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Our Binge Drinking Culture

Alcohol plays an important part in Australian culture. It is also of considerable significance to the Australian economy. Most people enjoy alcohol in a sensible manner, with family and friends, in order to relax, be sociable or forget about their problems for a while.

However, the statistics point to a concerning proportion of the population that consumes alcohol at levels that expose them to a risk of short-term and/or long-term harm.

There are also some worrying aspects of the Australian culture that appear to support, condone or even encourage alcohol misuse.

This Research Brief considers the issue of binge drinking by examining various studies which show the patterns of alcohol consumption across different groups in the community, together with the effects of, and possible reasons for, alcohol misuse. Detailed consideration is given to young people, and young women in particular. The contentious issue of parental supply of alcohol to young people in private premises is also discussed, including an examination of the Liquor (Restriction of Supply to Minors) Amendment Bill 2007 (Qld), a Private Member's Bill introduced by Mr J-P Langbroek on 22 February 2007.

Renee Gastaldon

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Research Publications and Resources Section

Ms Karen Sampford, Director	(07) 3406 7116
Mrs Nicolee Dixon, Senior Parliamentary Research Officer	(07) 3406 7409
Mrs Renee Gastaldon, Parliamentary Research Officer	(07) 3406 7241

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Inquiries should be addressed to:

Director, Research Publications & Resources

Queensland Parliamentary Library

Parliament House

George Street, Brisbane QLD 4000

Ms Karen Sampford. (Tel: 07 3406 7116)

Email: Karen.Sampford@parliament.qld.gov.au

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is clear that alcohol plays a part in Australian culture, and has a visible and important presence at many social, sporting and business occasions, celebrations, cultural events and family gatherings. Alcohol is also of considerable significance to the Australian economy. Most people enjoy it in a sensible manner, with family and friends, in order to relax, be sociable or forget about their problems for a while. However, the statistics point to a concerning proportion of the population that consumes alcohol at levels that expose them to a risk of short-term and/or long-term harm. There are also some worrying aspects of the Australian culture that appear to support, condone or even encourage alcohol misuse (**pages 1-2**).

This Research Brief:

- examines the concept of ‘risky drinking’ by referring to the various categories of risk associated with alcohol consumption and the risk of harm in the short-term and/or long-term (**pages 3-4**);
- discusses the levels of alcohol consumption recommended in the *Australian Alcohol Guidelines* for the general population (**pages 4-5**) and young people aged under 18 (**pages 5-6**);
- explains the concept of a ‘standard drink’ (**page 6**);
- considers the meanings of ‘intoxication’ (**pages 6**), ‘alcohol dependency’ (**pages 6-7**) and ‘binge drinking’ (**pages 7-8**);
- outlines the findings of recent studies which show the patterns of alcohol consumption across different groups in the community, including young people and young women in particular (**pages 8-18**);
- lists various short-term and long-term harms associated with excessive alcohol consumption (**pages 18-20**), and discusses other negative impacts such as fire, consequences for public safety and amenity, foetal alcohol syndrome and death, trauma or injury (**pages 20-23**);
- considers additional consequences of excessive alcohol consumption by young people (**pages 23-25**);
- looks at reasons why young people, particularly young women, binge drink (**pages 26-29**), including the phenomena of pre-mixed drinks (**page 29**) and the issue of parents supplying alcohol to their children (in this respect, consideration is given to the Liquor (Restriction of Supply to Minors) Amendment Bill 2007 (Qld), a Private Member’s Bill introduced by Mr J-P Langbroek MP) (**pages 30-33, 42-44**);
- discusses Queensland Government initiatives relevant to binge drinking, including the *Liquor Act 1992* (Qld) (**pages 34-45**), *Queensland Alcohol Action Plan 2003/2004 to 2006/2007* (**pages 45-46**) and *Make Your Own Mind Up About Drinking* campaign (**pages 46-47**); and
- provides information on initiatives of the Australian Government (**pages 48-49**) and the New South Wales Government (**pages 49-51**).

1 INTRODUCTION

Alcohol has played a long and central role in Australian culture, having a visible and important presence at many social, sporting and business occasions, celebrations, cultural events and family gatherings.¹ Alcohol is also of considerable significance to the Australian economy. Most people enjoy alcohol in a sensible manner, with family and friends, in order to relax, be sociable or forget about their problems for a while. However, the statistics point to a concerning proportion of the Australian population that consumes alcohol at levels that expose them to a risk of short-term and/or long-term harm.

For example:²

- at least one in ten Australians are classified as ‘binge drinkers’;
- about one in four people are ‘problem drinkers’, meaning they drink more than the recommended limits; and
- approximately 4.1% of Australians are ‘alcohol dependent’,³ with males (6.1%) almost three times more likely than females (2.3%) to feature in this group.

The annual cost to the Australian community of alcohol related harm was about \$7.6 billion in 1998/99 and, despite a decline in per capita consumption since the 1980s, it still remains high by world standards, with binge drinking being one pattern of use that is of concern.⁴

There is also worrying commentary that some Australians consider getting drunk to be an acceptable social practice and simply part of our way of life. People across

¹ For further discussion on the significance of alcohol to Australian culture see, for example, New South Wales Parliamentary Library Research Services (Talina Drabsch), ‘Alcohol Abuse’, *Background Paper*, No 5/2003, section 3.1. See also Jane Fynes-Clinton, ‘Dying for a drink’, *Courier Mail*, 28 December 2006, p 29 (a copy is included in Appendix A to this Research Brief).

² The Salvation Army, ‘The facts: binge drinking & alcohol abuse’, *Fact sheet*, August 2006, p 1 and NSW Parliamentary Library Research Services, ‘Alcohol Abuse’, section 2.5.

³ Alcohol dependency is discussed further in section 2.4 of this Research Brief.

⁴ Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy, *National Alcohol Strategy 2006 – 2009*, May 2006, p 2, downloaded on 13 April 2007 from [http://www.alcohol.gov.au/internet/alcohol/publishing.nsf/Content/B83AD1F91AA632ADCA25718E0081F1C3/\\$File/nas-06-09.pdf](http://www.alcohol.gov.au/internet/alcohol/publishing.nsf/Content/B83AD1F91AA632ADCA25718E0081F1C3/$File/nas-06-09.pdf).

all ages can experience peer group pressure if they abstain from alcohol or attempt to limit the amount they consume.

The *National Alcohol Strategy* reflects on the position of alcohol in Australian culture:⁵

In Australia today, alcohol retains deep-rooted cultural significance. Few question the cultural place of alcohol or its availability. This cultural acceptance of alcohol also appears to include its harmful impacts among some groups. Australians value the positive part that alcohol plays in their lives, but in general are largely unaware of many of the problems and costs associated with alcohol.

The nation's drinking cultures are driven by a mix of powerful, intangible social forces – such as habits, customs, images and norms, and other interlocking and equally powerful, tangible forces relating to the social, economic and physical availability of alcohol – such as promotion and marketing, age restrictions, price, outlets, hours of access and service practices. ...

Although the studies demonstrate that troubling levels of alcohol misuse occur across all ages, recent concern has focussed on the behaviour of young people, particularly young women, towards alcohol. This concern is supported by the following figures which show the use of alcohol by young people, together with some of the consequences:⁶

- over 80% of all alcohol consumed by 14 to 17 year olds is drunk at risky or high-risk levels for short-term harm;
- between 34% and 50% of males aged 15 to 17 who have consumed alcohol in the previous three months have done so at high-risk levels (seven or more standard drinks), while for females the rate is between 42% and 47% (five or more standard drinks);
- between 1993 and 2002, about 500 underage drinkers died from alcohol related injuries caused by risky or high-risk drinking; and
- between 1999 and 2000, there were 3,300 14 to 17 year olds hospitalised for alcohol related conditions.

This Research Brief:⁷

⁵ National Alcohol Strategy, p 26.

⁶ National Alcohol Strategy, p 13.

⁷ It should be noted that the particular problems regarding alcohol misuse by Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders, together with reasons for such misuse and the accompanying consequences, are not considered in this Research Brief. This is based on a view that such a consideration would be more appropriately dealt with in a separate Research Brief, where the relevant issues could be examined more comprehensively rather than by way of an overview only.

- examines the concept of ‘risky drinking by referring to the various categories of risk associated with alcohol consumption and the risk of harm in the short-term and/or long-term;
- discusses the guidelines for safe consumption, and the meanings attributed to the terms ‘intoxication’, ‘alcohol dependency’ and ‘binge drinking’;
- outlines the findings of various recent studies which show the patterns of alcohol consumption across different groups in the community, including young people and young women in particular;
- lists short-term and long-term harms associated with excessive alcohol consumption, and other negative impacts, particularly for young people;
- considers why young people, and young women specifically, binge drink, and discusses the increasing popularity of pre-mixed drinks and the issue of parents supplying alcohol to their children; and
- discusses Queensland Government initiatives relevant to binge drinking, together with some initiatives of the Australian and New South Wales Governments.

2 WHAT CONSTITUTES ‘BINGE DRINKING’?

2.1 RISKY DRINKING

2.1.1 Various levels of risk

The *Australian Alcohol Guidelines* categorise the risks associated with alcohol consumption as:⁸

- **low-risk levels** - where there is only a minimal risk of harm to the drinker and where there may be health benefits for certain groups in the population;
- **risky levels** - where the risk of harm is significantly increased and exceeds any possible health benefits; and
- **high-risk levels** - where there is a substantial risk of serious harm and above which the degree of risk increases rapidly.

The *Australian Alcohol Guidelines* also assess risk in terms of:⁹

⁸ National Health and Medical Research Council, *Australian Alcohol Guidelines: Health Risks and Benefits*, October 2001, p 26, downloaded on 13 March 2007 from <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/files/ds9.pdf>.

⁹ Australian Alcohol Guidelines, pp 26-27.

- **long-term risk** – the risk of harm and injury associated with regular drinking patterns over a long period of time; and
- **short-term risk** – the risk of harm, particularly injury or death, associated with given levels of drinking on a single day.

2.1.2 Guidelines for the general population

The *Australian Alcohol Guidelines* summarise the levels of alcohol consumption for both males and females which constitute low-risk, risky or high-risk drinking for harm in the short-term (**table 1**) and the long-term (**table 2**).¹⁰

In interpreting these guidelines, it is important to note that they:

- assume the drinker is at least of average size (60kg for males and 50kg for females);
- apply to the population generally and not to particular groups such as pregnant women, older and younger people, people with a mental illness, people taking medication or people with a health or social problem related to or affected by alcohol; and
- are based on the concept of a ‘standard drink’ (for an explanation of this term, see section 2.2 below).

Table 1: Number of standard drinks for risk of harm in the short-term

	Low-risk	Risky	High-risk
Males On any 1 day	Up to 6, no more than 3 days per week	7 to 10	11 or more
Females On any 1 day	Up to 4, no more than 3 days per week	5 to 6	7 or more

Table 2: Number of standard drinks for risk of harm in the long-term

	Low-risk	Risky	High-risk
Males On an average day Overall weekly level	Up to 4 Up to 28	5 to 6 29 to 42	7 or more 43 or more
Females On an average day Overall weekly level	Up to 2 Up to 14	3 to 4 15 to 28	5 or more 29 or more

¹⁰ Australian Alcohol Guidelines, p 5.

Accordingly, the following recommendations are made to the general population in order to minimise the risk of harm in both the short and long terms.¹¹

Table 3: Recommendations to minimise risk of harm in the short-term and long-term

Males	
•	no more than 4 standard drinks per day and no more than 28 standard drinks per week;
•	no more than 6 standard drinks in any one day; and
•	1 to 2 alcohol free days per week.
Females	
•	no more than 2 standard drinks per day and no more than 14 standard drinks per week;
•	no more than 4 standard drinks in any one day; and
•	1 to 2 alcohol free days per week.

2.1.3 Additional guidelines for young people aged under 18

For young people aged under 18, the *Australian Alcohol Guidelines* recommend that they:¹²

- not drink beyond the levels recommended above for the general population;
- be supported in any decision not to drink;
- not drink at all for at least several hours before undertaking potentially risky activities;
- not mix alcohol with mood altering drugs;
- be under adult supervision at all times;
- keep drinking to a minimum;
- not drink to become intoxicated; and
- have a gradual, supervised introduction to alcohol in order to become responsible adult drinkers.

