



Justice and Electoral Select Committee

Alcohol Reform Bill

FREEPOST Parliament

Parliament Buildings

Wellington 6160

February 2011

Alcohol Reform Bill - Submission

- 1.1 This submission is being made by **Family First NZ**, a charitable organisation that researches and advocates on family issues in the public domain.
- 1.2 Every report we have read regarding child abuse and family violence says that alcohol abuse is a major contributing factor. A child is hugely at risk when an adult is under the influence of alcohol, and a recent [survey by Massey University](#) found that more than half of our sexual and physical assaults occurred while under the influence of alcohol. Our teenagers are binge drinking at an earlier age, and our health and justice system is clogged up with the [fallout](#) from our drinking culture.
- 1.3 The binge drinking culture has been increasing markedly since liberalising laws and controls around alcohol abuse. In **1989** alcohol law changes eased restrictions for off-licence selling including supermarket and grocery stores selling wine, and availability increased as trading hours of on-licence venues were extended. And then in **1999** we foolishly lowered the drinking age, allowed the sale of beer in supermarkets and further increased trading hours.

NZ HAS A MAJOR PROBLEM WITH THE ABUSE OF ALCOHOL

- 1.4 2.8 people die every day from a booze-related illness or accident.
470 million litres of alcohol consumed last year.
In 70 per cent of all emergency hospital admissions, alcohol consumption is a [major factor](#).
\$425 million [paid out by ACC](#) for alcohol-related injuries 2007
[Half of serious violent crimes](#) are related to excess alcohol consumption – and a third of all police apprehensions relate to alcohol
\$655 million a year cost to the public health sector (up to 10% of health budget)

\$240 million extra in crime and related costs.

90 per cent of the 8000 prison inmates have an alcohol or drug problem.

\$1 - \$4 billion Economist Brian Easton's estimated social costs from alcohol.

\$1.17 billion in lost productivity each year

\$101 million spent by taxpayers on providing addiction services.

Otago University's Christchurch School of Medicine's survey in 2007 of more than 1000 25-year-olds found one in three admitted to an alcohol problem

At least 600 children born each year with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder

Alcohol abuse is a major contributor to family violence and child abuse.

A recent Massey University [study](#) published in the NZ Medical Journal found that more than half the physical and sexual assaults in NZ involved alcohol

ADVERTISING AND PROMOTION

REDUCE MARKETING AND ADVERTISING

- 1.5 The overall exposure of children and people under the age of 20 years to liquor advertising and liquor promotion should be minimised and liquor advertising and liquor promotion should not hold strong appeal to children or young people – as proposed in this Bill
- 1.6 But self-regulation by the industry simply does not work. This has been shown with the general advertising and broadcasting industries
- 1.7 We **propose** a pre-vetting procedure of liquor advertisements or promotions by the Director-General of Health. The procedures relating to the Broadcasting Standards Authority and the Advertising Standards Authority show that action after the event is too late – the advertising has been achieved, the damage has been done
- 1.8 We would **support** the adoption of some of the provisions of the private members bill by Green MP Jeanette Fitzsimons as part of this bill (Liquor Advertising (Television and Radio) Bill 2006 – Bills Digest No. 1430)
- 1.9 This bill, in its Explanatory Note said *“The aggressive promotion of alcohol features strongly in New Zealand society. This cannot help but exacerbate the problems of alcohol abuse. In 1992 alcohol brand advertising was introduced into broadcast media, leading to a 42% increase in advertising expenditure and a fourfold increase in televised alcohol advertising in the first three years. By 1998 there was approximately \$52 million worth of alcohol sponsorship and advertising on television and radio and in newspapers and magazines. The money spent on health promotion messages is a fraction of that.*
- 1.10 *“As a result, the primary source of information for most people about alcohol and how to use it comes from alcohol advertising. Alcohol advertising on broadcast media is characterised by the association of alcohol brands with desired lifestyle images. The message coming from that is that, if you want to have what it takes, you have to be able to take your drink.”*
- 1.11 Dutch researchers recently reported that watching films and ads in which alcohol features prominently

drives people to immediately reach for the bottle themselves. An experiment with students showed that volunteers exposed to a film and commercials where alcohol featured predominately drank an average one-and-a-half bottles of beer more during the hour they were watching.

