

18 February 2011

SUBMISSION ON THE ALCOHOL REFORM BILL

To the Justice and Electoral Committee

This submission is from **Alcohol Drug Association New Zealand (ADANZ)**.

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We wish to appear before the committee to speak to our submission.

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WHO ARE WE?

ADANZ is a national alcohol and other drug organisation. We aim to improve the health and well-being of the people of Aotearoa, New Zealand, by reducing the harm associated with alcohol, other drugs and gambling.

ADANZ provides expert information and policy advice, early intervention and support services to the people of New Zealand. ADANZ manages the Alcohol Drug Helpline and compiles the national Addictions Treatment Directory. We deliver a range of services led and developed by people who have previously experienced addiction, had a family member affected by addiction or used addiction treatment services.

Alcohol Drug Helpline

ADANZ delivers the Alcohol Drug Helpline, a telephone service available from 10.00 am – 10.00 pm seven days a week. The Helpline is funded by ALAC and the Ministry of Health.

alcoholdrughelpline
0800 787 797 
Te kai a te rangatira he korero

The Helpline offers free confidential information, insight and support on issues arising from drinking or drug use. We provide immediate assistance to callers and referral to services in the caller's area.

We offer a range of options: information and resources; brief interventions for alcohol and other drug problems; a call back service where the Helpline calls the client at a pre-arranged time to assist

them to reach their goals; relapse prevention for those who have made the change. We work with concerned others and support families/whanau to stay well when their loved ones are struggling with an alcohol or other drug problem.

The Helpline now assists 14,000 people a year and includes a dedicated Maori line, a dedicated Pasifika line, a Meth Help Team, and is about to roll out a new youth service specifically aimed at encouraging more young people to seek help and information.

WHAT IS OUR MANDATE TO SPEAK?

We hear directly from New Zealanders from all walks of life, not only about how alcohol is affecting their lives, but about the specific issues that impact them most. These are often modifiable things that we as a society can and should help to change.

We are one of the few agencies in New Zealand with a birds eye view of what is happening across the whole country. We report regularly throughout the year on changing call patterns both in terms of volume, but also on the differing segments of the population, allowing us to spot trends as they emerge.

The people that call the Alcohol Drug Helpline are typical of the New Zealand population at large. They are not archetypal down and out drunks. They are part of a broadening base of ordinary people, which increasingly includes more women and young people who find themselves caught up in heavy drinking, binge drinking or just drinking too much too often.

WHY ROBUST CHANGES TO OUR ALCOHOL LAWS ARE REQUIRED

- We have been relaxing our liquor laws for the last 20 years.
- The number of outlets licensed to sell alcohol has more than doubled from 6,296 in 1990 to 14,424 in 2010.
- Alcohol has become more affordable over the last decade.
- Existing laws are failing to control alcohol advertising, which continues to blatantly associate alcohol with social, sporting and sexual success.
- The Law Commission described the current situation as “the unbridled commercialisation of alcohol”. This has contributed to an environment that promotes a binge-drinking culture and has led to an increase in alcohol-related harms.

How are New Zealanders drinking?

- Total alcohol consumption rose by 9% between 1998 and 2008.
- 700,000 New Zealanders have been categorised as binge drinkers (consuming seven or more standard drinks per session).
- Binge drinking among teenagers is increasing. Between 1995 and 2004, the proportion of young people drinking more than six drinks on a typical occasion increased from:

- 14% to 25% in 14 –15 year olds
- 25% to 36% in 16 –17 year olds
- 31% to 40% in 18 –19 year olds.

What are some of the alcohol-related harms to our communities?

- Each year, about 1,000 people die due to alcohol. Half of these deaths are from chronic alcohol-related diseases such as cancer. The other half are from injuries.
- Alcohol is responsible for a net loss of 12,000 years of life each year.
- In 2005/06:
 - harmful alcohol use cost an estimated \$4.4 billion of diverted resources and lost welfare
 - there were 280,429 alcohol-related injury claims to ACC.
- Alcohol is a factor in one in three of all recorded crimes.

WHAT ADANZ SUPPORTS

We support all the 153 recommendations made by the Law Commission in their review of New Zealand's liquor laws. 'Alcohol In Our Lives: Curbing the Harm.'

