



Tinkering with Sale of Liquor Laws Not Welcomed

Chief Executive of the Distilled Spirits Association, Thomas Chin, gave oral testimony to the select committee investigating the Sale of Liquor Amendment Bill today (Thursday, 25 May), urging them to recommend the Government focus on enforcing the current laws instead of tinkering with new ones.

The Bill, which is before the Law and Order committee, aims to review, among other things, the liquor advertising regime, which currently permits alcohol advertising to be broadcast after 8.30pm when adult-only programming starts. Certain lobby groups believe that this advertising is to blame for underage and abusive drinking despite no evidence to support the claim.

Mr Chin says liquor advertising should not be used as a scapegoat instead of addressing wider issues like responsible drinking.

“It is the firmly held belief of the Association that further restricting the timing and jurisdiction of alcohol advertising will not stop minors gaining access to alcohol or stop the abusive consumption by some irresponsible individuals,” says Mr Chin.

“We’ve been led to believe that alcohol advertising causes non drinkers to drink and or to abuse alcohol. This notion is seriously misdirected. The reality is drink ads are designed to increase sales of a particular brand and to develop brand loyalty; they do not increase the sales of competitor’s products or total volume.”

He continues by saying that the real issue here is not advertising, but the negative drinking patterns and attitudes that are entrenched in our society, which is compounded when many young people are not being properly monitored or supervised once they’ve been supplied or allowed access to alcohol.

According to ALAC research, around _ of minors are consuming alcohol supplied to them by their parents, guardians and/or older friends.

“This means that, despite the law, the majority of young people have no great difficulty getting access to alcohol, and when they do, they are not in a safe, monitored environment.”

The Association believes that this situation needs to be addressed through changing the drinking culture and raising awareness of the real problems causing irresponsible drinking, both of which will require sustained focus to rectify.

“Parents and guardians must lead by example and be at the forefront of educating their children, rather than leaving it to the statutes to enforce.”

According to research firm AC Nielsen \$3.1m was spent on advertising spirit drinks, across all media, in 2005 compared with \$5.4m in 2004.

This represents a decline of 42% during which time per capita alcohol consumption increased by 12% (to 53million litres up from 48million litres). This means that, despite falling advertising and expenditure, the volume of spirits consumed increased.

Further, Mr Chin reminded the committee that industry members have been voluntarily following very strict rules with brand advertisements for more than 15 years.

Among others, the self-regulatory rules:

- Do not permit the use of actors under the age of 25, or
- Allow alcohol to be shown as making one sexier, stronger or smarter.

“Incidentally, this is an hour after programmes such as Coronation St and Eastenders are on air, both of which revolves around a pub and shows numerous drinking scenes each episode,” says Mr Chin.

The key aspects of the self regulatory rules are:

- regularly reviewed,
- in tune with current and prevailing social morals and expectations, and
- enforced by a robust complaints system.

The current self-regulatory advertising system is successful in its objectives and it works effectively.

“Instead of tinkering with the law, legislator’s focus should be on enforcing the law as it stands, addressing the drinking culture in this country and encouraging adults to supervise how young people’s drinking.”

ENDS.

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