

Dear Colleague

- **1. Cunning process for purchase age debate
- **2. The remainder of the Alcohol NON-Reform Bill
- **3. Local alcohol plans
- **4. What about Supplementary Order Papers?
- **5. National politics and alcohol policy
- **6. What will Alcohol Action NZ do?
- **7. Wanting to become more active?
- **8. AANZ Conference on alcohol marketing – Thursday, March 7th 2013 **9. Thanks

**1. Cunning process for purchase age debate We're hoping you've been able to pick yourself off the floor following the Parliamentary debacle on the purchase age debate several weeks ago. You had to either cry or laugh that evening, when democracy certainly wasn't the winner on the night with a majority of MPs (71/121) voting for change (split age or 20/20) in the first ballot, but when split age dropped out of the three-horse race and 18/18 was subsequently run against 20/20 in the second ballot, the heavy drinking culture status quo won.

It was either bumbling or great cunning that saw the voting structured like that, to put the three purchase age options up against each other at the outset. With so much money at stake, it is very hard to believe it was bumbling. The statistically flawed voting process gave the "Keep it at 18" the best and only chance to win.

And so, with the only substantial reform defeated, it is right to refer to the Bill now as the Alcohol NON-reform Bill. We were expecting it to be the Alcohol Half-a-Reform Bill.

**2. The remainder of the Alcohol NON-Reform Bill It has been announced by the Minister that the remainder of Bill will be debated for the final time before the end of this month. What is there to look forward to? In a word – nothing.

There is nothing on pricing, the single most effective and easily enacted reform. There is only tinkering with advertising and sponsorship involving some very limited restriction of advertising to minors, and nothing on changing the legal drunk driving that continues to be sanctioned and which threatens every driver, including you and your family on our roads, particularly in the evenings. There is next to nothing on alcohol availability with the ban from convenience stores simply righting something that was never intended anyway and local alcohol plans promising much more than they will probably ever deliver (see below); and of course nothing now in terms of changing teenage purchase of a Class B equivalent drug for peer group consumption.

There is therefore nothing substantial to look forward to in this remaining Clayton's Alcohol Reform Bill, apart from a series of technical changes related to the sale and purchase of alcohol, which no doubt will nevertheless be talked up large by National MPs and Hon Peter Dunne/Hon John Banks, with the alcohol industry in the background who can't stop smiling at their good fortune.

There is no excuse for this inaction. The science is strong, the public support for substantial reform (as demonstrated in the 2010 Health Sponsorship Council survey) is strong. The thing lacking was the political will. But the campaign will go on, and now we look to Labour and other parties to care enough and have the courage where National has failed.

**3. Local alcohol plans

Some people are thinking there is hope for the Alcohol Reform Bill because of local alcohol plans. But what the local alcohol plans initiative does (remembering they are likely to be voluntary anyway and therefore not necessarily enacted in every province), is relieve the government of any leadership on reducing the current gross accessibility of alcohol by standing up to the alcohol industry.

Devolving these decisions means it will be up to local councils to mediate the struggle between their communities and the alcohol industry (armed with their highly paid top-class lawyers, who are already salivating at the prospect).

The theory is great, that local communities will be able to determine the number of liquor outlets and their trading hours in their own neighbourhoods, and the government is full of this rhetoric. But the reality is that it will be time-stretched ordinary citizens against the alcohol industry's lawyers.

Not that we shouldn't try. We must. But local alcohol plans could very well take up all our time and energy, leaving nothing left to advocate for effective alcohol law reform at a national level.

We suggest an 80/20 split of time and energy in favour of working on effective alcohol law reform at a national level. In the end this is the most important requirement to change the heavy drinking culture in NZ.

**4. What about Supplementary Order Papers?

There are 22 supplementary order papers (amendments) that have been lodged in preparation for the final debate on the Alcohol NON-Reform Bill. These can be found at:

<http://www.legislation.govt.nz/bill/government/2010/0236/22.0/versions.aspx>

There are ten (for the most part excellent) SOPs from Labour Party MPs (numbers 107 – 116) but none of these are from the Labour Party representing party policy. Despite Sir Geoffrey Palmer's first plea to Parliament at the outset of his Law Commission team's review of the liquor laws (2009/2010) for political parties to dispense with the conscience vote, the Labour Party has not been able to do it yet. Conscience voting maintains alcohol as a moral issue, making it more susceptible to industry lobbying MP by MP, rather than primarily a health issue relying on science.

There are three SOPs related to pricing - from Labour's Hon Lianne Dalziel (SOP 113 on minimum pricing), Green's Kevin Hague (SOP 130 on excise tax) and Maori's Te Ururoa Flavell (as part of SOP 81 on minimum pricing).