The guidelines note that:¹³

A younger person's ability to cope with alcohol is influenced by their physical size and stage of development. Young people generally have a smaller body size than adults, and therefore tolerate less alcohol. They also lack experience of alcohol and

¹¹ Australian Alcohol Guidelines, p 6.

¹² Australian Alcohol Guidelines, p 15.

¹³ Australian Alcohol Guidelines, p 15.

its effects. This lack of experience also means that their bodies have not developed any tolerance to alcohol.

2.2 MEANING OF A 'STANDARD DRINK'

A 'standard drink' includes ten grams (or 12.5 millilitres) of alcohol and may be comprised of:¹⁴

- one 285mL pot of full-strength (4.8%) beer, 1.6 pots of light-strength (2.8%) beer or five pots of super-light (0.9%) beer;
- one 375mL can of mid-strength (3.4%) beer;
- one 100mL glass of wine;
- one 30mL nip of spirits;
- one 700mL bottle of alcoholic soda (depending on its alcohol content); or
- one 60mL glass of fortified wine (port, muscat or sherry).

2.3 INTOXICATION

The *Australian Alcohol Guidelines* state that although there is no consistent or formally agreed definition of 'intoxication', it generally means an elevated blood alcohol concentration ('BAC') such that a person cannot function within their normal range of physical/cognitive abilities. In some cases, levels above 0.05 or 0.08 BAC are taken as a measure of intoxication, however this is not universally accepted. Intoxication is also said to be a subjective feeling, the experience of a substantial effect of alcohol on mood, cognition and psycho-motor function.¹⁵

2.4 ALCOHOL DEPENDENCY

Alcohol dependency exists where a person prioritises drinking above other previously more important activities. They may drink to relieve withdrawal symptoms, commit significant time to obtaining and consuming alcohol and continue to use it despite its negative effects. Alcohol dependence is also characterised by an awareness of a compulsion to drink and an increased pattern to

¹⁴ Queensland. Department of Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development (Liquor Licensing Division), 'Responsible alcohol consumption: when a few becomes too many!', *Fact sheet*, downloaded on 20 October 2006 from <http://www.liquor.qld.gov.au/Documents/Fact+sheets/Responsible+consumption.pdf>.

¹⁵ Australian Alcohol Guidelines, p 126.

the drinking behaviour. It involves a degree of tolerance, withdrawal and compulsive behaviour, as distinct from alcohol abuse.¹⁶

It is not entirely clear why some people become dependent on alcohol. Some studies have suggested a relationship with genetics, a predisposition to a certain brain chemistry and learned behaviours where, for example, people grow up in a family where alcohol was used as a way of managing emotions.

There are also varying levels of alcohol dependency, from mild to compulsive, and the dependency may be both physical and psychological.

2.5 'BINGE DRINKING'

The *Australian Alcohol Guidelines* avoid the term 'binge drinking' on the basis that it is "ill defined and unclear".¹⁷ However, the guidelines do recognise that, conventionally, the term may refer to either:¹⁸

- occasional bouts of heavy drinking by young and/or non-dependent people; or
- a 'bender' engaged in by an alcohol-dependent person which may last for days or weeks.

The *NSW Youth Alcohol Action Plan 2001-2005* also refers to such a definition of binge drinking and makes the following comments:¹⁹

While these guidelines equivocate on the definition of binge drinking, they imply that binge drinking occurs at the defined 'hazardous' level – five drinks or more for men; three or more for women. This definition has been used in almost all subsequent Australian studies.

Alternatively, when describing binge drinking, Mr Paul Dillon of the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre said that he preferred to talk in terms of an attitude rather than a quantity of alcohol consumed:²⁰

It's about an intent to get drunk.

¹⁶ NSW Parliamentary Library Research Services, 'Alcohol Abuse', sections 2.4 and 2.5.

¹⁷ Australian Alcohol Guidelines, p 26.

¹⁸ Australian Alcohol Guidelines, p 125.

¹⁹ New South Wales. NSW Health Department, *Youth Alcohol Action Plan 2001 – 2005*, February 2002, p 5, downloaded on 1 December 2006 from http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/pubs/2002/pdf/yth_alcohol_plan.pdf.

²⁰ Elizabeth Allen, 'Binge drinking teenage curse', *Courier Mail*, 18 March 2006, p 58.

Colloquially, binge drinking is also referred to as ‘getting smashed’, ‘getting off your face’, ‘blacking out’ or ‘getting wasted’.

3 SELECTED RECENT STUDIES

This section outlines the findings of the following selected studies:

- *Statistics on Drug Use in Australia 2006*;²¹
- *2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey*;²²
- Australian Bureau of Statistics, ‘Alcohol Consumption in Australia: A Snapshot, 2004-05’;²³
- *Reducing the Risks – A Focus Group Study of Young Women’s Drinking Behaviours and their Perceptions of Risks*;²⁴ and
- *Australian Secondary School Students’ Use of Alcohol in 2005*.²⁵

3.1 STATISTICS ON DRUG USE IN AUSTRALIA 2006

The report, *Statistics on Drug Use in Australia*, was released in April 2007 and summarises the major drug-use statistical collections in Australia.²⁶

²¹ Australia. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Statistics on Drug Use in Australia 2006*, April 2007, downloaded on 13 April 2007 from <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/phe/soduia06/soduia06.pdf>.

²² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: Detailed Findings*, October 2005, downloaded on 1 December 2006 from <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/phe/ndshsdf04/ndshsdf04.pdf>. Statistical information provided in this Research Brief is drawn from throughout the survey. Figures may be rounded.

²³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, ‘Alcohol consumption in Australia: a snapshot, 2004-05’, cat 4832.0.55.001, downloaded on 4 December 2006 from <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/productsbyCatalogue/0B973AF7706E8B15CA2571D4001C8654?OpenDocument>.

²⁴ Northern Sydney Central Coast Area Health Service (Judy Finnigan, Mary-Rose Birch and Nola Engel), *Reducing the Risks: A Focus Group Study of Young Women’s Drinking Behaviours and their Perceptions of Risks*, 2006 downloaded on 1 December 2006 from http://www.nsh.nsw.gov.au/HealthInfo/HealthProm/reports/Other/Reducing_the_Risks.pdf.

²⁵ Australia. Department of Health and Ageing, *Australian Secondary School Students’ Use of Alcohol in 2005*, June 2006, downloaded on 12 March 2007 from [http://www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au/internet/drugstrategy/publishing.nsf/Content/85D7B21B3E3A993ECA2572250007755F/\\$File/mono58.pdf](http://www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au/internet/drugstrategy/publishing.nsf/Content/85D7B21B3E3A993ECA2572250007755F/$File/mono58.pdf).

²⁶ *Statistics on Drug Use in Australia 2006*, p viii.

In terms of alcohol, the report states:

- in 2004, 9% of Australians drank daily, 41% drank weekly and 34% drank less than weekly. This pattern remained fairly stable between 1991 and 2004;²⁷
- people 60 years of age and older are the most prevalent consumers of alcohol on a daily basis (17%);²⁸
- in 2004, 35% of Australians drank alcohol at levels considered risky or high risk for short-term harm and about 10% at levels considered risky or high risk for long-term harm;²⁹
- in 2003, about 2% of the burden of disease was attributable to alcohol;³⁰
- use of alcohol declined among secondary students between 1999 and 2005;³¹
- in 2004-05, alcohol was the most common principal drug of concern in treatment episodes (37%), followed by cannabis (23%), heroin (17%) and meth/amphetamine (11%);³² and
- in 2003, Australia ranked 22nd highest in the world in terms of per capita consumption of alcohol, with each person, on average, consuming about seven litres of alcohol through the consumption of about 92 litres of alcohol, 20 litres of wine and one litre of pure alcohol from spirits.³³

3.2 2004 NATIONAL DRUG STRATEGY HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

The *2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey* ('survey') describes the use of licit and illicit drugs in Australia, and the perceptions and attitudes towards them. It reports on people aged 14 years and older, with additional detail provided for 12 and 13 year olds in a chapter specifically dedicated to young people.

²⁷ Statistics on Drug Use in Australia 2006, p 12.

²⁸ Statistics on Drug Use in Australia 2006, p 13.

²⁹ Statistics on Drug Use in Australia 2006, p 14.

³⁰ Statistics on Drug Use in Australia 2006, p 35.

³¹ Statistics on Drug Use in Australia 2006, pp 48-49.

³² Statistics on Drug Use in Australia 2006, p 65.

³³ Statistics on Drug Use in Australia 2006, p 18.

Interesting comparisons are also provided in relation to the levels of risky drinking in each Australian state and territory.

About 30,000 people participated in the survey. In interpreting its findings, it is important to note that homeless and institutionalised people were not surveyed.

3.2.1 Overall drug use opinions

The survey reports the following in terms of Australians' overall drug use opinions:

- 40% consider heroin to be the drug most associated with 'a drug problem';
- 30% consider excessive alcohol consumption to be the most serious problem for the general community; and
- 80% personally approve of the regular use of alcohol by an adult.

3.2.2 Use of alcohol

Risky drinking generally

In terms of Australians' use of alcohol, the survey reports that:

- 9% drink regularly, 41% drink weekly and 16% do not drink at all;
- 20% drink once or more per month at levels that put them at high risk of alcohol related harm in the short-term;
- 10% drink at levels that put them at high risk of alcohol related harm in the long-term; and
- 8% drink at levels that put them at high risk of both short-term and long-term harm.

Impacts of, and attitudes towards, alcohol

The survey reports that:

- 29% of Australians have been verbally or physically abused or put in fear by someone affected by alcohol; and
- 84% support stricter laws against serving drunken customers.

In terms of Australians' understanding of risky drinking behaviours, the survey found that:

- 34% of males who drink at low-risk levels for short-term harm believe that a male can drink at least seven standard drinks in a six hour period without putting his health at risk, compared to 57% of males who drink at risky or high-risk levels for short-term harm;

- for females, the figures were 30% and 53% respectively in terms of a female drinking five or more standard drinks in a six hour period without putting her health at risk;
- 8% of males who drink at low-risk levels for long-term harm believe that a male can drink at least five standard drinks every day for many years without putting his health at risk, compared to 28% of males who drink at risky or high-risk levels for long-term harm; and
- for females, the figures were 14% and 26% respectively in terms of a female drinking three or more standard drinks every day for many years without putting her health at risk.

Risky drinking by young people

In relation to young people, the survey reports that:

- female teenagers (12.3%) are more likely than male teenagers (7.7%) to consume alcohol at risky or high-risk levels for long-term harm;
- from 12 to 13 years of age and 18 to 19 years of age, there is a ten-fold increase in daily or weekly alcohol consumption;
- of 12 to 15 year olds:
 - two-thirds have never had a full glass of alcohol;
 - only one in one thousand consumes alcohol daily;
 - one in thirty consumes alcohol weekly; and
 - three in ten consume alcohol less frequently than weekly; and
- most young Australians obtain their first glass of alcohol from a relative.

3.2.3 Comparisons of alcohol behaviours in Australian states and territories

Higher levels of risky drinking in Queensland

Queensland had a greater proportion of males and females at risk of alcohol related harm in both the long-term (**table 4**) and the short-term (**table 5**) than the Australian average.

