



NEW ZEALAND MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

14 February 2011

Justice and Electoral Select Committee
Parliament
Wellington

Alcohol Law Reform Bill

The NZMA is New Zealand's largest medical organisation and has a pan professional membership. We have around 4500 members who come from all areas of medicine including medical students, resident medical officers, general practitioners, and other specialists.

The NZMA aims to provide leadership of the medical profession, and promote:

- professional unity and values;
- the health of New Zealanders.

The key roles of the NZMA are to:

- provide advocacy on behalf of doctors and their patients;
- provide support and services to members and their practices;
- publish and maintain the Code of Ethics for the profession; and
- publish the New Zealand Medical Journal.

We have read the draft alcohol law reform bill with interest. In particular we were interested to learn how many of the Law Commission's recommendations in regard to alcohol had been accepted. The Law Commission's report "Alcohol in Our Lives" was a comprehensive one, and we strongly supported its recommendations.

We are therefore pleased that much of what the law commission proposed was accepted for inclusion in the Bill. In particular we strongly endorse the proposal for territorial authorities to be able to create local alcohol policies relating to the sale and consumption of alcohol within their districts, provided that those policies are in line with the objects of the legislation. We also support the creation of a number of infringement offences relating to alcohol as this is an effective way of targeting excessive or inappropriate alcohol use without overwhelming the court system.

There are however a few matters omitted from the Bill which we wish to raise.

Re-raise alcohol purchase age

We note that the Bill supports a split purchase age. While we support this as a default option our preferred position is a re-raising of the alcohol purchase age as being both a simpler mechanism and one that would be more effective.

Reducing the blood alcohol concentration level

We are disappointed that the Bill does not propose to reduce the current Blood Alcohol Concentration for all drivers over the age of 20 from 80 mg/per100mL to 50mg/ per 100mL. The Ministry of Transport has estimated a lower limit of 0.05 could prevent between 15 and 33 fatalities and 320 to 686 injuries every year, with an estimated annual social cost saving of between \$111 million and \$238 million¹.

Internationally, it has been shown that lowering the limit has positive effects on reducing driver consumption of alcohol, not just at the lower legal limits, but also at the upper extremes². Lowering the legal BAC does not only reduce the number of drivers with BAC between 0.05 and 0.08, but has the effect of making all alcohol impaired drivers lower the amount they drink before they drive, and the lower the BAC, the lower the crash risk.³

Tightening up on alcohol advertising and sponsorship

The NZMA believes that there should be a tightening of the advertising and sponsorship rules for alcohol. In particular we would support

- a ban on all alcohol advertising on radio and television before 10pm at night, and
- the prohibition of all alcohol sponsorship that relates to sport.

Price of alcohol

Given the enormous social and financial costs borne by the New Zealand society as a consequence of the hazardous consumption of alcohol the NZMA believes that consumers should receive a clear price signal when purchasing alcohol in any form. Government taxes should therefore be oriented to directly reflect the total volume of alcohol in the product. Such measures should encourage a shift to the consumption of products containing less alcohol per unit volume.

The NZMA also supports the principle of setting minimum prices for alcohol as has been said in other submissions.

We therefore strongly urge the inclusion in the Bill of the above matters.

We wish to appear before the Select Committee in support of our submission.

Yours faithfully



Dr Peter Foley
Chair

¹ Ministry of Transport, Safer Journeys Discussion Document, August 2009, p13.

² Frith, W.J. & Strachan, G. (2002). Road safety impact of establishing blood alcohol concentration levels at 0.05.

³ Ministry of Transport Alcohol/Drugs crash fact sheet available at http://www.transport.govt.nz/research/Documents/alcohol_drugs_2009.pdf