- 1.12** Researchers at Radboud University Nijmegen said that the findings highlight a potential need to explicitly warn people - and parents - if movies contain alcohol use because such portrayals have a direct effect on drinking,. "Implications of these findings may be that, if moderation of alcohol consumption in certain groups is strived for, it may be sensible to cut down on the portrayal of alcohol in programmes aimed at these groups and the commercials shown in between," Rutger Engels and colleagues wrote.
- 1.13** We **propose** that alcohol advertising should be limited to target adult audiences, played later at night on free-to-air tv (at least 9.30pm), and should not be allowed on public billboards.
- 1.14** We **propose** that the association between alcohol advertising and sport should also be limited because of the exposure to young people and children and the association between 'sporting heroes' and alcohol consumption

ACCESSIBILITY

REDUCE ALCOHOL ACCESSIBILITY

- 1.15** NZ has more liquor outlets than Australia despite having just one-fifths of its population.
- 1.16** We **support** the provisions that dairies and convenience stores should not qualify to sell alcohol. However, this should be extended to supermarkets. The increased availability of liquor shops in residential areas, and the longer hours of supermarkets selling alcohol has partly contributed to the culture of excess drinking.
- 1.17** According to the [National Alcohol Survey](#) (NAS) 2000, the most common reasons given by those aged 14 to 17 years for drinking were
- 'the range of places selling takeaway alcohol makes it easier to buy'
 - 'because more places serving alcohol are open longer'
 - 'I can buy wine in supermarkets'
- 1.18** Dedicated bottle stores in major shopping areas would avoid the confusion, would be clearly no-go zones for young people, and restricted hours would help to reduce the demand and potential for abuse
- 1.19** We **support** the provisions that local communities should have the final say as to the location and number of liquor outlets, but in all cases, they should not be within 200m of sensitive sites such as schools, residential areas, playgrounds, churches etc
- 1.20** We **reject** the proposal that default hours of purchase for on-license being 8am-4am. A recent [poll](#) by Research NZ has shown that 26 percent felt on-licence premises should close between 11 pm and 1 am, while a further 37 percent felt they should close between 1 am and 2 am.

PRICING

RAISE THE TAX ON ALCOHOL

- 1.21 Family First **rejects** the proposal to seek further price data supplied by the alcohol industry.
- 1.22 We **propose** that the government should introduce a minimum price per unit of alcohol to reduce the levels of harmful drinking. By increasing the current level of excise tax on alcohol, this would help compensate for the harm and health costs
- 1.23 We **propose** a ban on retailers using loss leading to promote the purchase of liquor.
- 1.24 We **support** the provisions restricting RTD's to 5 per cent alcohol

DRINKING AGE AND PARENTAL SUPERVISION

SOLUTION: RAISE THE DRINKING AGE

- 1.25 Family First **rejects** the split age proposal.
- 1.26 We also **reject** the proposal to allow under 18-year-olds to consume alcohol if they have a parent's or guardian's consent.
- 1.27 Family First is **proposing** a rise in both the purchase and drinking age to 21. This is based on the best medical evidence available (see attached research report – "YOUNG PEOPLE & ALCOHOL – What does the medical evidence tell us about the legal drinking age in NZ")
- 1.28 A rise in the drinking age is supported by public [polls](#) (71% - 2004), an Apr 09 Police Association [poll](#) (75%), an Aug '09 [poll](#) (almost 70%), an Oct 09 [poll](#) showing 75%, and an August 2010 [online poll](#) in the *Dominion Post* showing 77% of New Zealanders wanting the legal drinking age put back to at least 20
- 1.29 As research and media coverage has shown, parental supervision around alcohol has often been lacking – highlighted by out of control drunken parties spilling out into local communities
- 1.30 The primary responsibility for supervising teenagers with alcohol is the parents themselves. But that means the parents need to be physically present and involved – not just giving implied or express consent as recommend by this bill
- 1.31 The Alcohol Advisory Report "*The Way We Drink – A Profile of Drinking Culture in NZ*" (2003) showed that just over half of youths aged between 12 and 17 years admit having binged on alcohol (five or more drinks). Despite 63 per cent of adults saying they set strict rules about their children drinking, only half knew when their children drank
- 1.32 48 per cent of the youths said they were not supervised by an adult when they drank.
- 1.33 A 2008 survey [released](#) by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America and the MetLife Foundation found that parental guidance and example has a profound affect on their children's use of alcohol and drugs. Only 16 percent of teens whose parents set a zero tolerance policy reported their individual likelihood of using drugs or alcohol, whereas 45 percent of teens whose parents didn't set such boundaries reported they were likely to drink or use drugs at parties.
- 1.34 The survey also reveals that parents who had abused alcohol and drugs as teenagers were less likely to instruct their children about the negative effects of this behavior and to set a zero tolerance policy for

their teens.