Table 4: Risk of alcohol related harm in the long-term: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over (%)³⁴

Risk status	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Aus
Males									
Low risk	75.8	78.9	75.3	76.6	78.9	80.3	82.8	70.6	77.0
Risky	6.1	5.4	7.5	7.9	7.4	7.4	5.0	13.1	6.5
High risk	3.1	2.9	4.8	5.1	2.4	4.1	2.6	6.8	3.6
Females									
Low risk	68.1	71.4	70.2	74.4	72.0	75.6	78.1	69.5	70.6
Risky	7.3	7.4	7.7	8.0	7.9	5.3	8.9	9.8	7.5
High risk	2.1	1.7	2.5	1.9	2.2	2.7	1.3	4.5	2.1

Table 5: Risk of alcohol related harm in the short-term: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over (%)³⁵

Risk status	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Aus
Males									
Low risk	48.5	47.9	44.3	44.8	46.7	43.2	49.7	38.1	46.8
Risky or high risk:									
- At least yearly	15.4	16.1	16.2	16.7	18.1	19.1	15.5	13.7	16.1
- At least monthly	12.5	14.4	15.6	15.5	15.5	17.8	17.1	20.9	14.4
- At least weekly	8.6	8.9	11.6	12.5	8.4	11.6	8.2	17.8	9.8
Females									
Low risk	49.4	50.2	47.3	50.6	49.8	51.6	56.0	43.0	49.4
Risky or high risk:									
- At least yearly	12.3	13.4	14.1	15.9	13.1	14.8	15.5	15.9	13.5
- At least monthly	10.4	11.8	12.1	11.5	13.9	12.2	12.1	15.8	11.5
- At least weekly	5.4	5.1	7.0	6.3	5.3	5.0	4.6	9.2	5.7

³⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2004 *National Drug Strategy Household Survey: State and Territory Supplement*, June 2005, table S4, p 5, downloaded on 4 December 2006 from <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/phe/ndshs04sts/ndsh04sts.pdf>.

³⁵ 2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: State and Territory Supplement, table S5, p 6.

Attitudes towards certain alcohol measures

The support in Queensland for certain alcohol measures, compared to Australia more generally, is shown in **table 6**.

Table 6: Support for alcohol measures: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over(%)³⁶

Measure	Qld	Aus	Measure	Qld	Aus
Increase price of alcohol	20.2	20.9	Ban alcohol sponsorship of sporting events	41.9	46.1
Reduce no. of outlets selling alcohol	27.7	28.5	Harsher penalties for drink driving	84.7	85.9
Reduce trading hours for pubs and clubs	30.2	32.0	Harsher laws against serving drunk customers	84.4	83.8
Raise legal drinking age	41.4	40.7	Restricting late night trading of alcohol	51.3	51.9
Increase no. alcohol-free public events	61.9	63.3	Strict monitoring of late night licensed premises	70.8	72.1
Increase no. alcohol-free dry zones	59.6	63.3	Increasing size of standard drink labels on alcohol containers	65.0	66.4
Serve only low-alcohol beverages at sporting events	60.4	60.6	Adding national drinking guidelines	67.3	69.9
Limit tv advertising to after 9.30pm	69.7	71.4	Increasing tax on alcohol to pay for health, education and treatment of alcohol related problems	38.8	38.6

3.3 AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS, 'ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION IN AUSTRALIA: A SNAPSHOT, 2004-05'

The *Australian Bureau of Statistics: Alcohol Consumption in Australia: A Snapshot, 2004-05* shows that:

- about one in eight Australian adults drink at risky/high-risk levels, equating to roughly 13% of the population or two million people;
- the proportion of Australians drinking at such levels has increased from 8.2% in 1995, to 10.8% in 2001 and 13.4% in 2004/05;

³⁶ 2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: State and Territory Supplement, table S8, p 9.

- there has been a greater increase in the proportion of females than males drinking at risky/high-risk levels since 1995, increasing from 6.2% to 11.7% for females and 10.3% to 15.2% for males in 2004/05;
- the proportion of adults drinking at risky/high-risk levels is highest in the middle age groups, and this proportion has increased over time, with 18% of males aged 45 to 54 in 2004/05 being risky/high-risk drinkers, compared to 15% in 2001 and 12% in 1995. For similarly aged females over the same period, the proportions were 13%, 10% and 6.7% respectively;
- among people aged at least 18, 48% of males and 30% of females in 2004/05 had consumed alcohol at risky/high-risk levels in the short-term on at least one occasion in the previous year and 12% of males and 4% of females had done so at least once a week over the previous year;
- young people aged between 18 and 24 are most likely to have consumed alcohol at risky/high-risk levels in the short-term at least once a week in the previous year, with 19% of males and 11% of females in this age group having done so;
- 25% of young people aged 14 to 19 drink alcohol on a daily or weekly basis, compared to 50% of all people aged 14 or over; and
- for young people aged 14 to 19 who drink at risky/high-risk levels in the long-term, 77% of males generally consume regular strength beer while 85% of females generally consume bottled spirits and liqueurs.

3.4 *REDUCING THE RISKS – A FOCUS GROUP STUDY OF YOUNG WOMEN’S DRINKING BEHAVIOURS AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF RISKS*

Published in 2006, this study involved seven focus group sessions with women aged 18 to 24 in the Sydney area, and one with similarly aged males. In total, 37 women participated and all were either tertiary students or in the workforce.³⁷

The focus group questions were directed at gaining an understanding of young women’s:³⁸

- patterns of alcohol consumption;
- knowledge of the risks associated with alcohol consumption;
- reasons for high levels of alcohol consumption; and
- perceptions on what could be done to reduce the risks of high levels of alcohol consumption by females in their age group.

³⁷ Reducing the Risks, pp 27 and 29.

³⁸ Reducing the Risks, p 6.

The study found that:³⁹

- young women are clearly aware of the risks associated with episodes of high alcohol consumption;
- despite such an awareness, a high percentage continue to drink at risky and high-risk levels;
- young women consider police, bouncers, publicans and friends to be there to protect them from ‘predatory’ males or vulnerable situations, rather than viewing themselves as having control over their own risky behaviour or the quantity of alcohol they consume;
- gender issues are a significant factor in the use of alcohol by young women; and
- risky drinking by young women seems related to poor self-esteem and body image and a lack of social confidence, particularly with respect to sexuality and coupling behaviours.

The study noted that young women who are risky drinkers have little exposure to alcohol awareness programs, particularly if they have left high school or are over 18 years of age.⁴⁰ It concluded that, in order to be effective, such programs had to be highly relevant to young women, be designed to increase their self-efficacy and take into account the drinking environment.⁴¹

Some poignant quotes by young women in the report include the following:⁴²

You don't find other ways to be fulfilled. Alcohol and drinking become your social life.

You can't relax after a while without it.

If you're not going to get drunk, you may as well have soft drinks.

Alcohol gives you confidence to pick up guys. That's how you might meet your boyfriend.

³⁹ Reducing the Risks, pp 6, 12 and 24.

⁴⁰ Reducing the Risks, p 19.

⁴¹ Reducing the Risks, p 6.

⁴² Reducing the Risks, pp 33, 41 and 44.

3.5 AUSTRALIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' USE OF ALCOHOL IN 2005

A representative sample of secondary students from government, Catholic and independent schools in each state and territory was surveyed for this report. In total, data was collected from about 21,800 students in 376 schools, aged 12 to 17.

The survey found that:

- alcohol use increases with age. In particular:
 - by 14, about 86% of students have tried alcohol; and
 - by 17, about 70% have consumed alcohol in the previous month and 49% have done so in the previous week;
- 30% of 'current drinking'⁴³ 15 year olds and 44% of current drinking 17 year olds had consumed alcohol at levels set out in the *Australian Alcohol Guidelines* in the previous week;
- spirits, in either a pre-mixed or straight form, are the most common drinks for current drinking students in all the surveyed ages, with females, in particular, favouring pre-mixed spirits;
- in terms of how students usually acquired alcohol:
 - parents are the most common source, with 37% of males and 38% of females obtaining their last drink from a parent; and
 - only 6% of males and 4% of females bought their last drink themselves;
- the most common places to drink are the family home, a friend's home or a party;
- lower rates of weekly consumption occur if students obtained alcohol from their parents and if they drank in their own home; and
- fewer 12 to 15 year olds were current drinkers in 2005 (22%), compared to 2002 (29%) and 1999 (28%). There was no significant change in the proportion of 16 to 17 year olds who were current drinkers between 2005 (47%), 2002 (48%) and 1999 (51%).

For the first time, the 2005 survey asked students to report whether an adult was supervising them and/or their friends when they consumed their last drink.⁴⁴ The results showed that a majority of students across all ages had consumed their last alcoholic drink under adult supervision.

⁴³ Defined as those who had drunk alcohol in the week prior to the survey (*Australian Secondary School Students' Use of Alcohol in 2005*, p 9).

⁴⁴ The issue of parents supplying alcohol to their children is discussed in detail in sections 5.3 and 6.1.4 of this Research Brief.

Table 7: Percentage of current drinking students who had consumed their last alcoholic drink under adult supervision (%)⁴⁵

	12yo	13yo	14yo	15yo	16yo	17yo	Total 12-17yo
Male	76	64	56	62	57	52	59
Female	76	66	55	56	56	61	59
Total	76	65	56	59	57	56	59

The survey also provides the following information regarding the level of adult supervision when alcohol is consumed by current drinking students at the three most common locations for consumption.

Table 8: Percentage of current drinkers whose last alcoholic drink was consumed under adult supervision at home, at a party or at a friend's home (%)⁴⁶

	12yo	13yo	14yo	15yo	16yo	17yo	Total 12-17yo
Home							
Total	84	80	69	75	73	68	74
Party							
Total	57	53	51	52	52	56	53
Friend's home							
Total	68	37	37	50	48	45	46

The survey makes the following statement regarding adult supervision of alcohol consumption by students:

*Research has indicated that adolescents consume more when they drink outside the family home and when they are in the presence of peers. In addition, there has been some debate on the issue of parents supplying adolescents with alcohol and the implications of this for subsequent alcohol use.*⁴⁷ ...

These findings suggest that many parents are not supportive of their children being in unsupervised drinking situations and that parents are exercising caution when providing alcohol to their children. The results also imply an acceptance by parents of drinking by their adolescent children. While the question on adult supervision does not provide information as to the extent of this supervision, it appears that

⁴⁵ Australian Secondary School Students' Use of Alcohol in 2005, table 8, p 18.

⁴⁶ Australian Secondary School Students' Use of Alcohol in 2005, table 9, p 19.

⁴⁷ Australian Secondary School Students' Use of Alcohol in 2005, p 19.

*students who responded to this question ... believed an adult was overseeing their drinking behaviour.*⁴⁸

4 CONSEQUENCES OF EXCESSIVE ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

4.1 SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM HARM

Although alcohol consumption at moderate levels is often associated with positive effects such as improved relaxation, increased social confidence and reductions in the risk of heart disease for middle-aged and older people, the negative effects of excessive consumption are numerous.

As the *National Alcohol Strategy* notes:⁴⁹

The effects of intoxication on the individual are well documented and include psychomotor impairment, delayed reaction time, disinhibition, impaired judgement, emotional changes and other behavioural changes. Of course, not all occasions of intoxication result in major social harm or great catastrophe, but none of the health benefits of alcohol are delivered when it is consumed at levels causing intoxication. What is more likely to result are the social harms for both the individual drinker and those around them, such as injury, verbal abuse, violence, traffic crashes, drowning and other harmful outcomes.

Excessive alcohol consumption in the short-term can lead to:⁵⁰

- reduced concentration and difficulties learning and maintaining attention;
- a lack of coordination and slower reflexes;
- a loss of inhibitions;
- a flushed appearance;
- blurred vision and slurred speech;
- intense moods, including aggression, elation, depression or a lack of motivation;
- anti-social behaviour;
- headaches, nausea, vomiting and impacts on sleep; and
- possibly coma or death, if consumption is excessive.

⁴⁸ Australian Secondary School Students' Use of Alcohol in 2005, p 30.

⁴⁹ National Alcohol Strategy, p 11.

⁵⁰ Some of these are listed in, for example, National Drug and Alcohol Research Council, 'Alcohol', *fact sheet* and 'Cigarettes and alcohol: youth at risk', *Australian Doctor*, 10 March 2006, p 27-33, p 28.

Excessive consumption in the long-term can cause:⁵¹

- impacts on appearance, including skin, hair, mouth and teeth, weight gain, bones and joints, and eyes;
- a poor diet, if a preference for drinking rather than eating develops, possibly resulting in a vitamin B deficiency;
- stomach problems;
- frequent infections;
- liver, heart, central nervous system and brain damage, pancreatitis, cardiomyopathy, gastrointestinal problems and cardiovascular problems;
- sexual impotence and a reduction in fertility;
- concentration and short-term memory problems;
- depression;
- family and relationship problems, including domestic violence, child neglect and family tensions;
- poor work performance; and
- legal and financial difficulties.