The best hope for SOPs remains for the Maori Party's SOP 130, because the Maori Party are part of government. Along with minimum pricing their SOP has three excellent additional amendments – to dismantle all alcohol advertising and sponsorship, put a cap on liquor licences and establish a sinking lid on existing ones, and propose decent trading hours for liquor licences. But the word is that there is simply no appetite from Hon Judith Collins or her Cabinet colleagues to do anything that might change the heavy drinking culture.

**5. National politics and alcohol policy The government is beginning to unravel on many fronts and polls have shown for the first time recently that a Labour/Green/NZF coalition could govern after 2014.

Although NZF have indicated they are not closing the door to a new National/NZF coalition, a Labour/Green-led coalition is looking a distinct possibility.

But would such a coalition be able to agree about alcohol policy and have the courage of bringing in the same amendments they are putting up now in Opposition if they had power to in 2014? That depends on all of us. From now on, the Opposition parties need to be the primary focus of our campaign.

****6. What will Alcohol Action NZ do?**

We must see this current Bill through to the finish, even though it is such an obscenely weak piece of legislation if reform was really the intention. In fact, because it is so weak there continue to be opportunities most days of the week to send MPs across the political spectrum, but especially the PM and Cabinet Ministers an email, or comment somewhere in the media including social media, about the continuing damage from New Zealand's heavy drinking culture that the government is deliberately maintaining through doing nothing.

The highest priority in the next few weeks is that the message comes through loud and clear that the National government has failed the public by enacting an Alcohol NON-Reform Bill; and that the campaign to get real change will go on.

Every time we talk about what still needs to happen, we are contributing to change. Every good idea needs to be said a thousand times for others to hear it, even when they're trying hard not to hear it. We're human beings after all.

There will also be many opportunities in the weeks to months ahead to comment on three elements of the 5+ Solution not represented in the Bill – pricing, marketing and drink driving – because of government initiatives, even though they are probably little more than delay tactics. These three things are: further consideration by Ministry of Justice officials of minimum pricing; a special committee to be formed to consider the future of alcohol marketing; and the pseudo-research currently occurring on drink driving between 0.05 and 0.08. These are in addition to the alcohol accessibility aspects of local alcohol plans (numbers of liquor outlets and trading hours).

But probably the most important thing that Alcohol Action will be engaged in over the next twelve months will be developing a short paper on alcohol law reform that will become the focus for a broad-based coalition to support the next government in 2014, whatever shades of blue/green/red/brown/black it is. The current government has shown its true colours in recent months. Not only are they ambivalent about effective alcohol law reform that changes the heavy drinking culture, they are actively opposed to such measures. The only ray of hope, the Maori Party, is being ignored.

Continuing to point out the lack of action by the current National/Banks/Dunne group will contribute to the continuing public momentum for change.

****7. Wanting to become more active?**

We have become aware of people who are on this email distribution list of about 4000 who want to become more active in the work of Alcohol Action NZ. Currently there are about 40 colleagues in a more active network that receives material by email once or twice a week and participates in some email discussion as well as a monthly teleconference. About half of these colleagues are part of local Alcohol Action groups.

We are currently working on increasing the number of groups and have appointed Jacqui Robinson, formerly of Community and Public Health in Timaru and a highly active colleague in Alcohol Action from the outset, to be a national network coordinator.

If you would like to become more active, please make direct contact with her:
Jacqui James-Robinson [jacqui.alcoholaction@gmail.com]

Don't forget letters to the editor. Cliff Turner from Hamilton, now well into his 80s, continues to be a model. He churns out pearls almost on a weekly basis as well as frequent stinging complaints to the Advertising Standards Authority about alcohol advertising.

Here is a recent letter by him published in the Press as a reply to someone who was concerned about the motives of Alcohol Action and ASH.

“Your correspondent Peter Power suggested the Alcohol Action and ASH share an addiction to telling other people how to live their lives (Sept 29). If he had lived in the 19th Century he could have tendered the same advice to Lord Shaftesbury and William Wilberforce.

Shaftesbury told the textile-mill owners and the coal owners to desist from employing children, who worked under appalling conditions in their enterprises. Wilberforce urged the owners of West Indian sugar plantations to free their slaves.

What they had in common was a desire to make the world a better place. Alcohol Action and ASH share, perhaps more humbly, the same aim.”

**8. 2013 AANZ Conference on alcohol marketing – Thursday, March 7th 2013 This year's theme strikes right at the heart of the problem of excessive commercialisation - \$400,000+ per day spent by the alcohol industry on marketing, much of it targeted directly at our children and our friends' children.

Put the date in your diary now – Thursday, March 7th 2013. It will be held at Te Papa again and is shaping up to being the best of our four conferences to date.

**9. Thanks

Thanks for all the hard work you are doing supporting effective alcohol law reform. Together we are making great progress, despite, and perhaps somewhat ironically because of, the recalcitrant antics of this Key/Banks/Dunne government which have probably only helped increase the already strong public support for change.

Sincerely
Doug, Jennie and Geoff
Medical Spokespeople
Alcohol Action NZ
