

Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform (ACT) Inc.

committed to preventing tragedy that arises from illicit drug use

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NEWSLETTER

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NEXT Meeting

Thursday 23 September, 2004

Meeting commences at 7:30pm,

Venue: St Ninian's Uniting Church, cnr
Mouat and Brigalow Sts, Lyneham.

Refreshments will follow

Remembrance Ceremony will be held on
Monday 1st November.

Editorial

This month the Newsletter is devoted to the Federal Election and a comparison of the various parties' drug policies. Readers might like to use this comparison as a basis for deciding how they will vote on 9 October.

The information was obtained either from the party's website or if that was not available the party's contact person was asked for its policy.

The Greens had its policy clearly and honestly set out on its website, perhaps making them an easier target for their political opponents.

The ALP had its policy outlined in its Platform.

The Democrats did not have its policy on its website and when asked they provided a recent media release from Senator Lyn Alison, which along with a response to a media question by Senator Bartlett have been used for this comparison.

The Liberals did not have its policy on its website and at time of writing had not provided a copy of its policy. However in the archives its policy platform for election 2001 was found and this has been used. It is a reasonable assumption that Liberal policy has not changed since that date.

The Nationals had nothing on its website that would either point to a drug policy nor to an email address to write to and ask for a policy. Thus there could be no comparison in this newsletter. However one could assume from the various statements made by its leader over the past few years, that its policy, if they had one, would be quite severe with little understanding of addiction as a health and social issue and its huge impact on families.

The text in the comparisons was drawn from the sources indicated with editorial changes only where it was necessary for coherence.

Comparison of Drug Policies

What are the general philosophies

- Greens** Drugs and substance abuse are complex issues and strategies need to acknowledge this complexity. Regulation of the personal use of currently illegal drugs should be moved outside the criminal framework. A national approach to substance abuse, drug law and drug law reform, including access to a full range of client-based treatment.
- Democrats** The drug problem should be tackled as a health and social problem with much more effort put into prevention and treatment services which are currently under-funded.
- ALP** Labor recognises the serious health and social impact that problematic alcohol, legal and illegal drug use has on the Australian community. Greater efforts are needed to prevent and address the significant health and social problems caused by illegal drugs. Labor is committed to develop innovative integrated strategies to improve the outcomes of alcohol and drug interventions provided by specialist alcohol and drug services, general and mental health services, youth and family services, disability services, housing services, law enforcement and criminal justice system, policy and research services and indigenous services.
- Liberals** Illicit drugs are the greatest scourge facing our society and threatening our children. Unlike Labor's support of heroin trials and heroin injecting rooms, the Coalition will not compromise in the fight against drugs. *Our Tough on Drugs* strategy aims to catch drug pushers, rehabilitate drug users and prevent the spread of illicit drug use through education programs. The Coalition's future plans involve a social coalition of individuals, families, business, community and charitable organisations, supported by government resources and each contributing their own expertise to tackling the drug problem at its source. The Coalition will strengthen the *Tough on Drugs* initiative with more resources for law enforcement,

community-based treatment and community-based education.

Health oriented or law and order approach

- Greens** Classification and regulation of drugs should be based upon known health effects, and community education programs should make factual information freely available.
Regulation should aim to maximise individual health and social safety and well-being.
Programs for individuals, families and communities that address substance abuse should be diverse and focus on harm minimisation and increasing life options.
- Democrats** I believe we need to shift from a law and order model, in terms of personal use. Personal use should be dealt with as a medical issue, as a harm minimisation issue.
Traffickers and manufacturers should be targeted.
The expansion of drug diversion programs and specific drug courts that offer an alternative to the traditional justice system.
- ALP** Central to Labor's drug strategy is the principle of harm minimisation for all drugs. In particular Labor will, in consultation with expert bodies, drug and alcohol agencies, community groups and peak organisations:
- curb the supply of illegal drugs through effective law enforcement,
 - tackle the underlying causes of both legal and illegal drug problems in order to reduce demand,
 - increase the opportunities for treatment and harm reduction for people with drug problems.
- Liberals** The law enforcement success of *Tough on Drugs* in keeping the menace of illicit drugs away from our shores and off our streets has been remarkable.
Additional funding of Australian Federal Police and Australian Customs Service.
More illicit drugs are being seized than ever before and as a result a heroin drought in capital cities around Australia. [Note that this claim made prior to the 2001 election has since been shown to be false. Ed] The consequence of reduced supply, and falling purity, is that overdose deaths have dropped dramatically.