Nearly 4% of the workforce is reportedly absent from work for at least one day every three months due to excessive alcohol consumption.⁵² The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has found that:⁵³

- professionals are more likely to drink at levels of short-term risk of harm whereas unskilled workers are more likely to drink at levels of long-term risk of harm;
- 90% of workers drink alcohol, and about half drink at levels associated with a risk of harm, at least occasionally;
- 17% of workers have a binge-drinking episode at least monthly and 9% have an episode at least weekly;
- 7% of the workforce has gone to work under the influence of alcohol in the previous year; and
- drinkers who regularly consume high levels of alcohol are up to 19 times more likely to take a day off work than lighter drinkers.

⁵¹ Some of these are listed in, for example, National Drug and Alcohol Research Council, 'Alcohol'; 'Cigarettes and alcohol: youth at risk', *Australian Doctor*, p 28 and Reducing the Risks, p 18.

⁵² Jeff Sommerfeld, 'Drinking top cause of sickies', *Courier Mail*, 29 June 2006, p 23.

⁵³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Alcohol and Work*, June 2006, p 47, downloaded on 4 December 2006 from <http://www.nisu.flinders.edu.au/pubs/reports/2006/injcat82.pdf>.

4.2 FURTHER NEGATIVE IMPACTS

Discussed below are some further negative consequences of excessive alcohol consumption. These are:

- fire;
- impacts on public safety and amenity;
- foetal alcohol syndrome; and
- death, trauma or injury.

4.2.1 Fire

The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service has estimated that about 20% of deaths involving fire are alcohol related, and that this is highest for males and those aged between 25 and 29. The majority of such deaths occur in accidental or preventable fires and at night, particularly between 9.30pm and 5am, with half of the victims recording a BAC of 0.20.⁵⁴

4.2.2 Public safety and amenity

The *National Alcohol Strategy* notes the following impacts of excessive alcohol consumption on public safety and amenity:⁵⁵

There are significant social harms and harms to the physical environment that result from risky and high risk consumption of alcohol. They include crimes against persons such as threats and assaults, and crimes against property, such as vandalism. The harms also include anti-social behaviour such as public disorder and bodily fluid spills. There are also harms resulting from reckless acts and accidents involving alcohol, such as road accidents, falls, drownings, poisonings and burns. Some of the harms are highly visible, such as vandalism and litter, others are more hidden, such as domestic violence, while others are invisible, such as reduced feelings of safety.

4.2.3 Foetal alcohol syndrome

The *Australian Alcohol Guidelines* recommend that pregnant women, or women who might soon become pregnant:⁵⁶

⁵⁴ National Alcohol Strategy, p 12.

⁵⁵ National Alcohol Strategy, p 16.

⁵⁶ Australian Alcohol Guidelines, p 16.

- note that the risk of harm from alcohol is highest in the earlier stages of pregnancy;
- consider not drinking at all; and
- if they choose to drink:
 - never become intoxicated; and
 - drink less than seven standard drinks over a week and, on any one day, no more than two standard drinks spread out over at least two hours.

The guidelines state that:⁵⁷

It is difficult to identify exactly the lower levels of drinking at which alcohol may cause harm to the child and, for this reason, a woman may consider not drinking at all.

Nevertheless, while more high quality research is needed, the limited available evidence indicates that averaging less than one drink per day has no measurable impact on children's physical and mental development.

The evidence indicates that episodes of drinking above the guideline levels considerably increase the risk to the unborn child, including the risk of miscarriage, low birth weight, cognitive defects and congenital abnormalities. Heavy bouts of drinking maximise that risk.

The guidelines also recognise that some other countries recommend a total abstinence from alcohol during pregnancy.

There are reports of increasing evidence that even a single session of binge drinking during pregnancy can affect an unborn baby. Babies affected by foetal alcohol syndrome are typically smaller than average and have a range of developmental and behavioural problems. They also have distinctive facial features such as a thin upper lip, an extra fold of skin in the inner corners of the eyes and a flattening of the groove between the nose and the upper lip.⁵⁸

Recently, it was reported that:⁵⁹

Cases of infants born with foetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) ... have doubled in NSW from 15 in 2001 to 32 in 2004.

But experts believe the real figure is likely to be 10 times higher. ...

University of Sydney's Professor of Paediatrics Health Dr Elizabeth Elliot said: "For every child with FAS there are 10 more with neuro-developmental problems caused by alcohol".

⁵⁷ Australian Alcohol Guidelines, p 16.

⁵⁸ 'Drinking for two?', *New Scientist*, 1 July 2006, pp 46-49, p 46.

⁵⁹ 'Alcohol bottles to warn of risk to pregnancy', *news.com.au* (Daily Telegraph), 18 December 2006.

The particular concern of foetal alcohol syndrome in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is noted in the *National Alcohol Strategy*.⁶⁰

4.2.4 Death, trauma or injury

Excessive alcohol consumption exposes people to an increased risk of death, trauma or injury as a result of falls, pedestrian and non-pedestrian road accidents, physical risk-taking, violence, sexual assault, unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease and impacts on self-esteem which may lead to suicide or self-harm.

The *Australian Bureau of Statistics: Alcohol Consumption in Australia: A Snapshot, 2004-05* provides the following information on the risk of death or injury associated with alcohol consumption:

- people under the influence of alcohol are at an increased risk of injury;
- alcohol is the second largest cause of drug related death and hospitalisation in Australia, after tobacco;
- alcohol is the main cause of death on Australian roads, with 2,000 of the 7,000 deaths of persons aged under 65 in 1998 being related to alcohol; and
- just over 31,000 Australians died from alcohol caused disease and injury between 1992 and 2001, of which 75% were male and 25% female.

The same report points to the following figures regarding the significant economic consequences to the community of alcohol misuse:

- a 39% increase between 1998/99 and 2004/05 in the number per 1,000 people hospitalised with a principal diagnosis of mental and behavioural disorders due to alcohol, and a 41% increase in those under 20; and
- an estimated economic cost to the Australian community of alcohol misuse in 1998/99 of \$7.6 billion, which included associated factors such as crime and violence, treatment costs, lost productivity and premature death.

The *National Alcohol Strategy*⁶¹ states that:

- of the almost 16,800 deaths from acute conditions due to drinking at risky or high-risk levels between 1992 and 2001, 75% were male and, of these, more than 25% were aged between 15 and 29; and
- the most common cause of death related to intoxication among Australian males is road crash injury.

In terms of Queensland, it has been reported that:⁶²

⁶⁰ National Alcohol Strategy, p 23.

⁶¹ National Alcohol Strategy, p 12.

- there was an almost 70% increase in the number of alcohol related deaths in the ten years following 1994, to 142 deaths in 2003/04;
- over the same period, the number of people requiring hospital stays due to suicide attempts triggered by excessive drinking increased from 325 to 567 and for alcohol related liver disease from 450 to 819; and
- in 2003/04, almost 700 Queenslanders were admitted to hospital for alcohol poisoning and alcohol related psychosis.

4.3 PARTICULAR CONSEQUENCES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

With young people, there are additional concerns which often arise in relation to excessive alcohol consumption, including:

- possible progression to illicit drugs, with some reports suggesting that most addiction to illicit drugs commences with an addiction to alcohol;⁶³
- increased health and personal safety risks, with research finding that teenagers who begin binge drinking by 13 years of age are almost four times more likely to be overweight or suffer from high blood pressure by the age of 24, and are more likely to be involved in fatal car accidents, violent altercations or risky sexual behaviour;⁶⁴ and
- increased risk of alcohol dependency later in life.⁶⁵

The *National Alcohol Indicators – trends in youth alcohol consumption and related harms in Australian jurisdictions, 1990-2002*⁶⁶ shows that:

- from 1993 to 2002, about 2,650 Australians aged between 15 and 24 died from alcohol related injury and disease caused by risky or high-risk drinking, accounting for about 15% of all deaths in that age group;

⁶² Ainsley Pavey, 'Leading doctor voices frustration over lethal youth boozing – I can't help them', *Courier Mail*, 16 July 2006, p 7.

⁶³ Jeff Sommerfeld, 'Drinking often leads to drugs', *Courier Mail*, 28 November 2005, p 2.

⁶⁴ Karen Quah, 'Teen bingers over limit for adulthood ills', *Australian*, 24 July 2004, p 18 (Health).

⁶⁵ See, for example, Australian Alcohol Guidelines, p 15; Salvation Army, 'The facts: binge drinking & alcohol abuse', p 4; 'Cigarettes and alcohol: youth at risk', *Australian Doctor*, p 27 and Adele Horin and Emily Dunn, 'Teetotal teens learn to curb drinking', *Sydney Morning Herald (online)*, 26 August 2006.

⁶⁶ National Drug Research Institute (T Chikritzhs and R Pascal), 'Trends in youth alcohol consumption related harms in Australian jurisdictions, 1990 – 2002', *National Alcohol Indicators*, Bulletin No 6, November 2004.

- over 100,000 young people were hospitalised for alcohol related injury and disease between 1993/94 and 2001/02, with Queensland recording higher rates of hospitalisation of young males for this reason than all other jurisdictions apart from the Northern Territory;
- the most common causes of alcohol related deaths for young people are road injury, suicide and violence;
- the male alcohol related death rate is about four times higher than that for females; and
- young people in non-metropolitan areas are at greater risk of alcohol related death than city youth.

The same publication also provides the following statistics:

- the estimated numbers and population rates per 10,000 of 15 to 24 year old residents of the various Australian jurisdictions of alcohol attributable deaths between 1993 and 2002 (see **table 9**); and
- the top five causes of alcohol attributable deaths and hospitalisations for young males and females (see **table 10**).

Table 9: Estimated numbers and population rates per 10,000 of 15 to 24 year old residents of the various Australian jurisdictions of alcohol attributable deaths between 1993 and 2002

Jurisdiction	Estimated number of deaths	Population rates (per 10,000 of 15-24 year old residents)
NSW	752	0.8
Qld	588	1.1
Vic	507	0.8
WA	350	1.3
SA	216	1.1
NT	123	4.0
Tas	77	1.2

Table 10: Top five causes of alcohol-attributable deaths and hospitalisations for young males and females

	Deaths	Hospitalisations
Males	Road injury (52%) Suicide (19%) Assault (7%) Pedestrian road injury (9%) Drowning (4%)	Assault (30%) Falls (19%) Road injury (17%) Alcohol abuse (10%) Alcohol dependence (4%)

Females	Road injury (37%)	Assault (23%)
	Suicide (22%)	Alcohol abuse (19%)
	Assault (20%)	Suicide (18%)
	Pedestrian road injury (5%)	Falls (10%)
	Drowning (3%)	Road injury (8%)

Death from alcohol poisoning was attributed to the following numbers of young Australians between 1998/99 and 2000/01:⁶⁷

- 119 aged 10 to 14;
- 291 aged 15 to 19; and
- 166 aged 20 to 24.

A very real, but often forgotten risk, to young people of a binge drinking episode is choking to death on their own vomit when passed out.⁶⁸

Concerning reports also exist of some young people, barely out of their teens, dying as a result of levels of alcohol abuse that are usually associated with a lifetime of excessive alcohol consumption.⁶⁹

5 REASONS WHY YOUNG PEOPLE BINGE DRINK

Often, young people consume alcohol for the same reasons adults do - to relax, be sociable or forget about their problems for a while.

However, there are additional reasons why some young people go further and engage in binge drinking behaviours. Obviously, these considerations vary for each young person, but a general awareness of some of the possible reasons helps in assisting to develop better strategies to address binge drinking by young people.

Some of the reasons recognised in the various reports include:⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Diana Bagnall, 'What's driving our kids to drink', *Bulletin with Newsweek*, 9 September 2003, p 20.

⁶⁸ Queensland Ambulance Service, 'Don't let sleeping mates die', *Media Release*, 15 November 2006; Paul Anderson, 'Medical student found dead in tent at music festival', *news.com.au* (Herald Sun), 13 March 2007.

⁶⁹ Ainsley Pavey, 'Leading doctor voices frustration over lethal youth boozing – I can't help them'.

- young people's natural curiosity and desire to experiment;
- expectation and pressure to drink, and pressure on parents and other parts of society to condone it;
- that Australian culture considers drinking as a 'rite of passage' into adulthood;
- young people are under increased social pressures and stress at school;
- the role and acceptance of alcohol in Australian culture, and patterns of risky drinking behaviours across broad sections of the community;
- the freedom and wealth of today's adolescents;
- a lack of parental supervision; and
- the promotion of alcohol through the media.

