

Australia's National Alcohol Strategy: Reflections on the Policy Development Process

Brian Vandenberg

The year was 2005...



Reflecting on the policy development process

Some options:

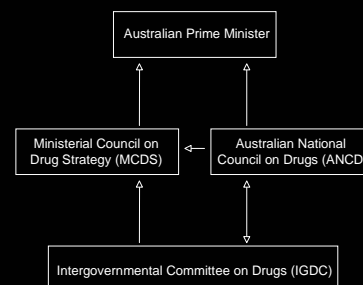
- The consultation and drafting process
- Comparison with previous strategies
- The evidence-base in the final product
- The influence of stakeholders (e.g. politicians; bureaucrats; industry)

The consultation and drafting process

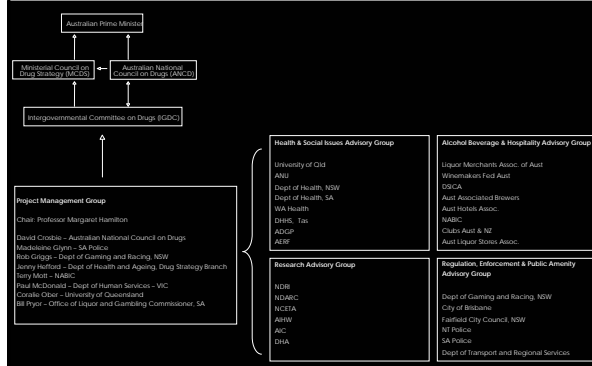
What is the National Alcohol Strategy

- Joint initiative of Commonwealth and State and Territory (and Local!) Governments
- Shared responsibility for implementation
- A 'public health' policy, but with some constraints (political; economic; cultural)

Advisory structure for the national drug strategy



Consultation for the national alcohol strategy

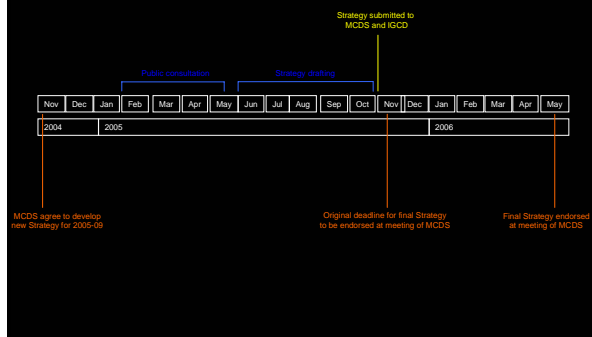


The policy development process

Analysis of information and opinions collected from:

- the project management group and advisory groups
- public comments on the consultation paper
- national consultation forums with key stakeholders
- consultations with experts
- a review of the local and international literature
- a review of recent trends in alcohol consumption and harm in Australia
- a review of recent developments and achievements in alcohol policy at the international, national, state/territory and local level.

The policy development timeline



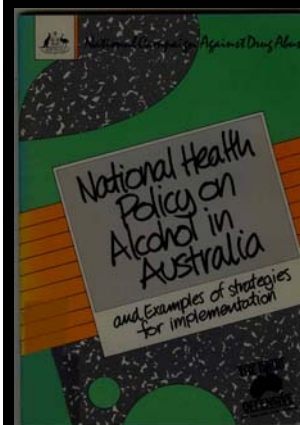
Comparison with previous strategies

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN AGAINST DRUG ABUSE



... the Campaign would focus particularly on the problems associated with those drugs which are illegal. At the same time it was recognised that there are widespread health and social problems arising from the abuse of licit drugs, and that the campaign would need to cover these as well.

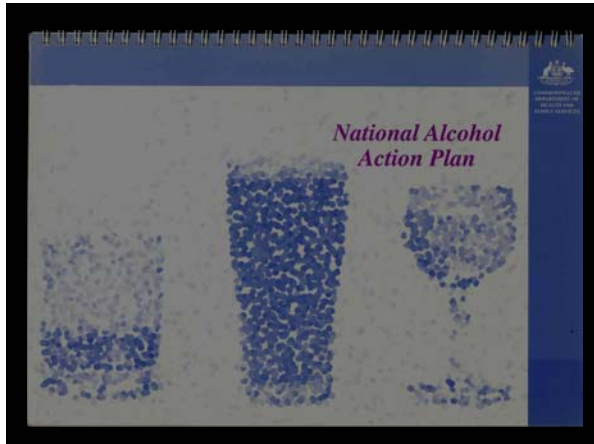
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Objective 2.1

To carefully assess the practical effect of any proposed changes to pricing, taxation and excise policies on the incidence and prevalence of alcohol related problems prior to their implementation.