Is evidence a basis for policies

- Greens** The Australian Greens will work towards:
- developing more appropriate classifications for drugs based upon their effects on health,
 - pilot programs to test the effectiveness of controlled availability of heroin to registered users from specifically licensed clinics,
 - an examination of methadone programs with the aim of reducing anomalies and opportunities for abuse in existing programs,
 - independent research into the effects of short and long term use of cannabis and other illegal drugs, including cocaine, morphine, amphetamines, LSD, ecstasy and other drugs as they appear in youth and other subculture,
 - investigations of options for the regulated supply of social drugs such as ecstasy in controlled environments, where information will be available about health and other effects of drug use,
 - continued research, expert advice and public debate on the most socially responsible options for the use of cannabis including that of eventual legalisation,
 - addressing the underlying causes of substance abuse and wider issues such as unemployment, homelessness, isolation, domestic violence, depression and limited life options.
- Democrats** Increased research into the medium to long term effects of designer drugs and treatment options.
- ALP** Research based trials of alternative pathways to treat and manage drug dependence.
Consultation with expert bodies, drug and alcohol agencies, community groups and peak organisations.
Tackle the underlying causes of both legal and illegal drug problems in order to reduce demand.
- Liberals** Expand the National Heroin Signature Programme to track the origins of cocaine and amphetamines.
This in turn will lead to better use of police resources in targeted operations, increased seizures of drugs and proceeds of crime, as well as more successful prosecutions from higher quality evidence collection.
The Australian National Council on Drugs, under the chairmanship of Major Brian Watters, will continue to advise the Government on how best to target grants to provide services in rural and regional areas and to people whose needs have not been adequately met in the past.

Support for Harm Minimisation

- Greens** Support for harm minimisation is implied by other aspects in policy, however no specific reference is made in the policy.

- Democrats** Supported with reference to personal use being a health issue and continued investment in needle and syringe exchange programmes. Harm reduction through needle exchange has been very successful in containing HIV infection and, in Sydney, a safe injecting room has saved lives but more must be done.
- ALP** Support for harm prevention and harm minimisation strategies to prevent the onset of drug use and also deal with drug abuse in co-operation with State, Territory and Local governments, including targeted advertising and public education campaigns, strengthened treatment for services and clean needle and needle exchange programs.
- Liberals** Introduction of retractable needle and syringe technology into Australia. Australians have concerns about the risk of injury from needles that are discarded in public places and about the risk of injury to health care professionals.
- It is important to overcome these risks and concerns. There is evidence that retractable needles and syringes reduce the risk of needle stick injuries that can transmit blood-borne viruses.
- [No specific reference to Harm Minimisation which can sometimes be in conflict with its Tough on Drugs and zero tolerance policies. Ed]