Far greater attention has been directed at the interaction of young people and illicit drugs than alcohol, when alcohol is shown statistically to be a much more dangerous substance for young people than heroin, speed or ecstasy. Accordingly, the lower significance attached to alcohol abuse may explain some parental latitude in terms of the drinking behaviours of young people. It has also been suggested that to tackle the binge drinking habits of young people, alcohol misuse by the wider community must be addressed.⁷¹

If we want to deal with the problem of underage drinking, we must be honest enough to realise that this can't be dealt with in isolation from wider community views on alcohol.

That demands we ask ourselves some uncomfortable questions.

...

After all, the answers to these questions shape the norms of the society that influence our young people.

Youth binge drinking will not be solved quickly and it will take courage and bold thinking to address it. We must genuinely examine our own thoughts and attitudes towards alcohol and then seek to integrate these with the message we give our young people.

If we don't, young people will rightly dismiss our advice as hypocritical. ...

According to the *National Alcohol Strategy*:⁷²

⁷⁰ See, for example, Rachel Rodda, 'Risk-takers are driving girl power into trouble', *Courier Mail*, 1 April 2000, p 15; Elizabeth Allen, 'Student booze-ups blamed on pressures', *Courier Mail*, 15 February 2005; National Alcohol Strategy, pp 26, 28-30 and Diana Bagnall, 'What's driving our kids to drink'.

⁷¹ Elizabeth Allen, 'Binge drinking teenage curse'; National Alcohol Strategy, p 27 and Ruth Limkin, 'Pre-mix drinks a dangerous teenage brew'.

⁷² National Alcohol Strategy, p 26.

There are lessons from successes in other fields, such as the cultural changes that have accompanied a reduction in smoking in Australia, and acceptance of compulsory seat belt wearing and support for random breath testing.

This section considers, in greater detail:

- why young women, in particular, engage in binge drinking;
- the phenomena of pre-mixed drinks; and
- the issue of parents providing alcohol to their children.

5.1 YOUNG WOMEN

It has been reported that about:⁷³

- 45% of 16 to 24 year old women engage in risk drinking, which involves five or six standard drinks in one session; and
- about 28% drink at high-risk levels, involving seven or more standard drinks.

By way of comparison, for females across a range of ages:⁷⁴

- 37.1% of females aged 25 to 34 engage in risk drinking, which drops to 30.7% of those aged 35 to 44, 22.0% of those aged 55 to 64 and 16.9% of those aged 75 or over; and
- 15.9% of females aged 25 to 34 drink at high-risk levels, dropping to 9.2% of those aged 35 to 44, 2.1% of those aged 55 to 64 and 0.7% of those aged 75 or over.

Accordingly, it should be noted that, although excessive alcohol consumption is perhaps more visible in terms of teenage females, the above figures provide a basis for reports of similarly concerning levels of binge drinking by young professional women and working mothers in their thirties.⁷⁵ In the United Kingdom, there are reports of high-earning women in their thirties “propping up careers, relationships and financial difficulties with the aid of a corkscrew” and that the problem is with the amount that they drink.⁷⁶

⁷³ Reducing the Risks, pp 14-17. Note that these figures relate to New South Wales.

⁷⁴ Reducing the Risks, pp 14-17. Note that these figures relate to New South Wales.

⁷⁵ David Gibbs, ‘Spritzer blitzers’, *Courier Mail*, 9 May 1999 and Cathy Pruror, ‘Strained days indeed (stress and young women)’, *Australian*, 17 January 1998, p 28.

⁷⁶ Suzi Godson, ‘Ladies who lurch: why women binge drink’, *Timesonline*, 27 March 2004.

Worryingly, some young women apparently:⁷⁷

Purposefully seek a particular level of intoxication that they want and have learnt to recognise from past social drinking. This was based on being “tipsy” enough to be confident, sociable and relaxed yet able to maintain control of their own behaviour and decorum.

It has also been said that it is not uncommon for some young women to consume 15 to 20 standard drinks in a night out.⁷⁸

Parallels have been drawn in various reports between increases in risky drinking by young women and a move by them towards more risky behaviour in general, including in relation to tobacco use, illicit drugs and sexual activity.⁷⁹

Some possible reasons for excessive alcohol consumption by young women include:⁸⁰

- to increase social confidence and acceptance, coupled with a belief that alcohol is necessary in order to achieve this;
- to attract the opposite sex;
- a belief that alcohol is an important precursor to social and sexual introduction and exploration;
- to manage normal social anxieties about sexual exploration, coupling, intimacy and attachment; and
- because ‘getting wasted’ is socially acceptable.

An interesting accompaniment of the concern regarding alcohol misuse by young women is the critical commentary, from a social perspective, of the behaviour of these women. This typically includes references to the women:⁸¹

- being dressed “scantily”;
- dancing provocatively;

⁷⁷ Charlotte de Crespigny, ‘Young women, pubs and safety’ in Paul Williams (ed), ‘Alcohol, young persons and violence’, *Australian Institute of Criminology Research and Public Policy Series*, No 35, 2001, pp 31-46, p 35 downloaded on 4 December 2006 from <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/rpp/35/RPP35.pdf>.

⁷⁸ Fran Metcalfe, ‘Ugly side of gender equality’, *Courier Mail*, 17 July 2006, p 39.

⁷⁹ See, for example, Jane Fynes-Clinton, ‘Risky business’, *Courier Mail*, 28 July 2003, p 12 and Fran Metcalfe, ‘Ugly side of gender equality’.

⁸⁰ Many of these reasons are stated in *Reducing the Risks*, pp 10, 11, 24, 27, 29.

⁸¹ See, for example, Fran Metcalfe, ‘Ugly side of gender equality’ and Shannon Willoughby, ‘Drunken girls not pulling punches’, *Gold Coast Bulletin*, 24 November 2005, p 1.

- partaking in “male-like behaviours”; and
- participating in an “alarming number of violent cat-fights”, involving such things as “ripping each other’s hair and yelling profanities”.

5.2 PRE-MIXED DRINKS

A pre-mixed drink, also known as an ‘RTD’ (ready to drink) or alcopop, is a spirit or wine that has been pre-mixed with a non-alcoholic drink such as softdrink or milk. They are generally based on white spirits such as vodka or rum and contain high levels of sweeteners, flavouring and colour and are considered by young people to be relatively inexpensive to purchase. There are about 400 varieties available to the Australian market.⁸²

Pre-mixed drinks are most popular with young drinkers, mostly young women aged between 12 and 17.⁸³ Their appeal to young people has generated significant concern, particularly against the background that they do not have a distinctly alcoholic taste and that their packaging and marketing has been consciously directed at young people. It has been reported that some manufacturers have catchy websites featuring competitions, games, downloads, music reviews, clips and even giveaway stickers and fluffy keyrings, obviously directed at appealing to the youth market.⁸⁴

5.3 PARENTS SUPPLYING ALCOHOL TO THEIR CHILDREN

Parents have a range of opinions regarding the most desirable relationship between alcohol, themselves and their children. These include:

- a view that “at least alcohol is not as bad as illicit drugs”, and that at least parents are more familiar with alcohol than they are with other drugs;
- support for the use of alcohol by teenagers under parental supervision; and
- a total ban on alcohol use by underage teenagers.

⁸² Mark Alexander, ‘How girls, 12, are turning to booze’, *Sunday Mail*, 22 February 2004, p 27.

⁸³ See, for example, Mark Alexander, ‘How girls, 12, are turning to booze’ and Ruth Limkin, ‘Pre-mix drinks a dangerous teenage brew’.

⁸⁴ Diana Bagnall, ‘What’s driving our kids to drink’ and Ruth Limkin, ‘Pre-mix drinks a dangerous teenage brew’.

It has been said that this diversity in parental opinion provides authorities with significant challenges in trying to counter risky underage drinking.⁸⁵

There are reports that some parents feel “powerless and overwhelmed by the issue of underage drinking” and that alcohol can be “the flashpoint for insecurities about parenting”.⁸⁶ This may partly stem from conflicting information available to parents, some of which advises that the longer children are kept away from alcohol the better⁸⁷ and other information which supports a gradual, supervised introduction to alcohol.⁸⁸ In other instances, parents who themselves misuse alcohol may have difficulty in reinforcing positive behaviours towards alcohol by their children.⁸⁹

The *Australian Alcohol Guidelines* state that:⁹⁰

Drinking by young people is very common in Australia, although there are also many young people who do not drink. There is a range of views about the optimal age to start drinking. A number of cultural groups in Australia introduce children to very dilute alcohol at a young age. ...

Helping young people to learn about drinking and the effects of alcohol within a safe and supportive environment can help them to manage their drinking in ways that minimise risk to themselves and others, both when they are young and throughout their adult years.

The National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre has recently been reported as calling for government-sanctioned guidelines for parents in relation to the provision of alcohol to their children.⁹¹

Waverley College in Sydney commissioned a survey of its students by researchers from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre following an incident in September 2002 in which 100 to 150 students from the school were involved in a

⁸⁵ Elizabeth Allen, ‘Binge drinking teenage curse’.

⁸⁶ Diana Bagnall, ‘What’s driving our kids to drink’ and ‘Campaign to home in on teen drinkers’, *Courier Mail*, 21 February 2000.

⁸⁷ Salvation Army, ‘The facts: binge drinking & alcohol abuse’, p 6.

⁸⁸ Australian Alcohol Guidelines, p 15.

⁸⁹ Sascha Hutchinson, ‘Under-age, overproof (alcohol and school students)’, *Australian*, 22 July 2003, p 9.

⁹⁰ Australian Alcohol Guidelines, p 15.

⁹¹ ‘Parents blamed for underage binge drinking’, *news.com.au* (Daily Telegraph), 29 January 2007.

drunken brawl in Bondi. One of the researchers stated a belief that the survey results would be virtually the same for any school in Australia and that parental reaction to its findings showed that it appeared that many parents underestimated their child's drinking activities. The survey found that:⁹²

- when students drink, they obtain alcohol from their parents in 35% of cases;
- another third get alcohol from a friend;
- family members, such as siblings, supply about 14% of alcohol;
- 5% buy alcohol themselves and another 5% steal it, usually from their own or a friend's house;
- one-third of the school population, aged 9 to 18, admitted consuming at least six standard drinks in any one session;
- 62 students reported drink driving; and
- students on average had their first taste of alcohol at age 11.8.

In 2005, for the first time, the survey, *Australian Secondary School Students' Use of Alcohol*, included information regarding the consumption of alcohol by students under adult supervision. These findings are discussed in section 3.5 of this Research Brief.

A report on parental attitude to their teenager drinking found that:⁹³

- 14% of parents of 13 to 14 year olds do not mind if they drink in moderation, rising to 35% of parents of 15 to 16 year olds;
- 9% of parents of 13 to 14 year old boys and 4% of parents of similarly aged girls would provide their teenager with alcohol for a supervised party, and 25% of parents of teenagers aged 15 to 16 would also do so; and
- virtually no parents felt safe supplying their teenagers with alcohol for an unsupervised party.

Parental provision of alcohol to teenagers in a private setting is not an offence in Queensland (this is discussed in greater detail in section 6.1.4 below). On this topic, the *National Alcohol Strategy* says:⁹⁴

A worrying aspect of alcohol consumption in private settings is the provision of alcohol to minors. Increasingly, parents and other hosts are exposed to

⁹² Sascha Hutchinson, 'Under-age, overproof (alcohol and school students)'.

⁹³ Australian Government. Department of Health and Ageing (Elizabeth King, Jenny Taylor and Tom Carroll), *Parental Opinions and Behaviour Regarding Teenage Alcohol Consumption*, March 2005, downloaded 4 December 2006 from [http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/phd-pub-alcohol-nac_parents-cnt.htm/\\$FILE/nac_parent.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/phd-pub-alcohol-nac_parents-cnt.htm/$FILE/nac_parent.pdf).

⁹⁴ National Alcohol Strategy, p 18.

considerable pressure from both other adults and young people, and can be confused about their legal obligations and about how best to prevent and manage the incidence of underage drinking. In addition to the ways parents sometimes make alcohol available to children, parental and adult influence as role models is a critical issue as behaviours may be replicated by young people around them.

