness of environmental influences on alcohol consumption and identify effective strategies to combat negative effects. Delegates from more than a dozen Asia and Pacific nations shared knowledge of the way in which alcohol is marketed in their countries as well as current efforts to curtail its misuse.

Before its introduction by Europeans, many Pacific countries were virtually without alcohol. Some countries have made deliberate efforts to suppress alcohol use, for example prohibition existed in Papua New Guinea until 1962, and prior to 1989 in Tonga, a permit was needed to drink. There is a dearth of research as to the effects of alcohol on Pacific nations today, but we know that drinking rates have been

increasing in the past 50 years, and that patterns in the region tend to be ones of high rates of abstinence but heavy drinking episodes among those who drink.

We also know that alcohol use is likely to increase in the Pacific – following the tendency for alcohol consumption to rise with growing affluence – as has been the case in Asia. The delegate from Thailand, for example, spoke about the huge increase in consumption in recent years. Thailand's consumption now ranks approximately 8th in the world, drinking 13.9 litres per adult in 2000.

While most Asia Pacific countries do have regulations governing alcohol use, many laws suffer from poor policing and few Pacific nations have comprehensive alcohol policies. Reports from delegates highlighted a range of marketing practices, and discussion included the need to introduce restrictions on marketing before it becomes entrenched.

The tiny nation of Niue has 'no need to advertise' but traditional ceremonies, such as hair cutting, now come with the expectation that hospitality involves providing alcohol.

In Tonga, where there seems to be debate about what the purchase age actually is, the delegate reported that much crime is alcohol-related. Alcohol advertising is prevalent on TV and in newspapers and every child knows the TV ad for the local Igala beer "The Taste of Tonga". Policies to restrict marketing are non-existent, and complicated by the fact that the brewery is part owned by the Crown Prince. A national committee is currently reviewing alcohol laws, and breath testing begins next year.

Sri Lanka allows no direct marketing, but indirect marketing

A Community in Action

A community action on alcohol project begun in Waiuku, south of Auckland this February is “progressing well”, says project coordinator Adrian Knowles. Funded by the Ministry of Health and administered by Alcohol Healthwatch, the project aims to provide support and co-ordination for community efforts to reduce alcohol related harm, with a focus on reducing intoxication and inappropriate access to alcohol to people under 18.

The project plans to work as much as possible with existing service groups and organisations to develop and enhance local responses to alcohol issues for young people. A reference group of local people is providing the foundation for the project.

“We want to address more than just the obvious issues like intoxication in public places,” says Adrian, “so that, rather than just cosmetic solutions, we are looking at strategies that consider drinking as a part of people’s lives. We are looking at changes that can be sustained beyond the project’s life, so the project is based soundly in health promotion theory and practice, which enables a broad, holistic approach.”

The development of the project has involved establishing relationships with local organisations and individuals, gaining a clear picture of the issues and forming project plans that are responsive to local needs. Part of this has involved developing an understanding among stakeholders about the project’s health promotion approach to the issues. “It’s a complex process,” says Adrian, “and one that really requires long term investment.”

Several very positive looking strategies are underway.

Enforcement of the Sale of Liquor Act has been a priority. “Working with Police has really highlighted the benefits of collaboration,” says Adrian. “They have been very responsive to our requests for enforcement strategies that work to reduce the availability of alcohol to minors.” Controlled purchase operations continue to be successful, with latest police data showing a steep decline in sales to young people who fail to produce age verification.

Dealing with the social supply of alcohol to minors from parents, other family members and friends is more difficult. A number of initiatives to address this complex issue are currently being undertaken. A parent support group aimed at helping parents decide what’s appropriate and how to negotiate with teens will be launched in February with a public meeting addressed by Celia Lashlie. Her presentation, “It takes a community to raise a child” will focus on the importance of developing community responses to community issues.

The planning of a designated driver project is also underway, involving both on and off-licence premises, to reduce drink driving in the area and a student training package is being developed in consultation with the local high school. It is hoped that these longer term strategies with the students will support them to make drinking decisions based on their health rather than social pressures.

Next year will be as exciting, as more community members become involved. “We are looking forward to other community groups hearing about the work, seeing the benefits and wanting to come on board.”

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▶ through product placement in movies is prevalent.

In China, alcohol advertising is well and truly entrenched in western style marketing with themes based on sports, national pride, masculinity and movie star heroes. \$US268 million was spent on TV alcohol advertising in 2000.

Particularly concerning was a presentation by Stanley Simpson, coordinator of the Pacific Network on Globalisation in Fiji, who spoke of the imminent trade agreements that Pacific nations are preparing to permanently enter into. Trade agreements, Simpson said, are too often assessed only in terms of economics and consumer choice, rather than their potential impact on the health and stability of their communities. Tariff reduction limits the ability of governments to control the import, marketing and price of alcohol and is likely to lead to greater variety of alcohol at lower prices, as well as to increased alcohol advertising. Simpson urged action by stakeholders to conduct research and mobilize community action against the inclusion of alcohol and tobacco in the Pacific free trade agreements, which is due to be discussed by Pacific Forum

countries early next year. A growing culture of alcohol abuse is feared if alcohol is included in the Pacific Islands Countries Trade Agreement.

