

NEWSLETTER

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NEXT MEETING

Thursday 23 July 2015, 7.30pm
St Ninian's Uniting Church hall,
cnr Mouat and Brigalow Sts, LYNEHAM

Meetings are followed by refreshments and time for a chat.

Editorial

Measuring success of the National Drug Strategy

The National Drug Strategy 2010 - 2015 lays out the groundwork for funding allocations, advertising campaigns and specific targets for the five years of the strategy for alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Importantly it identifies the mission of the strategy which is "to build safe and healthy communities by minimising alcohol, tobacco and other drug-related health, social and economic harms among individuals, families and communities". The current strategy is coming to an end and no doubt the strategy for the next five years is being developed.

While acknowledging alcohol and tobacco are the cause of (or implicated in) the most harm our interest here is illegal drugs.

The strategy has been based on Harm Minimisation since the first drug strategy in 1985. Under this broad title are three pillars:

Demand reduction means strategies and actions which prevent the uptake and/or delay the onset of use of drugs; and support people to recover from dependence and reintegrate with the community.

Supply reduction means strategies and actions which prevent, stop, disrupt or otherwise reduce the production and supply of illegal drugs;

Harm reduction means strategies and actions that primarily reduce the adverse health, social and economic consequences of the use of drugs.

Hovering above the broad level of harm minimisation but unstated is prohibition. Free reign for application of a harm minimisation policy is limited by the international prohibition treaties. And of course the strategy is politically controlled, limiting its ability even further - witness the political panic of the so called ice epidemic and the scare campaign that would have all ice users as dangerous and violent, despite the evidence and expert advice to the contrary.

Actions to reduce the supply of illicit drugs include inter alia preventing the import of illegal drugs; targeting cultivation, manufacture and trafficking; developing closer relationships with international partner agencies.

Past successes have been listed in the strategy as "The number of illegal drug seizures increased by almost 70 per cent between 1999-2000 and 2008-2009, and the collective weight of seizures increased by about 116 per cent [but note that the fall in seizures prior to 2008 is not mentioned]." Realistically these are not measures of success but simply a measure of output as compared to an outcome measure which is a real measure of success. To give a hypothetical example of an outcome measure the strategy could say: *the seizure of over four tonnes of methamphetamine reduced that drug market by five percent.*

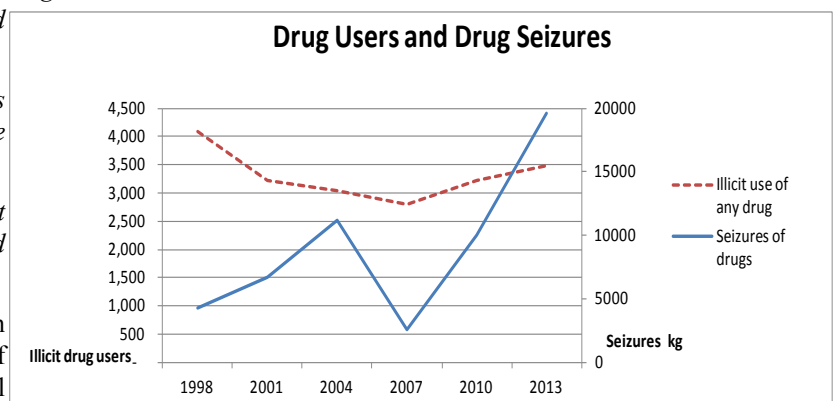
Increases in seizures and weight of seizures can mean that the supply was greater and police simply seized the usual percentage.

The strategy identifies measures of success in supply control as falls in purity levels, increases in price, and the number of drug labs disrupted. The latter is another output measure, not outcome.

Currently for most drugs the price has remained stable or decreased and the purity has either remained stable or increased. Already before the results of the strategy have been published, it has failed. But there is a predetermined excuse:

"there is not necessarily a straightforward relationship between price or purity and success or otherwise in supply-reduction strategies. For example, increases in price could reflect increases in demand as well as decreases in supply."

But this is not so as the following graph derived from ACC drug seizures and AIHW numbers of drug users shows. In this graph the number of drug users (ie demand for drugs) has remained



relatively stable, while the seizures increased.

Harm reduction, says the strategy, that some of the measures of success are: the social costs of drug use to the Australian community, trends in drug-driving related deaths and injuries, perceptions of community safety regarding illegal drugs (this one has already failed because of the government directed ice advertisement campaign), the prevalence and incidence rates of HIV and hepatitis C among injecting drug users, and trends

in opioid overdose related ambulance call-outs and overdose mortality.

The range of measures of success is very limited. The strategy has not considered harms such as the legal status of drugs, safety and public order, consequences of the criminal justice system, social functioning, education problems, family breakdown and so forth.