This is an issue that often arises in the context of the annual ‘schoolies week’ festivities, where there are frequently reports of parents providing young revellers with large supplies of alcohol for use in an unsupervised manner in their holiday accommodation.⁹⁵ Following ‘schoolies week’ 2006, the Hon M Keech MP, Minister for Tourism, Fair Trading, Wine Industry Development and Women announced a forum to discuss alcohol issues arising from the celebrations:⁹⁶

... I will be calling a forum to discuss alcohol issues that have arisen at schoolies this year. Police have reported high levels of intoxication by under-age schoolies and they and ... Liquor Licensing officers have laid some of the blame at the feet of parents who have supplied large quantities of alcohol to their children. A major concern has been the secondary supply of alcohol to young school leavers by parents, siblings and their older friends for consumption by schoolies in their units before they go out to party at Surfers. While the majority of schoolies do the right thing and are well behaved, obviously when they are heavily affected by alcohol their activities and judgments are impacted upon. Some parents have contributed to this problem by supplying full strength and strong ready-mixed drinks to young people, many of whom have little experience with the consumption of alcohol.

The supply of alcohol by parents to children is not illegal provided it is for consumption on private premises. But there has to be an element of responsibility for both parents and young people in terms of how much and what type of alcohol is supplied. Parents have to take responsibility for their children and for the conduct of their children during schoolies. That is why I am calling a forum with Liquor Licensing officers, police, the Department of Communities, the Surfers Paradise Management Association, the Gold Coast Liquor Industry Consultative Association, as well as unit owners and managers, so that we can get together to determine the extent of the alcohol problem and then consider whether action needs to be taken.

On 22 February 2007, Mr John-Paul Langbroek MP introduced a Private Member’s Bill, Liquor (Restriction of Supply to Minors) Amendment Bill 2007 (Qld), into the Queensland Legislative Assembly. This Bill is discussed in greater detail in section 6.1.4 of this Research Brief.

⁹⁵ See, for example, Michael Wray and Andrew Potts, ‘Sober resolve to reform Schoolies’, *Courier Mail*, 14 December 2006 (a copy is included in Appendix A to this Research Brief).

⁹⁶ Hon M Keech MP, Minister for Tourism, Fair Trading, Wine Industry Development and Women, *Hansard*, 28 November 2006, p 595.

In early April 2007, it was reported that the State Government's *Youth Violence Taskforce*⁹⁷ would recommend that parents caught supplying alcohol to their underage children should face prosecution. However, a spokesperson for the Hon J Spence MP, Minister for Police, was reported as saying "parents who allow their children to drink modestly will not be singled out ... but the recommendations will concentrate on stopping parents supplying alcohol to teenagers for parties, Schoolies and other events".⁹⁸

6 QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

Various Queensland Government initiatives relevant to binge drinking are discussed below. These are:

- particular provisions of the *Liquor Act 1992* (Qld);
- the *Queensland Alcohol Action Plan 2003/2004 to 2006/2007*,⁹⁹ and
- the *Make Your Own Mind Up About Drinking* campaign aimed at young women.¹⁰⁰

A further initiative, not discussed in detail, is *Safe Celebrations*, a 2006 report for the Minister for Police and Corrective Services which identifies underage alcohol consumption as a key reason why youth parties get out-of-control. This report also provides additional statistics on, and analysis of, the incidence of binge drinking by young people.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ For more information on the Youth Violence Taskforce, see <http://www.police.qld.gov.au/News+and+Alerts/campaigns/> (downloaded on 13 April 2007).

⁹⁸ Edmund Burke and David Murray, 'Ban on parents supplying grog – Youth taskforce plan follows teenager's party death', *Courier Mail*, 1 April 2007, p 5.

⁹⁹ Queensland Government. *Finding the Balance: Queensland Alcohol Action Plan 2003/2004 to 2006/2007*, downloaded on 12 October 2006 from http://www.premiers.qld.gov.au/library/pdf/Alcohol_Action_Plan_WEB.pdf.

¹⁰⁰ Queensland Government. Queensland Health, *Make Up Your Own Mind About Drinking*, downloaded on 17 October 2006 from <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/youngwomenandalcohol/>.

¹⁰¹ Queensland Government. Safe Youth Parties Taskforce, *Safe Celebrations – A Report into Out-Of-Control Youth Parties in Queensland*, 10 March 2006, downloaded on 4 December 2006 from <http://www.police.qld.gov.au/Resources/Internet/services/reportsPublications/documents/Safe%20Celebrations.pdf>. See also Queensland Parliamentary Library (Glenda Emmerson), 'Controlling gatecrashers – safe youth parties taskforce', *Hot Topics – In the News*, September 2005.

More recently, the *Know Your Limits* campaign has involved posters and coasters being distributed to participating licensed premises in south-east Queensland showing young people in graphic situations after consuming too much alcohol.¹⁰²

6.1 LIQUOR ACT 1992 (QLD)

The *Liquor Act 1992* (Qld) ('the Act') regulates the sale and supply of liquor in Queensland.¹⁰³ Provisions relevant to the issue of binge drinking include:

- controls on certain advertising of liquor by licensees and permittees;
- obligations on licensees and permittees regarding the service, supply and promotion of liquor;
- bans on certain drinking practices (Brisbane City Council area only);
- certain prohibitions in relation to young people aged under 18;
- provisions relating to intoxicated persons; and
- prohibitions on the consumption of liquor in most public places.

Other provisions, such as the 3am 'lockout' condition,¹⁰⁴ deal with some of the effects of binge drinking.

6.1.1 Controls on certain advertising of liquor by licensees and permittees

Obligations are imposed on licensees and permittees to:¹⁰⁵

- maintain a safe environment for patrons and staff; and

¹⁰² Sue Gardiner, 'Being legless is not a good look', *City News*, 15 February 2007, p 8.

¹⁰³ Note that the author has underlined various provisions of the Act discussed in this section of the Research Brief, by way of emphasis. The Queensland Government conducted a review of the Act to ensure it reflects recent community attitudes including concerns of alcohol abuse and binge drinking, and to consider how the nature of venues that serve alcohol has changed, recent changes in serving practices and the rapid growth of the tourism and hospitality industry. Submissions to the discussion paper closed on 2 June 2006.

¹⁰⁴ *Liquor Act 1992* (Qld), Part 5, Division 5. 'Lock out' conditions were considered in Queensland Parliamentary Library (Renee Giskes), 'Liquor Amendment Bill 2005 (Qld): A 3am 'Lock Out' for Brisbane's Licensed Premises and State-wide Restrictions on Alcohol Advertising', *Research Brief*, 2005/09, April 2005 downloaded on 4 December 2006 from <http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/view/publications/documents/research/ResearchBriefs/2005/200509.pdf>.

¹⁰⁵ *Liquor Act 1992* (Qld), s 148B(1).

- ensure liquor is served, supplied and promoted in a way that is compatible with minimising harm from the use of liquor and preserving the peace and good order of the surrounding neighbourhood.

Licensees and permittees are prohibited from advertising, external to premises or in a manner visible or audible to a person outside the premises:¹⁰⁶

- the availability of free liquor or multiple quantities of liquor (such as ‘two drinks for the price of one’) for consumption on the premises;
- the sale price of liquor for consumption on the premises; or
- a promotion that is likely to indicate to an ordinary person the availability of liquor, for consumption on the premises, at a price less than that normally charged for the liquor (such as ‘happy hours’, ‘all you can drink’ and ‘toss the boss’).

The rationale for this prohibition is that:¹⁰⁷

Dangerous new trends are becoming apparent with an increase in the number of young people who are binge drinking. ...

Extreme discounts, free drink promotions and other drink promotions targeting young people perpetuate a culture of binge drinking. The practice is usually driven by one or two licensees in a locality with others then being driven by competitive pressures to follow. ...

The ban is aimed at curbing inappropriate behaviour associated with alcohol use.

Advertising intended to be covered by this ban includes, but is not limited to:¹⁰⁸

- all written and oral advertising;
- all types of signage external to the premises;
- the handing out of flyers;
- advertising over the internet, on radio or television, or in newspapers or magazines; and
- SMS and touting.

¹⁰⁶ *Liquor Act 1992* (Qld), ss 148B(2)-(6).

¹⁰⁷ Queensland Government. Department of Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development (Liquor Licensing Division), ‘Advertising ban on drink promotions’, *Fact sheet*, downloaded on 12 October 2006 from http://www.liquor.qld.gov.au/_Documents/Fact+sheets/Ad+ban.pdf.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Advertising ban on drink promotions’, *Fact sheet*.

6.1.2 Obligations on licensees and permittees regarding the service, supply and promotion of liquor

Licensees and permittees:¹⁰⁹

- are prohibited from engaging in practices or promotions that may encourage rapid or excessive consumption of liquor; and
- are required to engage in practices and promotions that encourage the responsible consumption of liquor.

Unacceptable practices or promotions that may encourage rapid or excessive consumption of liquor

The Liquor Regulation 2002 (Qld) ('the Regulation') provides the following examples of unacceptable "practices or promotions that may encourage rapid or excessive consumption of liquor":¹¹⁰

- promoting or conducting an activity that encourages rapid or excessive consumption of liquor or discourages a patron from monitoring or controlling their consumption;¹¹¹
- supplying liquor to a person on condition that the person is required to promote or conduct an activity that encourages rapid or excessive consumption of liquor or discourages a patron from monitoring or controlling their consumption;
- serving, supplying or promoting liquor in a container that encourages rapid or excessive consumption of liquor or discourages a patron from monitoring or controlling their consumption;¹¹²
- serving, supplying or promoting liquor without taking appropriate action to discourage rapid or excessive consumption;¹¹³ or
- serving or supplying liquor to a patron while holding the patron's financial institution access card or other property pending payment for the liquor, in

¹⁰⁹ *Liquor Act 1992* (Qld), ss 148A(2)-(3), (5)-(6).

¹¹⁰ *Liquor Regulation 2002* (Qld), s 41(1).

¹¹¹ The examples provided are promoting or conducting skolling games, promoting the consumption of drinks known as 'laybacks' and promoting the consumption of liquor from a water pistol.

¹¹² The examples provided are serving liquor in a yard glass for consumption at one draught and serving liquor in a test tube shaped glass without providing a stand for the glass.

¹¹³ The example provided is promoting free or discounted liquor without providing an appropriate number of staff or security persons to monitor and control patrons' consumption.

a way that discourages them from monitoring or controlling their purchase of liquor.¹¹⁴

Acceptable practices or promotions that encourage the responsible consumption of liquor

The Regulation provides the following examples of “acceptable practices or promotions that encourage the responsible consumption of liquor”:¹¹⁵

- deterring the rapid or excessive consumption of liquor;¹¹⁶
- having non-alcoholic and low alcohol beverages available;
- having free or reasonably priced drinking water available;
- supplying liquor in standardised quantities recognised by patrons;¹¹⁷ and
- serving patrons half measures of spirits on request.

6.1.3 Bans on certain drinking practices (Brisbane City Council area only)

It is a condition of a licence or permit that the following activities must not be conducted:¹¹⁸

- a competition or game in which either contestants or players consume liquor on the premises or free or discounted liquor is given as a prize for consumption on the premises; or
- another prescribed activity that may encourage the rapid or excessive consumption of liquor or promote intoxication.

Subject to some limited exclusions, this condition applies only to premises:¹¹⁹

- in the Brisbane City Council area; and

¹¹⁴ The example provided is holding a patron’s financial institution access card and serving liquor to the patron on account over several days pending payment when they next receive social security benefits.

¹¹⁵ Liquor Regulation 2002 (Qld), s 41(2).

¹¹⁶ The example provided is deterring patrons from taking part in skolling games.

¹¹⁷ The examples provided are serving spirits in measured nips, serving liquor in glasses or jugs marked with measured quantities and supplying liquor in prepacked containers labelled with measured quantities.

¹¹⁸ *Liquor Act 1992* (Qld), s 142AL.

¹¹⁹ *Liquor Act 1992* (Qld), s 142AE.

- if the licensee or permittee is authorised to sell or supply liquor at any time after 1am during a trading period starting at 8pm on any day and ending at 7am the following day.