According to Auckland University Law Professor Jane Kelsey, imposing capitalist models on Pacific Island economies could spell disaster for their communities. In a controversial report on the implications of the overarching Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER), she accuses Australia and New Zealand of forcing the pact, suggesting that we are, as her report is titled, “Big Brothers Behaving Badly”.

The Asia Pacific Meeting on Alcohol Policy was funded by Ministry of Health and hosted by SHORE. Associate Minister of Health Damien O’Connor gave an opening address. A WHO sponsored meeting on alcohol and health in the Pacific followed in Noumea, at which senior health and government officials focused on patterns of change and considerations in developing national and regional policy on alcohol.

Titanic hits iceberg

On 6 September 2004, a Liquor Licensing Authority hearing was held for a premise on Auckland's North Shore, Titanic Bar and Restaurant. The application for the hearing included the cancellation or suspension of the on-licence issued to the premises, and the cancellation or suspension of the General Manager's Certificate.

What made this particular case worth highlighting was the large number of breaches of the Sale of Liquor Act. Grounds for the first application were breaches of the following: display of signs and licence (Sec.25); unauthorised sale and supply (Sec. 165); allowing drunkenness or disorderly conduct on licensed premises (Sec. 168 1a); sales of spirits otherwise than in a glass (Sec.169); allowing persons on licensed premises outside of licensing hours (Sec. 171); as well as breaches to the conditions of their licence (trading outside of licensing hours and not promoting responsible consumption of liquor by the licensee). The grounds for application for suspension/cancellation of the General Managers Certificate were the failure to conduct the licensed premises in a proper manner, and the manager's suitability.

It appeared that the premise was operating like a karaoke bar, instead of a restaurant. Bottles of whiskey in 750ml volumes were found on the customers' tables which enabled them to drink as much alcohol as they wanted without bar staff being able to monitor their consumption. This practice was explained by the licensee as a regular custom of patrons to purchase full bottles of whiskey and pour drinks out of them at each visit.

They then marked the level they had drunk to before they left the premises, and this was done at their tables. Another routine Police visit revealed two extremely intoxicated male patrons in the premises, as well as incorrect displays of the on-licence and hours of trading. Last Drink Survey evidence was used during the hearing, with an offender producing 717 micrograms of alcohol per litre of breath when breath tested after allegedly having consumed alcohol at Titanic. Eftpos receipts were also used as evidence by Police to show that the premises had been trading outside their 1am closing time.

The evidence presented to the court was upheld by the Authority. The Authority found the premises to be a Korean style karaoke bar run with 'no consideration for New Zealand law'. There was little attention paid to host responsibility, and the Authority did not take kindly to the respondent's less than truthful briefs of evidence while under oath. Both the duty manager and the licensee were found to be in contradiction of the way in which they should have been running the premises. In light of the evidence presented in court, the Authority ordered Titanic's licence to be suspended for 6 weeks, and the General Managers Certificate in question was suspended for 3 weeks (as it was seen she was acting mostly under the instruction of the licensee).

One week into the suspension, the building that housed the Titanic was torn down to make way for an apartment block. There has been no indication so far as to whether the licensee will reopen the premises elsewhere.

Rejection of inquiry into advertising 'disappointing'

In response to a petition led by the Group Against Liquor Advertising which called for a select committee inquiry into alcohol advertising, the Health Select Committee report released last week did not recommend that an inquiry be held. Their recommendations instead included monitoring of alcohol advertising research, further counter-advertising, and a comprehensive review with the goal of improving the current regulatory framework.

The Green Party represented a minority view in the committee, stating that the conclusions "side-stepped the issues raised by the petitioner and failed to deal with the role of alcohol advertising in normalising and glamourising alcohol". Alcohol Healthwatch Director Rebecca Williams says that New Zealanders have been "short-changed".

Events

2005 Australian Winter School "Drugs Lifestyles and Culture – Innovation and Evidence" The focus of this conference is on the practical application of research evidence, policy and innovative programs for those working in service delivery agencies.
www.winterschool.info

Feedback

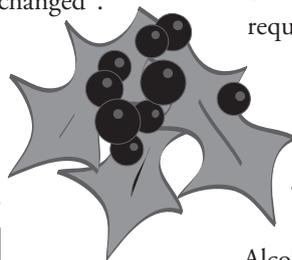
Many thanks to those of you who took the time to fill in evaluation forms for this newsletter. Your responses were very supportive, also reflective of the wide variety of roles among our readership. It's not too late to reply. We're happy to receive comments/suggestions anytime, and will be considering these suggestions during our newsletter redesign next year.

Thanks also to all who updated your database details. We will be introducing email notification next year for those who requested it.



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Disclaimer: The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of Alcohol Healthwatch Trust.



We wish all our readers a relaxing, fun and safe Christmas break.

Alcohol Healthwatch

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