It is commendable that the strategy commits to evidence based and evidence-informed practice, ie using approaches which have proven to be effective.

However it is of little value if despite the evidence that supply control has not been effective nor that in evaluating harm reduction many of the measures of effectiveness are either ignored, too hard or simply not considered to be relevant. Nor is it helpful if the drug strategy, before any data are available, gives itself an excuse for any failure.

The next drug strategy could be so much better if the current one was examined and evaluated more critically. For example if the evidence says that supply control as practiced at the moment does not work then this should lead to changes in practice and more likely a change in overall drug policy. But this has not happened in the past and there appears to be no courage to ever do so.

Extracts from FFDLR submission to the inquiry into methamphetamine and its chemical precursors by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement

Thanks to Bill Bush for preparing and forwarding this submission. *The full submission can be found on FFDLR's website ffdlr.org.au*

Daring to think the unthinkable: Consideration of the adoption of a regulatory model for illicit drugs

If there is one message to take from this submission it is that the advent of crystal methamphetamine in Australia has been a development which Australian drug policy has been ineffective to prevent and wind back. Rich and with an existing substantial population of drug users, Australia is an ideal country for business growth with a potential demand a new illicit drug that is cheap to produce. Australia's drug policy has served to facilitate the expansion. This is a development that is not unique to Australia.

Initially at least, purified potent crystalline methamphetamine was not manufactured in Australia. It was imported (McKetin & McLaren 2004, 4). The first mention in the Australian illicit drug report of the more potent forms of methamphetamine imported from South East Asian being found in Australia was in the report of 1996-97. "There are already signs," it noted, "of this occurring:

- there has been an increase in the number and size of seizures of ice (crystalline methylamphetamine hydrochloride);
- amphetamines in tablet form, manufactured overseas, are starting to appear in larger quantities in Australia;
- there has been an increase in the number of Customs seizures of amphetamines" (AIDR 1997, 56).

At the time "most ice available in Australia [was] believed to be imported from the Philippines" (AIDR 1997, 62).

A year or two after that first appearance, the then Commissioner of the AFP told a Herald Sun journalist that Asian crime syndicates had carried out marketing research that showed a bigger market for amphetamine-like substances in the form of swallowed pills than an injected drug like heroin:

Time and again prohibition has motivated organised criminals to replace existing drugs with more potent new ones which produce far greater harm.

"They are making speed pills that look like ecstasy and in many cases they attempt to pass it off as ecstasy. Some people might think these tablets are sexier than heroin. And the syndicates have their market research which tells them that these days people are more prepared to pop a pill than inject themselves," he said" (Mr Keely quoted in Moor 2001 p. 1)

As it turns out, crystal methamphetamine is a most adaptable drug. It can be administered by smoking, intranasally or by injection (AIDR 2002, 35). Apart from its much advertised negative effects, it reduces fatigue, produces euphoria and a heightened sense of well-being, increases talkativeness, alertness and energy and increases libido (Victoria Police, p. 1-42). It thus has a lot going for it in the eyes of a high proportion of young people who are typical risk takers or who lack self-confidence and see it as a crutch to overcome social awkwardness (Blue Moon Research & Planning Pty Ltd 2000).

So the advent of an attractive new drug like crystal methamphetamine repeated in Australia what has happened in many other countries and with many other drugs. Time and again prohibition has motivated organised criminals to replace existing drugs with more potent new ones which produce far greater harm. This occurred during alcohol prohibition in the United States when more concentrated spirits displaced less potent and bulkier beers or in Pakistan and hill tribe villages in Indochina where heroin rapidly displaced traditional opium smoking (Seccombe 1995).

"The consequence of an illicit market governed almost exclusively by the need to maximise profits, is that it becomes increasingly dominated by the more concentrated, potent and risky drug products and preparations that offer the greatest profits—injected heroin, crack cocaine, and methamphetamine for example" (Transform Drug Policy Foundation 2009, p. 38).

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Governments should take steps to ensure that only effective school education programs are supported and that the principles for drug education in schools contained in the National School Drug Education Strategy are followed.

Recommendation 2: Anti-drug media campaigns should:

- (a) be carefully designed so as to have the desired impact on the target audience and not be shaped by what may seem convincing to those not in that audience; and
- (b) not cause parents to panic or otherwise react in ways damaging to the well-being of their children who may use drugs.

Community and business need to ask hard questions about organised crime

David Connery and Clare Murphy, the Canberra Times, 7 July 20015

Some Australians will be shocked by recent revelations about the penetration of organised crime into Australian society. But the revelations of mafia crime and influence by the ABC and Fairfax are only one such source.

These investigations add to recent Australian government reports showing that organised crime – whether domestic or transnational – imposes a wide and growing range of harms upon Australia’s people and community, our economy and government, and our international interests.

