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Member for Hammond

**House of Assembly**  
**17<sup>th</sup> Sep 2014**

**Social Development Committee:**  
**Sale And Consumption of Alcohol**

**Mr PEDERICK ( Hammond ) ( 11:18 :18 ):** I rise today to address the 36<sup>th</sup> report of the Social Development Committee, entitled the Sale and Consumption of Alcohol, and note that most of this work, in fact pretty well all the inquiry work, was done by the previous committee from the previous parliament. It was my privilege as part of the Social Development Committee with the new members to finalise the report for the parliament. I just want to note the terms of reference that were put down for this inquiry. They state:

That the Social Development Committee inquire into and report on the adequacy and appropriateness of laws and practices relating to the sale and consumption of alcohol and in particular, with respect to—

Whether those laws and practices need to be modified to better deal with criminal and other antisocial behaviour arising from the consumption of alcohol;

Strategies that could and should be used to reduce, and deal with, offending arising from the consumption of alcohol;

The health risks of excessive consumption of alcohol including—

(a) binge drinking; and

(b) fetal alcohol syndrome;

The economic cost to South Australia in dealing with the consequences of alcohol abuse;

The influence of alcohol abuse in domestic violence;

The appropriateness of the current legal age for consumption of alcohol;

Any other relevant matters.

It is to be noted that on 24 September 2012 the committee further resolved in a motion of the Hon. Dr Bob Such MP that the terms of reference include an additional term that

strategies could and should be used to reduce and deal with offending arising from the consumption of alcohol.

With regard to the executive summary the committee has noted that alcohol occupies a significant place in Australian society. It is consumed by more than 80 per cent of adult Australians in a variety of public and private social situations. Alcohol consumption at social events is an integral part of the Australian culture for many people as a means of socialisation, enjoyment, hospitality and celebration. In some religious denominations it is consumed in ecclesiastical rituals.

Alcohol is a pleasurable part of the lives of many South Australians and when consumed in a responsible manner alcohol is a lawful, socially-acceptable activity that can provide social benefits. The committee heard some interesting submissions, and I quote from the submission given by the Salvation Army:

The consumption of alcohol, when undertaken in a safe and responsible way, can be a pleasurable social activity for many South Australians. We, the Salvation Army, also recognise the hospitality industry, and tourism in general, contribute much to the South Australian economy. However, our work and programs have led us to understand that effective regulation and legislation in this area is necessary, based on clear evidence of the scale and extent of human and societal costs of alcohol misuse...The Salvation Army...supports policy and practices that clearly promote the responsible use of alcohol and minimise the harm resulting from harmful alcohol use, particularly in relation to those most marginalised in society.

A submission also provided to the committee from the South Australian Network of Drug and Alcohol Services (SANDAS) referred to recent announcements in South Australia concerning the sale and distribution of alcohol and the need for adequate legislative instruments to ensure the minimisation of harm. I quote from that submission:

There have been several recent announcements about changing the sale and distribution framework for alcohol, with the desired outcome to influence behaviour, minimise harm and impact on the way our living environment is perceived. These have included new venue types, changes to trading hours and the possibility of selling wine in supermarkets. An accumulation of such events in the alcohol marketplace without a wide ranging examination of the current administrative law governing alcohol, runs the risk of weaker regulation and difficulty in meeting the full intent of state and federal policy of harm minimisation.

The committee also heard that in general alcohol is consumed in a responsible manner and at moderate levels. However, there are instances of people consuming alcohol at levels that increase their risk of alcohol-related injury and developing health problems over the course of their lifetime.

The committee also heard evidence that revealed alcohol-related harm such as dysfunctional drinking, disease, injury violence, antisocial behaviour and family and relationship breakdown is costing the community in both economic and social terms. DrinkWise made a submission to the inquiry talking about the:

...significant ongoing public debate in Australia and other similar countries about the extent to which laws and practices that govern the sale and consumption of alcohol contribute to the burden of problem drinking and its distribution in the community and, to the extent they do contribute, how should they be changed, if at all, and how might those changes be implemented effectively...These on-going debates reflect the reality that there is a lack of consensus both within the health community as well as the broader general public.

Building consensus on complex, contentious public health issues is achievable over time if stakeholders invest in building a robust evidence-base, the best available evidence is made accessible and an inclusive process of discussion and debate is resourced and supported by government working in partnership with other interested parties. We have seen this in action in Australia over tobacco use, HIV/AIDS, road injuries and childhood immunisation for example.

The issue for governments in setting alcohol policy through regulation and public policy mechanisms is to balance the available evidence, the interests and aspirations of people who consume alcohol responsibly with those who misuse alcohol, as well as supporting the commercial interests of the alcohol industry and recognising the benefits to the community in terms of tourism, employment and revenue. The alcohol industry is a significant contributor to the South Australian economy in terms of revenue, as a substantial employer providing a major export item, as well as the role it plays in tourism and regional economic activity.

It was the intention of the Social Development Committee to investigate and seek advice on the effectiveness of laws and practices that govern the sale and consumption of alcohol and, in doing so, reflect the body of evidence-based knowledge to effect positive change where necessary. Whilst the committee heard a substantial amount of evidence about the harm that results from the misuse of alcohol and how it presents a continuing challenge for policymakers, the alcohol industry, the police who are charged with keeping law and order and protecting public safety, and the wider South Australian community, the issue for government is whether measures to counteract the negative effects of alcohol should be introduced across the general population or primarily targeted at those persons who misuse it.

The committee also heard from numerous witnesses that preventative approaches and effective community education strategies are key to addressing the negative impacts of alcohol consumption in the community and in changing behaviours. I note that the submission from the Sammy D Foundation stated:

Consistent, long-term, age-appropriate education campaigns, which are evidence-based and focus on prevention and awareness of the impacts of alcohol consumption, should run hand-in-hand with tougher enforcement and other harm minimisation strategies. These campaigns should tap into social media for wide reach.

In the course of the inquiry, a number of key issues were consistently raised, in submissions received and in oral evidence presented, to target the misuse of alcohol and to effectively

respond to health issues, criminal and antisocial behaviour as a consequence of alcohol consumption. They are outlined below and discussed in greater detail in the report:

- alcohol related harm and harm minimisation strategies;
- categories of liquor licences and density of outlets;
- trading hours;
- liquor licensing accords;
- alcohol pricing;
- advertising, marketing and promotion;
- alcohol sales volume data;
- community education and social media strategies; and
- enforcement of existing legislation.

While there are social and economic benefits associated with the sale and consumption of alcohol, there are also a range of potential serious, substantial, long and short-term harms.

The committee was presented with a vast range of evidence, and I thank the previous committee for all their work in regard to this inquiry. I understand some of the members went to Newcastle to look at trading hours, and I really do commend the previous members of the Social Development Committee for all their input into trying to get the right outcome in regard to the sale and distribution of alcohol. I commend all current members of the Social Development Committee for the work they have done in finally presenting this report to the parliament.