We support the steps for change in the proposed new legislation which reflects the groundswell of public opinion in this country that is calling for a much needed shift in the way we sell, distribute and regulate alcohol in New Zealand. However we believe there are critical changes recommended by the Commission that need to be included in the bill if we are to see real change occur in our nations drinking behavior. Small policy changes will have a small impact. Significant changes are needed to have a significant impact. In particular:

- Reduce accessibility in the community.
- Much greater restrictions on marketing.
- The implementation of minimum pricing.
- Removal of alcohol from supermarkets.
- Lowering the blood alcohol limit for drink driving.
- Raising of the purchase age to 20 years.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following outlines our key recommendations for changes to the Alcohol Reform Bill and the rationale behind them.

1. GIVE PEACE A CHANCE - Reducing accessibility to alcohol in the community



There is a demonstrated correlation between high liquor outlet density and increased police activity, which includes violent crime, sexual offences and property damage. Consequently ADANZ fully supports the Government's foresight in accepting the Law Commission's proposals to empower local communities to have more say in local licensing decisions, and that local authorities will be required to adopt a *local* alcohol policy that can respond more effectively to the needs of its communities.

However, trading hours have not been restricted nearly enough. For anyone wishing to purchase alcohol they will still be able to do so at any time except between 4am and 8am in the morning.

Listen to one of our callers who put into their own words the impact this level of availability has on their attempts to maintain safer levels of drinking.

I've been making such good progress. I started to reduce my drinking while I was away on holiday... I think my wife has started to have some hope that I will, finally, be able to beat this. But I just want to tell you how hard it is now that I'm home. My habit has been to call in at the bottle shop on the way home from work, drink that lot and sometimes, in my craziness, I go out again and buy more. It is so easy to get from the local stores. I know that if the alcohol suppliers closed at say 8pm and there wasn't any in the supermarkets, that at this stage of my journey my struggles would be less. I get this crazy feeling that I have to have some alcohol on hand, even if I'm not going to drink it (although usually I do). I know all the arguments, but it would go some way to helping me if I couldn't buy it. **Male, 46, NZ European.**

SOLUTION: ADANZ recommends that:

- The Government should make local alcohol policies mandatory for all local authorities. This would:
 - ensure all communities have a say about alcohol in their neighbour hoods
 - encourage all local authorities to consider the nature of alcohol use in their district
 - ensure the licensing process is consistent nationwide.
- The Government's decision to broaden the factors to be considered by licensing authorities when reviewing applications is a good one.
- Taking into account the impact of any new licensed premises on the surrounding community will help prevent the clustering of alcohol outlets, reduce the availability of alcohol and reduce alcohol harms.

- The Government should accept the restricted trading hours recommended by the Law Commission and make a one-way door policy compulsory.

2. UNDER THE INFLUENCE – The power of advertising and sponsorship that associates alcohol with social, sporting and sexual success

90% of young people aged 5-17 are exposed to alcohol advertising on TV each week of their lives.

Clear links have been established that this advertising encourages young people to start drinking at a younger age and leads those that already drink to drink more because it helps to create and continually reinforce the idea that drinking is sexy, sophisticated and a sign of success.



To give an example of where we think current measures fall short, the present *voluntary* code for advertising liquor states: Advertisements shall not be sexually provocative. Yeah Right!



Alcohol is defined as “a legalized drug with the potential to cause serious harm”. It is *not* an everyday commodity. We therefore advocate strongly for the creation of a joint committee run by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Justice to oversee a programme to reduce exposure to alcohol advertising and increase control of its content.

The following is how that lack of control over content feels to parents trying to teach their children about the reality of dealing with the hazards and harm that can come from

drinking.

I work so hard to teach my boys the dangers and evils of alcohol. They are good boys and are doing well but how on earth can I stop this? They now have to see all these bright coloured ads...I am getting a group of parents together to protest but I'm so upset at the moment I just needed to talk to someone else. And it's not just the young people they see, they see older people, drunks and that. Oh how can this be allowed to happen? **Female caller to Helpline, 40 Samoan.**

SOLUTION: ADANZ recommends that:

- At a very minimum, the Government should accept the Law Commission's three-stage plan to control alcohol promotions, advertising and sponsorship.
- The eventual goal should be an end to all forms of alcohol advertising.
- The Government should place external controls over the industry's ability to advertise.
- The Government should restrict new forms of marketing that target young people using social media such as Facebook or viral text messaging.