The harms to individual safety and community harmony are well known. Most understand that illicit drugs, for example, have serious health risks and that the drug trade creates violence and corruption. Perhaps around 1000 die each year as a result of these drugs. Still, about 15 per cent of Australians over 14 years took illicit drugs last year. And drugs are involved in about 11 per cent of car fatalities in NSW alone. These major harms are produced through interactions between everyday Australians and organised crime, every day.

Serious and organised crime harms the community in other ways too. They are players in firearms trafficking, “modern slavery” and people-smuggling. Organised criminals are a source of violence and intimidation. These activities affront our safety and human rights.

While you may not have encountered organised crime personally, it still costs you individually.

Agencies are now warning that criminals are targeting Australia’s superannuation wealth. We’ve already seen how “Trio Capital” lured investors into a sham scheme, while less-sophisticated “boiler room” frauds can convince people to part with their savings too.

Identity fraud – a growing crime – is becoming easier and cheaper to perpetrate. Sometimes, that involves using someone’s stolen identity or personal details to access banks accounts or obtain credit. Identity fraud victims might not lose much individually – usually less than \$1000. But it takes time and sometimes stress to restore integrity to your identity, and the burden is on you to attempt to repair your credit rating history. That’s not always easy.

Another dimension of identity crime involves obtaining false identities. And it’s not as hard as you might think. About \$600 can buy a fake Medicare card, driver’s licence, credit card and phone bill. That’s enough proof of identity to get a loan or open a bank account.

The use of the internet for crime is one factor that’s creating new conditions. Cyber-enabled criminals can reach into homes, or break into company systems and exploit what’s there. This activity costs the Australian economy about \$1 billion a year, and about 108 cybercrimes are reported each day.

The cyber environment also helps other crimes. During the past few years, authorities have been struggling against “dark web” markets sell drugs, weapons, identities and highly exploitative, violent and degrading porn. This trade is supported by cryptocurrencies like “Bitcoin”.

Perhaps the main impact of serious and organised crime is felt in

the economy. Many businesses might only encounter organised crime indirectly, perhaps as they lose competitiveness to others using standover tactics or tax evasion. Other businesses might be affected by counterfeits or digital piracy.

And community safety is at risk when organised crime introduced fakes into the market place. We’ve heard of numerous instances: fake brakes that caused a car crash, major aircraft components that came loose because of fake bolts, and people who’ve taken worthless or harmful medicines because they bought fakes.

So there’s more at risk than just a poor-quality DVD here.

At the same time, organised crime imposes costs and losses upon governments. In addition to lost revenue, the nation spends significant money on police, customs, intelligence, court and corrections to deal directly with serious and organised crime. Governments also impose regulations to stop crimes such as money laundering and identity theft, which adds to business costs in some way.

Serious and organised crime also affects Australia’s overseas interests. While the Australian government builds partnerships with and provides aid to various countries, organised crime works at the same time to undermine human rights and development.

This problem is so severe that the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime now argues that organised crime in developing countries could overshadow the benefits of future economic and social integration.

That means even more places in the world could become havens for organised crime, which would be very likely to add to the impact of serious and organised crime here. This impact was estimated at \$15 billion a year some time ago. That figure is under review by the Australian Crime Commission, and it’s sure to be much more now.

That’s a cost we could reduce if we asked ourselves a few questions.

The first must be asked of the Australian public: do you understand the damage that’s done by using illicit markets? While purchases might seem to affect only that consenting adult, the damage is far-reaching. It extends to the harms caused through crime-related violence and corruption, to unfair competition for legitimate businesses. Broader harms damage societies along the supply chain for drugs and human trafficking.

Do community members, businesses and law enforcement have trusted ways to share information? There are numerous mechanisms for reporting crime, such as Crime Stoppers, but are there better ways? This is especially important for businesses, who need sound advice about specific threats to them – and they could give police better information about what’s happening too.

Are all our national policy settings optimal? Is it time to review drug policies, perhaps so we can focus law, health and education efforts against illicit drugs according to the harm each causes?

There are significant inconsistencies in laws – for instance, South Australia wants to proscribe some “listed” gangs, just as Queensland’s thinking about abolishing laws with similar effects. Isn’t it time that the nation’s governments agreed to an effective approach to seizing unexplained wealth? And are cryptocurrencies unambiguously good?

Given the revelations contained in the Fairfax-ABC investigation into the way the Calabrian mafia has allegedly corrupted some in Australia, isn’t it time we established a national anti-corruption commission?

There's never a politically good time to raise these questions. That's why the community and business need to bring these topics onto the agenda – because it's in everyone's interests to have the best possible system in place to counter serious and organised crime.

