



15<sup>th</sup> October 2009

The Research Director  
Law, Justice and Safety Committee  
Parliament House  
BRISBANE QLD 4000

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Dear Madam Chairman

I am a retired Registered Nurse.

Almost twenty years ago I successfully completed a Graduate Diploma in Health Science Health Education.

Since my retirement in 2000 I have remained very interested in Health Promotion. Because of personal and professional experiences, this is especially the case in relation to Alcohol Abuse and its related violence. While Preventative Health Education and Promotion has gained some ground during these intervening years, it distresses and saddens me to see how little progress (up until recently) has been made in relation to alcohol misuse.

However, with the advent of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's introduction of a National Binge Drinking Strategy and the support of organizations such as the Alcohol and Other Drugs Council of Australia (ADCA) contributing to the debate it does seem as though the time has come to make some positive inroads on "Australia's growing alcohol toll" (ADCA News March 08 p1).

Consequently I was greatly encouraged to read of your Inquiry into Alcohol-Related Violence in Queensland and hope that the attached submission will contain something of value to add your deliberations on this vast and complex issue. I wish you every success with your enquiry.

With kind regards

  
Lindsay Rigby.

# **SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY INTO ALCOHOL – RELATED VIOLENCE IN QUEENSLAND.**

Prepared and submitted by Lindsay Rigby.  
19<sup>th</sup> October 2009.

## **1. HARM MINIMISATION.**

It is important to acknowledge the role and the principle of Harm Minimisation in the Drug & Alcohol field. However, this concept has been guiding policy formation for nearly 25 years and it does not yet appear to have had much impact on the harms generated by excessive consumption of alcohol.

**Is it possible that because of the status of alcohol in Australian society and in our economy that there has not yet been a genuine attempt to examine the issue and to take concrete actions in relation to this substance?**

While there has been some effort to educate with regard to Safe Drinking Levels, Standardisation of serves of alcohol and Drink Driving legislation, the recent furore over high profile figures caught Drink Driving indicates there is still a long way to go before these measures are fully accepted/integrated into mainstream behaviour.

There is a definite resistance to and contempt for what is seen as “The Nanny State” in Australia.

I would argue that measures such as replacing glass with plastic containers, provision of safe transport and crowd controllers/marshals all smack of the “Nanny State” pandering to inebriated patrons pouring out of venues. These measures do nothing to eradicate the underlying violence generated by excessive alcohol intake or to promote a sense of self-responsibility for one’s behaviour. The removal of glass may prevent lacerations but does nothing to curb the impulse to “King Hit” other patrons who may become targets of alcohol-induced angst.

What needs to be appreciated and addressed is the fact that violence has many faces. Some of them are overt like a “glassing” and capture much attention. Others, such as interpersonal violence are more covert, but just as destructive to individuals.

## **IMAGERY & STATUS OF ALCOHOL.**

During the last fifty years the manufacture and distribution of alcohol has assumed a significant and growing presence that has permeated our culture. “To Party” means to “get pissed”. The stubby and the can have become almost a claw-like extension of the hand as we socialize.

Governments must lose their reticence “about creating wider public media campaigns that directly confront alcohol consumption and misuse” (Fitzgerald & Jordan, 2009 p267).

Submission prepared by L. Rigby.

The conflicting messages exhibited by the alcohol industry in conjunction with the recipients of its sponsorship are at times astounding. For example Drink Driving is considered as one of the greatest harms linked to alcohol consumption. However, anyone watching the recent car racing from Bathurst could not fail to be dazzled by the XXXX, Jim Beam and Jack Daniels logos festooning the racing cars. Surely this kind of imagery needs to be modified.

The ambivalent relationship between alcohol and sport that is constantly displayed on the sporting arenas of this country due to sponsorship must be addressed. Perhaps this is the reason why a proportion (some surveys suggest 25 to 30%) of our youth say that they drink to get drunk. They are totally confused by so many mixed messages and seek oblivion rather than wrestle with the issues.

The recent campaign to have the June Queen's Birthday public holiday re-scheduled to the Monday following the AFL Grand Final says more about the proponents wanting a legislated opportunity for a giant binge than any devotion to the actual sport as the match was concluded by 6pm therefore allowing plenty of time to recover from the earlier excesses of the day. This holiday change should not be made.

The prominence and domination of signage relating to alcohol is excessive therefore emphasizing its status and importance. For example outside Shopping Malls there is dominant signage directing shoppers to a specific shop such as COLES or WOOLWORTHS. You do not see huge signs for milk, butter, bread or any of the other staples of life. Why then is it necessary to so prominently advertise alcoholic products? Just as people know to go to a supermarket for their groceries so they know to go a liquor outlet for alcohol. As you enter the small township of Tin Can Bay the most attention grabbing sign is an illuminated flashing XXXX over the club on the outskirts of the township.

Much conflict has been generated in Aboriginal communities over the dependence upon alcohol sales to fund other essential community assets. This is just as much an issue for mainstream society with its dependence upon revenue raised in the pubs and clubs to fund various projects.

### **Recommendations.**

Investigate the "Good Sports Program" developed by the Australian Drug Foundation. (ADCA News March 2006 p1)

Place limitations on the public advertising of alcohol.

All alcoholic products should carry health warnings.

Submission prepared by L. Rigby.

A flat tax should be imposed according to the alcoholic content of a drink.

It may be time to reconsider some variation of the Local Option Act that attempted to engage individual communities in deciding the presence and numbers of liquor outlets in a particular area/state as was explored in the early twentieth century (Fitzgerald & Jordan, 2009 p171)

## **2. IMPACT OF LATE OPENING HOURS.**

It would seem to me that the much-maligned 6 pm swill has been replaced by a 24 hour swill. **This will persist until there is a change in the drinking culture.** "There is an incontrovertible link between longer trading hours and increased violence". (Fitzgerald & Jordan, 2009 p254).