- Alcohol sponsorship of sporting or cultural events across New Zealand should end.

3. WHAT A DIFFERENCE A YEAR MAKES – Introducing minimum prices now versus the ‘we need more research’excuse



We strongly advocate that the Government rethink its decision to reject the recommendations of the Law Commission to raise the excise tax on alcohol and to postpone the investigation of minimum pricing.

We argue that there is not only sufficient, but there is now compelling evidence from around the world that alcohol behaves just like every other commodity including tobacco and

illicit drugs - when you raise its price, consumption decreases.

This link was first established nearly 15 years ago in 1997, has been corroborated by countries as diverse in their approach to alcohol as Finland, Australia, Wales, Scotland the US and Sweden, has been implemented by Canada and is about to be in the UK.

Not only has a link been established between the price of alcohol and consumption but there is evidence now that relates rises in the price of alcohol to reductions in the level of alcohol related harm. It has been linked to reductions in sexual offences, violent crime and property damage.

Young drinkers together with heavy and frequent drinkers are most sensitive to price changes as they prefer (choose) cheap alcohol, which would be most affected by the introduction of a minimum price. The message is clear and it is simple: harmful and hazardous drinkers tend to choose the cheapest drinks.

Look at these calculations from the UK where minimum pricing is just being introduced (cited in a Home Office Report). Setting a minimum price of 30p for one standard drink is estimated to lead to the following over the next year:

- Reduction in total crime by **3,800**.
- The number of alcohol related deaths by **302**.
- Prevent **3,800** cases of unemployment.

The NHS 2009 report states the number of alcohol related deaths as 6,541 per annum. The estimated reduction of alcohol related deaths is significant therefore at 4.6%.

An equivalent drop in New Zealand would result in the saving of up to 50 lives over the next year. With the deaths of over a 1,000 New Zealanders every year from alcohol related causes, it has been argued that the annual death rate from alcohol consumption in New Zealand makes it a category one pandemic.

SOLUTION: ADANZ recommends that:

- The Government should accept the Law Commission’s main recommendations on pricing, including:
 - increasing excise tax by 50% to achieve a 10% average increase in retail prices.

- fully investigating minimum pricing schemes and making it a legal requirement for retailers and producers to provide sales and price data.
- reducing excise tax on low-alcohol products.
- All revenue from excise tax on alcohol should be used to pay for prevention, treatment and rehabilitation services.
- We believe there is a strong case for minimum pricing in addition to a rise in excise tax.
- The Law Commission's recommendations were designed to be a 'mutually supportive package'. We believe the Government should accept the Law Commission's entire suite of recommendations instead of 'cherry picking' the least politically risky options.

4. SUPERMARKET SHOPPING LIST - Just another grocery item?

Alcohol is *not* an everyday commodity yet it is openly sold where the majority of us buy our essential, everyday goods – in the supermarket. Placing alcohol for sale alongside ordinary foodstuffs sends out the wrong message and more importantly, makes it significantly harder for people such as our callers who are trying to moderate their drinking to avoid it.



It is often argued that to remove wine and beer from our supermarkets would inconvenience those who do not have a drinking problem (or do not think they have). Why, it is argued, should these people be inconvenienced by a supposed minority of problem drinkers? ADANZ believes that as a society we need to step back and weigh up a far bigger picture and ask ourselves is the cost of a minor inconvenience worth the huge social, health and economic cost everyone is paying for the abuse of alcohol in New Zealand?

If we can reduce levels of drinking by taking alcohol out of supermarkets altogether, we will not only reduce the levels of damage and harm to the individual drinker but have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of their families and whanau also.

SOLUTION: ADANZ recommends that:

- The government consider removing alcohol from supermarkets.
- At the very least we believe there needs to be an end to the practice of the display, promotion and discount of alcohol at supermarket entrances, often at heavily discounted prices, which represents far too great an obstacle for those seeking to manage their drinking levels.
- We would also like to see the off-site advertising of alcohol prices for any retail outlet completely banned as this encourages price discounting and encourages binge drinkers to shop around for the place that they can purchase the cheapest means of achieving intoxication.

