

30 April 2013

Secretariat
Health Committee
Select Committee Services
Parliament Buildings
WELLINGTON 6160

Submission on the Psychoactive Substances Bill

Dear Sir/Madam

The New Zealand Medical Association (NZMA) wishes to make a written submission to the Health Select Committee on the Psychoactive Substances Bill.

The NZMA is the country's largest voluntary pan-professional medical organisation with over 5,000 members. Our members come from all disciplines within the medical profession and include specialists, general practitioners, doctors-in-training and medical students. The NZMA aims to provide leadership of the medical profession, and promote professional unity and values, and the health of New Zealanders.

The NZMA is strongly supportive of the Psychoactive Substances Bill (hereafter referred to as 'the Bill'). We note that the Bill will regulate otherwise unregulated psychoactive substances such as "party pills" and other "legal highs" in New Zealand. The Bill will restrict the importation, manufacture, and supply of psychoactive substances and only allow the sale of those psychoactive substances that can meet safety and manufacturing requirements.

The current system has clearly not been working, with unregulated synthetic psychoactive substances able to be sold until they were proven dangerous, rather than being assessed for their risk before being made available for sale. The reported harms of such substances are wide and include agitation, paranoia and psychosis through to long term impairment of mental health. Accordingly, the NZMA endorses the need for a robust legislative framework

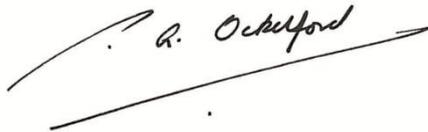
for the testing, manufacture, sale and regulation of psychoactive substances. We believe that the Bill is a comprehensive, pragmatic, and innovative approach to address a complex problem.

We welcome the key provisions of the Bill, including the establishment of a new regulatory authority within the Ministry of Health which will be funded on a cost recovery basis. We note that the Bill will ensure that no new psychoactive substance can be sold in New Zealand unless it has first been through comprehensive testing and proven to be low-risk to health. We believe this Bill will protect public health and safety. Furthermore, requiring the manufacturers and suppliers of these drugs to fund drug testing is likely to reduce costs to the taxpayer. We also welcome the Bill's provision for restrictions and requirements on products that are approved for sale, including the places of sale, advertising and health warnings, and record-keeping.

We suggest that potential changes in drug consumption trends due to any possible displacement effect be monitored and reported on. We also suggest that the purpose of the act could be amended to read "The purpose of the Act is to promote health and reduce harm through regulating the availability of psychoactive substances in New Zealand." Currently, the Bill does not address health or harm reduction explicitly in its purpose.

We hope that our submission is helpful and we look forward to the progression of this important Bill.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dr Paul Ockelford". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Dr Paul Ockelford
NZMA Chair