Change in hours for consideration.

Sunday to Thursday 10am to 10pm.

Friday/Saturday 10am to 2am.

## **3. FLOW-ON ISSUES FOR EMERGENCY SERVICE WORKERS.**

It is appalling that at any time emergency workers and facilities should be tied up dealing with alcohol induced incidents/injuries. However, this is particularly reprehensible in times of shortage of workers and supply of adequate services such as is being currently experienced in many parts of the country. Furthermore, on top of the inherently stressful nature of this work, it is intolerable that these workers should be verbally and physically abused by inebriates.

A decrease in binge drinking should automatically improve the conditions for these workers.

## **4. EDUCATION CAMPAIGNS.**

As stated under the section on Harm Minimisation, in my life time, I have seen a proliferation in the use of and profile of alcohol in our society.

This is manifested by its availability, extensive advertising and frequent visual presence on TV news items eg. scenes of art, fashion, Melbourne Cup gatherings etc. Even in radio broadcasts I believe that much more mention is currently made of alcohol. Eg. A highlight of the famed Birdsville Races is often the tonnes of alcohol being shipped in for the event. Recently on my local ABC mention was made of a chili concentrate being added to beer and the announcer made much of what a thrilling taste experience this provided.

**Somehow I believe it is necessary to engage the attention of more of the adults in the community with regard to alcohol misuse, the related violence and its prevention.**

For some years I was voluntarily involved with an organisation in Kingaroy trying to educate youth and prevent alcohol and drug abuse. Despite our best efforts we attracted very few adult members, however, we were instrumental in bringing the Life Education Van to Kingaroy. It was disappointing to recently read a report in the local South Burnett Times (20.01.09) stating that the region had a "massive problem with alcohol". **Might our efforts have had a better outcome if more adult role models had joined us in our endeavours?**

Furthermore many people when questioned about the harms associated with alcohol only consider alcoholism and addiction

I recently put the focus of this enquiry to my local Toastmasters' Group. They were asked to briefly nominate their solution to Alcohol-related violence. Many of the members spoke of ways to deal with alcoholism despite my elaborating on the fact that violence was the focus of the enquiry.

**I would suggest that there should be Government sponsored T.V.education aimed at adults/parents – not just aimed at teenagers.**

## **5. THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN INFLUENCING ATTITUDES.**

As mentioned previously the young adults now embarking upon creating families may need some awareness-raising on the responsible use of alcohol. Many of them and particularly women have been the product of this era of very liberal attitudes to the drinking culture.

I and many other woman of my generation have espoused feminist values but to many of us this did not mean participating in some of the worst aspects of male behaviour. I find it absolutely tragic to see young women "legless" and so vulnerable to a variety of assaults. I am sure that when Merle Thornton and her companion chained themselves to the bar of the Regatta Hotel to highlight discrimination against women entering public bars they didn't intend that women become misusers of alcohol.

**There must be attitudinal change.**

Forty years ago I vividly remember men who were regarded as pillars of society boasting in front of their growing sons about how "pissed" they had been. These men were not alcoholics – just ordinary representatives of male society.

Maybe alcohol awareness could be incorporated in the antenatal classes many young couples now attend.

Perhaps it is time to also challenge the current widely held and publicly espoused concept of teenagers thinking themselves immortal and bullet proof and thus excused of any responsibility for reckless behaviour. How much of this attitude (if it really exists) is fueled by alcohol induced bravado. I never remember personally feeling utterly immune to danger. However, I vividly remember being ashamed, terrified, disgusted and powerless over the behaviour of others under the influence of alcohol.

It is utterly reprehensible for parents to supply their off-spring with rivers of grog for events such as Schoolies or any other occasion principally for the entertainment of those under eighteen.

**There is a good case for raising the legal age for drinking once again to twenty-one years.**

In an educative brochure for parents recently released by Campbell Newman Lord Mayor of Brisbane it was hoped that the message would provide guidance and "also a little courage in broaching this difficult topic". It is this tentative and ambivalent attitude to the subject that needs challenging. Why should it be any more difficult to talk about the health properties of alcohol than say milk?

## **6. THE ECONOMIC COST OF ALCOHOL RELATED VIOLENCE.**

Numerous reports show that the current cost of alcohol abuse to the Australian community is around \$15 billion. This is of course only a monetary value. It fails to identify the loss of life and human suffering contained in this statistic.

Along with all of the above suggestions I would recommend that much more funding be directed to scientific research in the following areas –

Any association between the onset of Alzheimer's Disease and Alcohol intake.

The connection between obesity and alcohol consumption.

The genetics of tendencies towards alcoholism and an effective treatment for same.

The nexus between dual diagnosis and self-medicating with alcohol.

The fostering of more open and tolerant dialogue on issues of self-esteem and self image so that people do not have to resort to alcohol to enhance their a sense of adequacy.

Further studies/debate on the ethics of interventions to prevent harms and/or measures to enforce same.

## **CONCLUSION.**

It is my fervent desire that some aspects of my submission may aid in the deliberations of this committee. It is time for women of non-aboriginal origin to join their aboriginal sisters in speaking out against alcohol-related violence. Violence takes many forms ranging from the derogatory expletive, assaults on persons and property to addiction, rape, maiming and death. These then combine to create the huge economic and social toll that must be born by all citizens.

In making this contribution I hope that the haze of horror that alcohol has cast over my entire life and the lives of many whom I have encountered will have been endured for some purpose for the betterment of future generations.

Bibliography. Ross Fitzgerald & Trevor Jordan Under the Influence Harper Collins 2009.