5. DRIVING DRUNK – Highway to disaster



The Law Commission recommended that the Blood alcohol concentration (BAC) limits for driving should be reduced from 80 to 50mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood for adult drivers. However the government's decision to request two years of more research ignores the nearly 300 international studies examining BAC levels and driving ability. They overwhelmingly show that the more alcohol a driver has consumed, the higher their crash risk.

Most New Zealanders support a legal BAC limit of 50mg. When asked how much alcohol should be safe to drink before driving, 85% of those surveyed answered two drinks or less. This is equivalent to a BAC limit of 50mg.

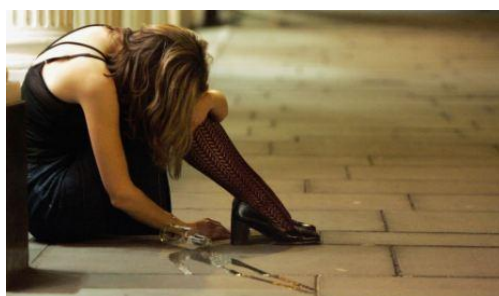
Lowering the adult BAC limit to 50mg would save between 15 and 30 lives and prevent between 320 and 686 injuries every year. It is easier to keep track of how many drinks you've had when keeping below 50mg. This is about two cans of beer drunk by an average-sized adult male in one hour. People intending to keep below a limit of 80mg are more likely to lose count of their drinks.

SOLUTION: ADANZ recommends that:

- The Government should immediately lower the adult BAC limit to 50mg per 100ml. There is ample research evidence, applicable to New Zealand, to support this change.
- ADANZ fully supports the Government's decision to reduce youth BAC limits to zero. This sends a clear message to young people that, if you drink any alcohol, you should not drive.
- We also support the Government on the introduction of alcohol interlocks for repeat drink drivers. However, repeat drink driving offences are often a sign of an underlying drinking problem. Ensuring that treatment is available to recidivist drink drivers should be a priority.

6. WHEN IN DOUBT BLAME THE YOUTH – Protecting our young people from alcohol related harm

Since lowering the purchase age from 20 to 18 in 1999 there has been a significant increase in intoxicated youth presenting to our hospitals and an upwards surge in alcohol related accidents involving young people. Between 2002 and 2006 for example, there were 5,413 emergency admissions from alcohol related causes in the 15-24 yr old age group. In 2000, it was estimated that alcohol contributed to the deaths of 212 young people aged 15–29 years. For New Zealanders aged under 25 years, alcohol-related trauma is a leading cause of death.



Most international studies conclude that the younger the onset of drinking, the more likely the adverse outcomes such as injuries, fatalities, and unsafe sex. In addition, drinking alcohol at a young age has been identified as a risk factor for alcohol related harms as a young adult and later in life.

Evidence from around the world shows that raising the purchase age reduces the level of access adolescents have to alcohol. Harmful youth drinking is thereby reduced whilst the age at which young people start drinking is raised. This is particularly important in light of recent developments in neurological research which shows that the brain continues to develop well into a person's twenties. Drinking alcohol from a young age can harm the developing brain.

This wealth of evidence and experience clearly highlights the need to protect our young people from the harmful effects of having access to, and becoming frequent consumers of alcohol from adolescence onwards, as well as the consequences of being exposed to harmful quantities of alcohol via binge drinking.

SOLUTION: ADANZ recommends that:

- The government follow through on its sensible decision to accept the Law Commission's proposals for strengthening the controls on supply of alcohol to minors by including this in the new alcohol law. This will give parents and other adults more support and clarity about their rights and responsibilities around supplying alcohol to their own and other children.
- Listen to the evidence and accept the Law Commission's recommendation to return the purchase age back to 20, with no exceptions.
- Treat purchase age as a health and social policy issue rather than a conscience issue when voting in the House.
- Make alcohol policy on the basis of the evidence and experience rather than on what might be popular.
- Not allow its concern for the drinking and voting rights of young people to over-ride the real and significant harms that have occurred since the lowering of the purchase age.