- 1.35 Studies show the frequency and amount for adolescent alcohol use may be related to levels of parental monitoring. Data from the National Longitudinal study of Adolescent Health published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* find that adolescents were less likely to drink alcohol frequently if they felt more connected to their parents and their parents were home more often.
- 1.36 Research from the *Journal of Marriage and Family* found that higher levels of parental monitoring decreased the likelihood that adolescents would begin alcohol use and made them engage in drinking less frequently as they got older.
- 1.37 Additionally, data published in *Pediatrics* found a higher rate of alcohol consumption among boys who spent more time at home alone and unsupervised. These findings underscore the important influence parents have on their teenagers.
- 1.38 In research just released, a team from Melbourne's Murdoch Children's Research Institute says its study, which has tracked 1520 young people's drinking habits over more than 10 years from mid-teens to mid-20s, shows there is no safe or sensible level of drinking for adolescents, in light of later likely events.
- 1.39 The lead researcher said "We found no evidence of a level that may have been safe." The research, published in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, found that by young adulthood, 27 per cent of men and 13 per cent of women met at least one of the criteria for alcohol abuse and risky sexual behaviour.
- 1.40 A drinking age of 21 would alleviate some of the pressure parents feel to supply alcohol or allow alcohol consumption. This will also reduce risky behaviour as a result of excess or binge drinking e.g. violence, alcohol abuse, social or legal problems, alcohol-related high-risk sexual behaviour, drink driving etc

SELLING TO UNDERAGE

STRONG PENALTIES FOR SELLING TO UNDERAGE

- 1.41 We **propose** that any manager, temporary manager, or acting manager who is found to be selling alcohol to underage people should have their alcohol license cancelled after the 2nd conviction, and the revocation should be for a period of at least five years

PUBLIC DRUNKENNESS

PENALTY FOR PUBLIC DRUNKENNESS

- 1.42 Family First is **proposing** a penalty for public drunkenness. This prevents offensive behaviour associated with being intoxicated from being normalised and in some cases, glorified. It means that families are not confronted with unacceptable behaviour and intoxication in public places and at family events
- 1.43 It also means that the results of public drunkenness including offensive behaviour, vomiting, vandalism,

street brawls, littering etc does not become the burden of the local community

- 1.44 This proposal is supported by nearly 2/3'rds of kiwis according to a recent Research NZ [poll](#)

HEALTH WARNINGS

PLACE HEALTH WARNINGS ON ALCOHOL PRODUCTS / ADVERTISING

- 1.45 Family First is **proposing** health warnings to be placed on alcohol and within alcohol advertising, in the effective way that health warnings have been placed on cigarettes. The UK have adopted a similar scheme and there have been recent calls for health warnings in Australia also
- 1.46 The proposed warning labels should include words such as "know your limits" or "drink responsibly", the number of units each drink contains, and the recommended safe drinking level for that beverage
- 1.47 They would also warn that drinking alcohol should be avoided if pregnant or trying to conceive.
- 1.48 They should give the web address for alcohol support and education groups.
- 1.49 This will help people calculate how much they are drinking, whether they are staying within sensible drinking guidelines, the potential risks of abuse, and helping people to make the right choices

1.50



TREATMENT OPPORTUNITIES

INCREASE TREATMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALCOHOL ABUSE

- 1.51 For many people, alcohol abuse and alcoholism is a major issue and their behaviour may no longer be within their control. An *Otago University's Christchurch School of Medicine* survey of more than 1000 25-year-olds found one in three admitted to an alcohol problem and one in 20 was alcohol-dependent or had an addiction where liquor ruled their lives and they needed it to function. Those with the most

disturbing alcohol problems were the least likely to acknowledge they had a problem.

- 1.52 We need to offer solutions including short-term and long-term rehabilitation centres for recidivist offenders and those who genuinely want help to change. This should be a priority.

CONCLUSION

- 1.53 **Ultimately, it is not alcohol that is the problem. It's the abuse of alcohol and the culture of binge drinking that we have allowed to develop through liberalised laws. We must reverse these liberalised laws.**
- 1.54 We wish to appear before the Select Committee.

Bob McCoskrie

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