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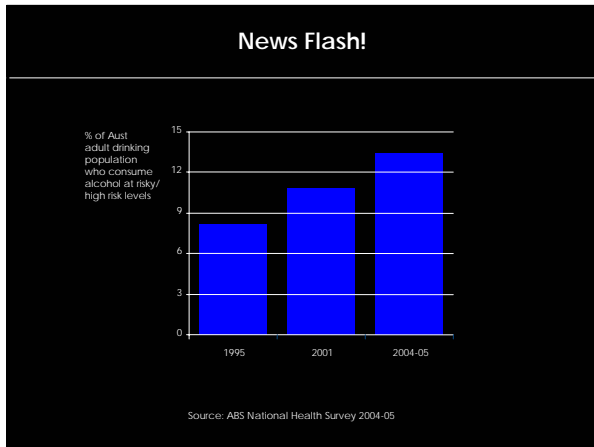


National Alcohol Strategy
A Plan for Action 2001 to 2003-04

Key Strategy Area 6:
Pricing and Taxation

Systems of pricing and taxation that have a positive public health impact, particularly in terms of minimising harm related to the misuse of alcohol.

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The evidence-base in the final product

NATIONAL ALCOHOL STRATEGY
2006-2009

Research to Safer Drinking Cultures

- 4 Priority Areas
- 39 Pages
- Evidence and strategies side-by-side
- A clear statement of its intention on the front cover

- ### Guiding Principles
- Build on past and present efforts
 - Consult
 - Seek evidence
 - Contemplate future trends and issues
 - Focus on some key areas
 - Identify realistic responses.

Priority Areas

- Intoxication
- Public Safety and Amenity
- Health Impacts
- Cultural Place and Availability

Evidence in the policy: half full or half empty?

Evidence-based strategies that were adopted

- ✓ Improve enforcement of liquor licensing regulations.
- ✓ Enhance the capacity of the nursing profession
- ✓ Data collection
- ✓ Monitoring and evaluation
- ✓ Social marketing campaigns

Evidence-based strategies NOT adopted

- x Taxation reform
- x Strict advertising controls
- x [Increase legal purchase age]

The influence of stakeholders

Tensions

Our focus:

- The adult drinking culture

Preferred focus of alcohol industry:

- Young people
- Indigenous Australians
- Alcohol dependent people

Houston, we have a problem...

TRIPLE J RADIO:

Do you acknowledge that alcohol and tobacco cause greater problems than illicit drugs in this country?

THE HON CHRISTOHER PYNE MP
ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR HEALTH:

Certainly not. There's no evidence that would suggest that speed and ecstasy and marijuana are on the same level as alcohol and tobacco.



Really?

Anybody who suggests that is really deluding themselves

Source: Triple J Radio, 18 April 2009

You also said ... that when we turn to the problems of alcohol abuse in teenage drinking, we should be mindful of the positive contribution which alcohol has made to Australia, both culturally and economically. That sounds a little bit like you're spruiking for the alcohol industry.

Well, the difficulty that you and I have is that you think that alcohol and tobacco and illicit drugs should all be treated in the same way. I don't have that attitude. Alcohol is a legal product and alcohol – and many people would tell you – taken ... drunk in small substances is quite good for you.



The alcohol industry is an enormous employer of Australians and also exporter of product, which is great for our balance of trade and our economy. And you couldn't put alcohol on the same level as illicit drugs. I mean, one is a legal substance and one isn't a legal substance. One can do you good and illicit drugs never will.

Source: Triple J Radio, 18 April 2009

I notice you also mentioned the wine industry twice in your maiden speech. Do you receive donations from the alcohol industry?

(Laughs) What a stupid question. I'm a great supporter of the wine industry. I'm a South Australian.

So, do you receive donations from the alcohol industry?

My donations that come to me go to the ... my Federal Electorate Conference. They may well have received donations, I don't know. They wouldn't necessarily tell me.



I am comfortable with leg... companies that operate legally in this country, making donations to political parties, in order to encourage democracy.

Source: Triple J Radio, 18 April 2005

Alcohol taxation

4B Investigate price-related levers to reduce consumption of alcohol at harmful levels

- Focus ongoing dialogue on price-related levers to reduce consumption of alcohol at harmful levels.

Some observations about the alcohol industry

- Their interests are protected by Governments (and the public)
- They are profit driven and self-interested; but its doubtful they are conspiring to kill us!
- They don't want change to current alcohol policy; ideally, their preference is for no policy at all
- They are very diverse (producers; retailers; hoteliers; etc) and hence are quite fragmented and often divided on policy
- They are only as strong as their weakest link, so they are not unbeatable

Conclusion

A voice from the past:

"Whether described as half empty or half full, the Australian national health policy on alcohol has need of being 'filled up' and there are some encouraging signs that pressure may be building for this to happen"

David Hawks (1993)

Contact

bvanderberg@vichealth.vic.gov.au