David Connery and Clare Murphy are analysts with the Australian Strategic Policy Institute

Bolivia's Smarter Approach to Controlling Coca Production

July 7, 2015 by Diego Garcia-Devis, <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org>, 7 July 2015

Forced crop eradication using harmful pesticides and without viable livelihood alternatives has put the health and economies of local communities at risk and caused forced displacement.

On May 14, 2015, the government of Colombia announced that it would stop using glyphosate in the aerial fumigation of coca crops. The herbicide was being used as part of a 20-year-old supply-reduction tactic backed technically and financially by the United States. Colombia's decision followed on the heels of a report published by the International Agency for Research on Cancer and issued by the World Health Organization that labeled glyphosate as a potential carcinogenic herbicide.

Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos, a champion of drug policy reform in the international arena, has announced a moratorium until October 1, 2015, to identify alternatives to the aerial eradication method of controlling the production of cocaine at its source. While advocates of forced eradication are demanding Colombia resume this practice, critics of this model are calling for policies that prioritize human development and human rights.

Over the last 30 years, Colombia, Bolivia, and Peru, the world's largest coca-cocaine producers, have experienced the worst of the War on Drugs, and their poor and marginalized communities have shouldered this burden disproportionately. Forced crop eradication using harmful pesticides and without viable livelihood alternatives has put the health and economies of local communities at risk and caused forced displacement. Increased militarization of the War on Drugs coupled with expanded police authority and corruption has led to social destabilization, the erosion of public safety, and the death of citizens, activists, and journalists.

New evidence of the potential benefits of a more progressive approach offers Colombia the opportunity to distance itself from traditional supply-side coca control mechanisms by placing farmers' rights at the center of drug policy reform.

Habeas Coca: Bolivia's Community Coca Control by Kathryn Ledebur and Linda Farthing, is timely in offering alternatives to forced eradication. The most recent contribution to the Lessons for Drug Policy series draws from a process initiated in Bolivia in 2004 when the Cato policy was put into effect allowing farmers to grow 1,600 square meters of subsistence coca per household. Later, in 2009, under the administration of Evo Morales, implementation of the community control model began. Under this scheme, farmers are subjected to monitoring by their peers and where excess coca production is identified, it is voluntarily eradicated, taking forced eradication out of the equation. This model is not necessarily limited to controlling excess coca production. As reported by Ledebur and Farthing,

it is a multidimensional and participatory model that promotes the industrialization of coca and improves farmers' livelihoods.

The Bolivian community control model can be seen as a sequence of replicable public policy actions: decriminalization of coca leaves and coca growers; creation of a coca grower's participatory mechanism; and support for integral and sustainable socio-economic development projects with respect to the coca plant. As pointed out by Ledebur and Farthing, the community control model "has proven more effective and cost-efficient than forced eradication in controlling coca production and represents a local proposal appropriate to its context."

The Colombian experience offers evidence of the harmful effects of mechanisms focused exclusively on reducing supply and demonstrates their limitations given that the Andean country remains the main cocaine exporter to the U.S. Habeas Coca offers lessons that other Andean countries can adapt to their own realities. The report shows that it is possible to reduce coca cultivation in a manner that is peaceful and increases the legitimacy of the state. All of these factors are relevant to the current Colombian context.

According to Habeas Coca, coca production in Bolivia has dropped by around 24 percent since 2008 when forced eradication ended and was replaced by a model focused on community control. Since the implementation of this new policy, violent confrontations between police and farmers have almost disappeared. Furthermore, of the almost 12,000 hectares of coca eradicated, less than 2,000 hectares were eradicated by force, whereas almost 10,000 hectares were voluntarily removed.

The potential benefits for Colombia are even greater given the context of the peace process between the government and the insurgent group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC). The partial agreement between the two parties on the drug problem has established participatory mechanisms for the coca growing communities to define their own integral development model, avoiding ineffective alternative development projects.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's (UNODC) most recent report on Colombia indicates that coca cultivation increased by 44 percent between 2013 and 2014 and cocaine production rose from 290 to 420 tons. Clearly the policies that maintain the status quo approach to coca control have failed.

Bolivia's community control model offers many insights into limiting coca production that can be adapted to the Colombian context. Such approaches, combined with state-building policies in historically marginalized territories, can also reduce violence, augment livelihoods, and place human interests at the center of an effective supply-side drug policy.

Later this month, Pope Francis will visit Bolivia and has reportedly requested that coca leaves be available during his visit. Ideally, this event will increase awareness in the international arena of supply-side policies that have been harmful to the human rights and cultures of indigenous communities.

International remembrance day

Saturday 18 July 6pm Ashfield Uniting Church 180 Liverpool Road, Ashfield. Remembering lives lost - families come together.

Tuesday 21 July 2pm Lawrence Hargrave Park Ward Avenue Potts Point, Sydney. To honour the memory of those we have lost to drug related deaths in our community.