Addiction treatment policies

- Greens** The Australian Greens will work to initiate or support:
- client-focused treatment of people affected by substance abuse and drug-related problems,
 - freely available treatment programs with adequate follow-up,
 - treatment programs and facilities which sensitively cater for individuals within different groups: women and men, including older people, Indigenous people, parents of children affected by substance abuse and the young,
 - an extension of drug-free rehabilitation programs, to be covered by Medicare.
- Democrats** Greater investment and support for rehabilitation programmes particularly for those that cater for drug dependent adults with children.
- Expansion of detoxification facilities.
- Continuation of methadone maintenance treatment while it remains the best option for the majority of people addicted to heroin and in other cases prescription of heroin.
- Supervised injection centres as an element of a comprehensive approach to assisting the drug dependent.
- ALP** Labor will develop and implement a comprehensive framework of strategies to address the diverse problems cause by illicit drugs. These strategies will include:
- developing and implementing comprehensive community and education strategies targeted to those most in need of information. These groups include the young, families, migrants, refugees and indigenous Australians and the strategies should be designed to encourage drug free lifestyles,
 - additional funding for treatment, primary health care, rehabilitation and diversion services run by government and non-government agencies,
 - specialised early intervention support services, including counselling and social support, for families and friends of problematic drug users,
 - culturally appropriate services for young people, indigenous Australians and migrants. These services to work with mainstream drug and alcohol services,
 - consultation with service users and peak professional bodies in alcohol and drug service planning and delivery,
 - provision of advocacy services for treatment recipients of drug and alcohol services,
 - enhancing cross-sector complex case management between services and health professionals,
 - prevention and protection of health and welfare of those who misuse volatile substances or are at risk of misusing them.
- Liberals** Treatment for drug addiction does work, and the benefits are not only for those individuals who are successfully treated but also for their families and their communities as a whole.
- Investment in community-based treatment and education. A major strength of *Tough on Drugs* has been to build community capacity to treat people to help them kick the drug habit.
- Funding provided for the Non-Government Organisations Treatment Grants Programme for community-based treatment and rehabilitation, funding provided to extend and expand the highly successful Community Partnership Initiative and funding for Non-Government Organisations Treatment Grants Programme for new and ongoing services.
- One of the most effective ways of providing help to those who need it is to ensure that people are treated in their communities.

And Education?

- Greens** The Australian Greens believe that there should be appropriate levels of education on the effects of all drugs including prescription and non-prescription medications legal and illegal drugs.
The Australian Greens will work towards:
- developing more appropriate classifications for drugs based upon their effects on health
 - making relevant information about drugs widely available
 - more social education and other programs on the dangers of drugs of concern such as GHB and the so-called 'date-rape' drugs.
- Democrats** A speech given by Sen Lyn Alison in Sept 1999 indicates support for factual and supportive education in schools and rejection of the zero tolerance policy for students who use drugs.
- ALP** Reduce the demand for illegal drugs through targeted advertising and public health education campaigns.
- Liberals** Funding for *Community Partnership Initiative* and *Croc Festivals* – see below.

Community and Family involvement

- Greens** Promoting community-strengthening programs that engage communities to work together to address the underlying issues relating to substance abuse
Providing access to community-based counselling and support services for substance abusers, without condemnation, including adequate follow-up.
Strong communities working together to address the underlying issues of substance abuse can most effectively deliver prevention and intervention strategies.
- Democrats** Not stated
- ALP** Support for community self-help organisations and recognition of the role they play in community support and the reintegration of service users back into the community.
Labor will ensure that the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments work together to develop models that coordinate the alcohol and drug interventions provided by all relevant services to maximise positive outcomes for the community.
- Liberals** Funding for the *Community Partnership Initiative*. Through this Initiative, local drug prevention and education projects are directly funded to better equip those who are in the frontline in our fight against drugs in our communities.
Funding to support the *Croc Festivals*. *Croc Festivals* promote a drug-free healthy message and provide opportunities to young people who live in remote communities across Australia to showcase their performance and design skills in the same way as students who participate in the Rock Eisteddfods held in urban centres.

Any reforms to the drug laws?

- Greens** Removing criminal sanctions for personal drug use.
Penalties for the illicit sale of illegal drugs.
Examination of the practices of police forces, with the aim of minimising drug related corruption.
Disallowance of the use of drug intoxication as an excuse to mitigate sentences or penalties for crimes of violence and negligence.
Decriminalisation and regulation of cannabis cultivation and possession for personal use, while monitoring its effects on the health of young people.
Controlled availability of cannabis at appropriate venues.
- Democrats** National consistency in the decriminalisation of marijuana.
Access to marijuana for medicinal purposes on prescription.
The Australian Democrats do not support over the counter sales of ecstasy and believe legalising drugs is unwise and unlikely to decrease the quantities used.
Penalties should better match the crime and that big scale producers, importers and pushers should be targeted rather than users.
- ALP** Not stated
- Liberals** Not stated