Licensees may still conduct competitions and games provided they:¹²⁰

- are conducted responsibly;
- do not involve the consumption of liquor as the competition; and
- do not offer free or discounted liquor as a prize.

A ‘competition’ or ‘game’ includes a promotion or event in which a person:¹²¹

- competes to outdo another person’s speed in drinking liquor or the volume of liquor consumed; or
- is provided with free drinks, or required to drink more than four standard drinks on the one day, to participate in the competition or game,

but does not include other contests or games which are decided by other skills, talent, strength, chance or luck.

Examples of a ‘competition or game’

The following examples are provided of what would constitute a ‘competition or game’ for the purposes of this condition:

- ‘drink to win’;
- ‘last man standing’;
- ‘all you can drink’; and
- ‘skolling competition’.

Examples of prohibited competitions or games (in addition to the above list) are:¹²²

- buying a product to receive a scratch card for the chance to win liquor for consumption on the premises;
- incentives for staff of licensed premises to encourage patrons to drink more alcohol;

¹²⁰ Queensland Government. Department of Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development (Liquor Licensing Division), ‘Compliance guidelines for competitions, games and other activities on licensed premises (Brisbane City Council area)’, *Fact sheet*, downloaded 18 October 2006 from http://www.liquor.qld.gov.au/_Documents/Fact+sheets/Competitions+and+Games.pdf.

¹²¹ Queensland Government, ‘Compliance guidelines for competitions, games and other activities on licensed premises (Brisbane City Council area)’.

¹²² Queensland Government, ‘Compliance guidelines for competitions, games and other activities on licensed premises (Brisbane City Council area)’.

- bar tabs;
- competitions involving consumption direct from a yard glass, jug or other container holding more than two standard drinks; and
- vouchers/coupons offering at least a 25% discount on liquor for consumption on the premises.

Examples of acceptable competitions or games are:¹²³

- buying a product to receive a scratch card to win merchandise, food or take away liquor;
- buying four or less standard drinks to receive an entry into a non-liquor prize draw;
- incentives for staff of licensed premises to promote brand switching;
- trivia nights, karaoke, talent quests;
- prizes of promotional products other than liquor (such as food, accommodation, t-shirts, key rings and stubby holders); and
- packaged liquor to be removed from the premises.

Prescribed activities

The Regulation lists the following ‘prescribed activities’ for the purposes of this condition:¹²⁴

- holding an event or occasion in or on which a person’s membership of a group, or participation in the event or occasion, entitles them to free or discounted liquor (such as a ‘blondes’ night’, ‘students’ night’ or other theme night). Such events or occasions may be conducted provided they do not encourage the rapid or excessive consumption of liquor or otherwise promote intoxication;
- a promotional or other activity that offers a person, as a reward, free or discounted liquor for consumption on the premises (such as a raffle in which a person might win free or discounted liquor for a day). Such promotions may still be held provided they do not encourage rapid or excessive consumption of liquor or otherwise promote intoxication. Low risk promotions, such as ‘beer of the month’, brand switching to encourage trial of a new product, loyalty reward programs conducted over more than one trading day; and free sampling are acceptable;

¹²³ Queensland Government, ‘Compliance guidelines for competitions, games and other activities on licensed premises (Brisbane City Council area)’.

¹²⁴ Liquor Regulation 2002 (Qld), s 37H. Guidelines on the regulation are provided in Queensland Government, ‘Compliance guidelines for competitions, games and other activities on licensed premises (Brisbane City Council area)’.

- a promotional or other activity that offers a person a reward, other than free or discounted liquor, if the person would need to drink more than four standard drinks on any day to win the reward (such as a promotional activity in which a 'drinks card' is given and, to win a T-shirt by using the card, the person would need to drink more than four standard drinks on any day). Promotions requiring a patron to drink more than four standard drinks are acceptable if the terms and conditions, and advertising, make it clear to licensees, serving staff and patrons that up to four standard drinks can be redeemed on any one day, the date of each redemption can be identified and related advertising includes a responsible consumption message;
- in terms of happy hours:
 - having a happy hour that is of more than two hours' duration between 7am and 9pm;
 - having a happy hour that is longer than one hour between 9pm and 1am;
 - having a happy hour or part of a happy hour after 1am;
 - if premises have more than one happy hour on a day – having the happy hours with less than one hour between the end of one happy hour and the start of the subsequent one; or
 - on any day, having a happy hour that starts before 9pm and ends after 9pm.

Examples of prohibited activities are:¹²⁵

- if a person needs to drink more than four standard drinks on any trading day to win a T-shirt;
- 'ten drinks for \$10' promotions which are time limited or can only be redeemed in one day;
- staff incentives to encourage patrons to drink rapidly or excessively or promote intoxication;
- 'pub crawl' group discounts;
- reward schemes for liquor only;
- raffles in which a person wins liquor for consumption on the premises or free or discounted liquor for a day; and
- 'buy a round for you and your mates' for a reward if the patron does need to buy more than one round for the reward.

Examples of acceptable activities are:

¹²⁵ Queensland Government, 'Compliance guidelines for competitions, games and other activities on licensed premises (Brisbane City Council area)'.

- any theme night where patrons receive services other than free or discounted liquor (eg free manicure or food promotions);
- ‘beverage of the day/month’ which is discounted for at least one trading day over the whole trading period;
- staff discounts and incentives which do not encourage patrons to drink rapidly or excessively or promote intoxication;
- discounts for combined meal and beverage bills;
- rewards schemes which combine food and liquor;
- raffles in which a person wins non-liquor prizes or packaged liquor for consumption off the premises; and
- ‘buy a round for you and your mates’ for a reward provided the patron does not need to buy more than one round for the reward.

6.1.4 Certain prohibitions in relation to young people aged under 18

The Act contains various provisions directed at the interaction of young people under 18 years of age (‘minors’) with liquor, including those:

- regulating the presence of minors at certain premises;
- prohibiting the sale of liquor to minors;
- regulating the supply of liquor to, or the consumption of liquor by, minors at certain premises; and
- prohibiting minors from falsely representing their age.

Presence of minors in certain premises

Subject to some limited exceptions, minors must not be allowed to enter premises to which a licence or permit applies.¹²⁶

Selling liquor to a minor

The sale of liquor to a minor is prohibited.¹²⁷ This prohibition does not, however, extend to the gratuitous supply of alcohol.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ *Liquor Act 1992* (Qld), s 155.

¹²⁷ *Liquor Act 1992* (Qld), s 155A.

¹²⁸ *Liquor Act 1992* (Qld), s 4 (definition of ‘sell’).

Supplying liquor to, or allowing consumption of liquor by, a minor at certain premises

A person must not, on premises to which a licence or permit relates.¹²⁹

- supply liquor to a minor;
- permit or allow liquor to be supplied to a minor; or
- allow liquor to be consumed by a minor.

In addition, a person must not, on a street or place adjacent to such premises, or in a public place (subject to limited exceptions), supply liquor, or cause or permit liquor to be supplied, to a minor.¹³⁰

This prohibition does not apply to the supply of liquor to, or consumption of liquor by, minors at private premises. Issues relating to such a practice are discussed in sections 3.5 and 5.3 of this Research Brief. Section 5.3 also discusses a report that the State Government's *Youth Violence Taskforce* will recommend that parents caught supplying alcohol to their underage children face prosecution.

On 22 February 2007 Mr John-Paul Langbroek MP introduced a Private Member's Bill, Liquor (Restriction of Supply to Minors) Amendment Bill 2007 (Qld) ('Bill'), into the Queensland Legislative Assembly. The key amendment proposed by the Bill¹³¹ is a prohibition on the supply of liquor to minors at private premises unless:

- the supply is made by the minor's parent, step-parent, guardian or other person who has parental rights and responsibilities for the minor; and
- that person responsibly supervises the minor at all times that the minor has possession of the liquor.

A maximum penalty of 40 penalty units (\$3,000)¹³² is proposed for this offence. The exception to the proposed prohibition was stated to be "specifically designed to not cover parents who allow binge drinking or supply alcohol to unsupervised children for schoolies".¹³³ In introducing the Bill, Mr Langbroek MP said:¹³⁴

¹²⁹ *Liquor Act 1992* (Qld), s 156(1).

¹³⁰ *Liquor Act 1992* (Qld), s 156(2).

¹³¹ **Clause 6**; *Liquor Act 1992* (Qld), **proposed amended s 155A**.

¹³² *Penalties and Sentences Act 1992* (Qld), s 5,

¹³³ Liquor (Restriction of Supply to Minors) Amendment Bill 2007 (Qld), *Explanatory Notes*, p 2.

¹³⁴ Mr J-P Langbroek MP, Liquor (Restriction of Supply to Minors) Amendment Bill 2007 (Qld), *Second Reading Speech*, Hansard, 22 February 2007, pp 499-500.

For a number of years at schoolies festivals it has become obvious to authorities that parents are stocking and restocking their young school leavers' units with alcohol throughout the festivals and effectively relinquishing any responsibility. ...

I recognise that there needs to be a delicate balance struck. I support the rights of parents and guardians to make decisions on sensible alcohol consumption within their families, for example having a glass of wine at home to cautiously introduce a youngster to alcohol. However, schoolies and underage teen parties have caused a high level of concern in the community. Parties of this kind encourage teens to consume dangerously high levels of alcohol.

Mr Langbroek MP also referred to similar legislation that exists in New South Wales.¹³⁵ Section 114 of the *Liquor Act 1982* (NSW) provides:

(1) *A person shall not ... supply liquor to a person under the age of 18 years.*

Maximum penalty: 50 penalty units or, if circumstances of aggravation exist in relation to the offence, 100 penalty units or 12 months imprisonment (or both).

A penalty unit in New South Wales is currently \$110.¹³⁶ Accordingly, the maximum penalty for a contravention of the above provision is \$5,500 or, if circumstances of aggravation exist, \$11,000 or 12 months imprisonment (or both).

The provision goes on to state:

(4A) *For the purposes of this section, circumstances of aggravation exist in relation to an offence under this section if (and only if) both of the following apply:*

(a) *the information by which the proceedings for the offence are instituted alleges that the offence is (for the reasons specified in the information) so serious as to warrant the imposition of a penalty in excess of 50 penalty units;*

(b) *the court that convicts the person for the offence is of the opinion (having regard to the quantity or nature of the liquor involved or the young age of the person involved, or other relevant considerations) that the offence is so serious as to warrant the imposition of a penalty in excess of 50 penalty units.*

It is a defence to a prosecution for this offence if it is proved that the defendant “was a parent or guardian of the person to whom the liquor was ... supplied or was authorised to ... supply liquor to the person by the parent or guardian”.¹³⁷ A notable difference compared to a proposed amendment to the *Liquor Act 1992* (Qld) under the *Liquor (Restriction of Supply to Minors) Amendment Bill 2007* (Qld) is that, in New South Wales, responsible parental supervision of the young

¹³⁵ Second Reading Speech, p 500.

¹³⁶ *Crimes (Sentencing Procedure Act) 1999* (NSW), s 17.

¹³⁷ *Crimes (Sentencing Procedure Act) 1999* (NSW), s 17(6).

person's possession of the alcohol is not required in order for the defence to be available.

False representation of age

A person must not falsely represent themselves to be 18 years of age or older:¹³⁸

- with the intent of being supplied with liquor; or
- to enter into premises to which a licence or permit relates.

A person must also not make a false document representing an age, or give such a document to another person, knowing it to be false and with the intent that the document be used as acceptable evidence of age for the purposes of the Act.¹³⁹

It is also an offence for a person to falsely represent that they are 18 years of age or older for the purpose of obtaining acceptable proof of age under the Act.¹⁴⁰

6.1.5 Provisions relating to intoxicated persons

Supply of liquor to, or allowing consumption of liquor by intoxicated persons at certain premises

A person must not, on premises to which a licence or permit relates:¹⁴¹

- supply liquor to an unduly intoxicated or disorderly person;
- permit or allow liquor to be supplied to an unduly intoxicated or disorderly person; or
- allow liquor to be consumed by an unduly intoxicated or disorderly person.

Drunk or disorderly persons at certain premises

A person must not be drunk or disorderly, or create a disturbance, in premises to which a licence or permit relates.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ *Liquor Act 1992* (Qld), s 158(1).

¹³⁹ *Liquor Act 1992* (Qld), s 158(2).

¹⁴⁰ *Liquor Act 1992* (Qld), s 158(3).

¹⁴¹ *Liquor Act 1992* (Qld), s 156(1).

¹⁴² *Liquor Act 1992* (Qld), s 164.

Various persons, including those who are unduly intoxicated, disorderly, creating a disturbance or under 18 years of age may:¹⁴³

- be removed from such premises; or
- refused entry to such premises.

6.1.6 Prohibition on consumption of liquor in most public places

Subject to limited exceptions, a person must not consume liquor in certain public places, other than those designated by the relevant local government as places where liquor may be consumed.¹⁴⁴

6.2 QUEENSLAND ALCOHOL ACTION PLAN 2003/2004 TO 2006/2007

Finding the Balance: Queensland Alcohol Action Plan 2003/2004 to 2006/2007 ('Alcohol Action Plan') is aimed at preventing and reducing the harm associated with alcohol misuse in Queensland.¹⁴⁵ It states that:¹⁴⁶

... 80% of alcohol consumed in Australia in 2001 put the drinker at risk of immediate or long-term harm. These trends were reflected in Queensland consumption rates, with Queensland drinking behaviours among the most risky in Australia, and higher than the national average.

The following excerpt also provides some background to the plan:¹⁴⁷

The social cost associated with alcohol-related harm in terms of health, disability, trauma, death, absenteeism and loss of productivity is significant. In monetary terms, the cost of alcohol misuse to Queensland is estimated to be \$1.4 billion per year. Although there has been some decline in consumption rates by Queenslanders in the ten years between 1991 and 2001, Queensland still has one of the highest rates of alcohol-related deaths and hospitalisations in Australia. Between 1992 and 2001, over 6,000 Queenslanders died of alcohol-related causes and over 136,000 were hospitalised.

In terms of binge drinking by young people, the plan states:¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ *Liquor Act 1992* (Qld), ss 165 and 165A.

¹⁴⁴ *Liquor Act 1992* (Qld), ss 173B and 173C.

¹⁴⁵ Alcohol Action Plan, p 3.

¹⁴⁶ Alcohol Action Plan, p 7.

¹⁴⁷ Alcohol Action Plan, p 8.

Monitoring has also revealed the emergence of dangerous new trends associated with alcohol misuse. These include an increase in the number of young people aged 14 – 24 who are consuming alcohol and consuming it in a high risk manner with binge drinking by young women in particular escalating.

The key focus of the plan is to address the detrimental impact of alcohol misuse in the community, including related violence and misuse in susceptible high risk groups, particularly young people, Indigenous communities and offenders with alcohol related problems. Tailored programs specific to the needs of each group are outlined.¹⁴⁹

The plan also:

- seeks to raise the community's awareness of the dangers of alcohol misuse;
- endeavours to improve the effectiveness of legislation and regulatory initiatives;
- considers the responsible marketing and provision of alcohol;
- outlines initiatives to promote safer drinking environments;
- addresses drink driving and related issues;
- seeks to reduce alcohol related harm through the development and implementation of targeted and appropriate interventions;
- outlines key workforce development strategies; and
- identifies the need for appropriate research and evaluation.

6.3 'MAKE YOUR OWN MIND UP ABOUT DRINKING' CAMPAIGN

The Queensland Government's *Make Up Your Own Mind About Drinking* campaign aimed to empower young women in their decisions about alcohol consumption and was run in 2005 and 2006, with advertisements appearing on television and in cinemas and magazines.

The campaign stemmed from research which showed:¹⁵⁰

- young people are generally over-represented in terms of harms related to alcohol consumption; and

¹⁴⁸ Alcohol Action Plan, p 7.

¹⁴⁹ Alcohol Action Plan, pp 3-4.

¹⁵⁰ Queensland Government. Queensland Health, 'Young Women and Alcohol Campaign – "Make up your own mind about drinking"', *Background paper*, downloaded on 14 March 2007 from <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/youngwomenandalcohol/documents/32059.pdf>.

- there was risky alcohol consumption by young women, both in Australia and overseas.

The campaign also acknowledged a degree of complexity in the issues concerning patterns of binge drinking by young women aged 18 to 23, and stated that specific interventions targeting this cohort were important for their long-term health.

Some of the findings of research undertaken to assist in the development of the campaign included:¹⁵¹

- that young Queensland females are knowledgeable about the recommended number, and concept, of standard drinks, but many still partake in risky drinking behaviour;
- most do not strongly associate alcohol with causing death; and
- most wrongly classify their own risky behaviour and consider themselves as occasional or social drinkers distanced from the risks of binge drinking.

An evaluation of the campaign found that there was a “favourable shift in the alcohol consumption of young Queensland women which exceeded the original project expectations”, and that after the campaign, there was a 10% increase in the proportion of Queensland young women taking action to reduce their alcohol consumption.¹⁵² Favourable reductions were also recorded in the proportion of young Queensland women classified as “reluctant drinkers” who were partaking in risky alcohol behaviour.

7 INITIATIVES IN SELECTED OTHER AUSTRALIAN JURISDICTIONS

By way of random selection, this section examines some of the initiatives directed at alcohol misuse by the Australian and New South Wales Governments.

7.1 AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT

The *National Alcohol Strategy 2006 – 2009* was endorsed by the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy at its meeting on 15 May 2006. It aims to:¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ ‘Young Women and Alcohol Campaign – “Make up your own mind about drinking”’, Background paper.

¹⁵² ‘Young Women and Alcohol Campaign – “Make up your own mind about drinking”’, Background paper.

¹⁵³ National Alcohol Strategy, p 2.

- reduce the incidence of intoxication among drinkers;
- enhance public safety and amenity at times and in places where alcohol is consumed;
- improve health outcomes among individuals and communities affected by alcohol consumption; and
- facilitate safer and healthier drinking cultures by developing community understanding about alcohol and through regulation of its availability.

The strategy exists because:¹⁵⁴

Many of the dangers of alcohol for Australians who drink, and for those around them, are misunderstood, tolerated or ignored. This is particularly apparent with regards to intoxication. The paradoxical affinity that Australians have for a drug that is harmful to so many, so often, has become the hallmark of many of the nation's drinking cultures.

Today there is not a single drinking culture in Australia, but a great diversity, reflecting the varied and changing meanings that alcohol occupies in our lives. Common among these cultures, however, is an unsafe approach to alcohol. To put it plainly, too many Australians now partake in 'drunken' cultures rather than drinking cultures. ... To continue in this direction is in nobody's interests

Although the strategy notes that Australia has a relatively high per capita consumption of alcohol, ranking 34th out of 185 countries in a study undertaken by the World Health Organisation, it also recognises that there are difficulties regarding the availability of reliable data on alcohol consumption in Australia.¹⁵⁵ Despite this, the strategy makes the following points in relation to consumption estimates for Australia:¹⁵⁶

- per capita alcohol consumption steadily declined from the late 1980s until the early 1990s when the consumption began to fluctuate;
- over the past decade there has been a steady increase in the proportion of the Australian population that drinks, reaching 83% in 2004;
- 1.46 million Australians consume alcohol on a daily basis, 600,000 (41%) of whom are aged at least 60;
- one in five Australians drink at levels that are risky or a high risk of harm in the short-term at least once per month, with Australians aged 20 to 29 the most likely of all age groups to drink at such levels (being one-third of males in this age group and one-quarter of similarly aged females);

¹⁵⁴ National Alcohol Strategy, p 4.

¹⁵⁵ National Alcohol Strategy, pp 8-9.

¹⁵⁶ National Alcohol Strategy, pp 9-10.

- in 2001, 85% of alcohol consumption by 14 to 17 year old females was at risky/high-risk levels for short-term harm. For males, this figure was 80%;
- following a period of national decline in youth alcohol attributable deaths during the 1990s, increases have been recorded in more recent years in several states and territories;
- in terms of the alcoholic beverage preferences of males aged 15 to 17, there has been a decrease in those consuming full-strength beer (from 46% in 2000 to 36% in 2004) and an increase in those consuming pre-mixed drinks (from 14% to 36% over the same period); and
- this trend was even more pronounced for females, with a decrease in the proportion drinking full-strength beer (from 15% to 8%) and a significant increase in those consuming pre-mixed spirits (from 14% to 62%).

The strategy also refers to recent research and initiatives on alcohol abuse at the national, state/territory and local levels.¹⁵⁷

7.2 NEW SOUTH WALES

The New South Wales Government convened a summit on alcohol abuse over four days in August 2003, bringing together experts, community leaders, liquor industry representatives, support services and Members of Parliament.¹⁵⁸ Over 300 people attended the summit, and more than 300 public submissions were received.¹⁵⁹

The summit was held in conjunction with the following events, both of which took place on the day preceding the summit:

- a *NSW Young People and Alcohol* forum, at which about 60 young people shared their experiences and views on issues concerning alcohol. A statement of the participants' understanding of the issues and possible solutions was tabled on the first day of the summit; and
- a *Talking about Grog* forum, which allowed Aboriginal people to discuss their particular issues, share their experiences and identify strategies, which were taken by Aboriginal representatives to the summit.

¹⁵⁷ National Alcohol Strategy, p 8.

¹⁵⁸ For further information, see <http://www.alcoholsummit.nsw.gov.au/>. For background to the summit, also see NSW Parliamentary Library Research Services, Alcohol Abuse.

¹⁵⁹ New South Wales Government, *Outcomes of the NSW Summit on Alcohol Abuse 2003 - Changing the Culture of Alcohol Use in New South Wales – Key Initiatives*, May 2004, p(i), downloaded on 4 December 2006 from http://www.alcoholinfo.nsw.gov.au/alcohol_summit_03/response/Alcohol_Summit_Response_-_Key_Initiatives.pdf.

The 318 recommendations made by the summit covered the following areas:¹⁶⁰

- community engagement and information;
- preventing harm and abuse;
- alcohol dependence, disease and treatment;
- effective health care service delivery;
- alcohol related injury and trauma;
- family health and wellbeing;
- workforce development;
- alcohol related crime and anti-social behaviour;
- alcohol and the justice system; and
- responsible supply and consumption;

In response, the New South Wales Government released a report¹⁶¹ which sets out a four-year plan directed at changing the culture of alcohol abuse. The plan centres on the following broad actions and includes a range of initiatives for various sections of the community:

- more education and communication about alcohol;
- improving the well-being of families and young people;
- more targeted health and treatment services;
- prevention of injury and trauma;
- building the capacity of the workforce;
- dealing with alcohol related crime;
- promoting responsible service and supply; and
- regular monitoring and coordination of alcohol abuse initiatives.

Section 114 of the *Liquor Act 1982* (NSW), which regulates the supply of alcohol to young people, is discussed in section 6.1.4 of this Research Brief.

¹⁶⁰ NSW Summit on Alcohol Abuse 2003, *Communiqué*, 29 August 2003, downloaded on 4 December 2006 from http://www.alcoholinfo.nsw.gov.au/alcohol_summit_03/home/Communique.pdf.

¹⁶¹ New South Wales Government, *Outcomes of the NSW Summit on Alcohol Abuse 2003 - Changing the Culture of Alcohol Use in New South Wales*, May 2004, downloaded on 4 December 2006 from http://www.alcoholsummit.nsw.gov.au/response/Alcohol_Summit_-_Outcomes_Report2.pdf.

APPENDIX – NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Title **Dying for a drink**
Author **Jane Fynes-Clinton**
Source **The Courier Mail**
Date Issue **28 December 2006**
Page **29**

Title **Sober resolve to reform Schoolies**
Author **Michael Way, Andrew Potts**
Source **The Courier Mail**
Date Issue **14 December 2006**
Page **10**

Title **Ugly side of gender equality**
Author **Fran Metcalf**
Source **The Courier Mail**
Date Issue **17 July 2006**

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2007/09	<i>Protection for Good Samaritans under the Civil Liability (Good Samaritan) Amendment Bill 2007 (Qld)</i>	Apr 2007
2007/10	<i>Implementing Recommendations of the Review of the Mental Health Act 2000 (Qld); the Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill</i>	Apr 2007
2007/11	<i>Our Binge Drinking Culture</i>	Apr 2007

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