



**MEDIA RELEASE – SUNDAY, 9 SEPTEMBER, 2012**

## **ILLICIT DRUG PROHIBITION: PLAN A HAS FAILED WHERE IS PLAN B?**

**Report launched:** Adelaide Convention Centre, 12 noon, Sunday 9 September, 2012.

**Title:** "Alternatives to Prohibition. Illicit drugs: How we can stop killing and criminalising young Australians". Short title: "Alternatives to Prohibition."

**In attendance:** **Paul Barratt AO**, Chairman, Australia 21; **Dr Alex Wodak AM**, Director, Australia 21, President of the Australian Drug Law Reform Foundation, co-author of the Australia21 report; **Professor Bob Douglas AO**, Director Australia 21 co-author of the report; **Lisa Pryor**, roundtable participant.

Richard Horton, Editor of *The Lancet*, launched Australia21's second report on illicit drugs on Sunday 9 September in Adelaide on the eve of the 2012 Population Health Congress.

The report focused on what Australia can learn from the experiences of three countries (Portugal, Switzerland and the Netherlands) which have liberalised their drug regimes in some way, and one country (Sweden) which has followed a strict law enforcement policy. The increased emphasis on health and social responses to illicit drugs in Portugal, Switzerland and the Netherlands was associated with a decline in illicit drug problems in these countries. In contrast, Sweden's strong emphasis on law enforcement has been associated with increasing drug-related deaths.

The report called for a National Summit on illicit drugs – with strong youth involvement - and recommended a referral to the Australian Productivity Commission. A number of specific options for change were discussed and it is hoped these will be considered broadly by the Australian community.

Several former and current politicians have supported moves for a rethink of Australia's illicit drug policy. (See quotes at the end of this release.)

### **Quoted in the report:**

**Vivienne Moxam-Hall**, honorary youth adviser to Australia21, and student representative at the University of Sydney

*"The criminalisation of recreational drug use is a youth issue. It is youth health that is being compromised and our future that is being sabotaged. It is vital that young people are actively engaged to consider solutions to this problem."*

**Lisa Pryor**, journalist, writer, law graduate, medical student, and mother:

*"It is galling that governments are described as 'tough on drugs' when they increase sentences for drug possession...Far from being tough, increasing sentences is just about the weakest, laziest, easiest and least effective thing a government can do. It is also extremely expensive."*

**Mick Palmer AO APM**, former Commissioner of the Australian Federal Police:

*"Whilst controlling and reducing drug related criminal trafficking and related offences must remain an important part of any strategy, it should be complementary to the primary aim of providing health and social care and support for drug addicts and users. This should not be construed, however, as suggesting that any message that is given is not strongly negative to drug use."*

## What current and former senior politicians are saying:

**Professor Peter Baume AC**, former Liberal Health Minister in the Fraser Government and former Chancellor at the ANU

*"Australia must do something - anything - to improve the present awful arrangements we have about drugs. What we have achieved is entrenchment of criminals in a lucrative business. They pay no tax and corrupt our children and we are party to it."*

**Professor Carmen Lawrence**, former Premier of Western Australia, Commonwealth Minister of Health and Human Services and Chair of the Australian Labor Party

*"The view that drug use is an individual moral failing or pathology rather than a systemic issue tends to inform current policy and public opinion and we need vigorously to challenge this view. The call by Australia21 for a national summit to develop a new deal in this difficult area has my firm support."*

**Hon Marshall Perron**, former Country Liberal Party Chief Minister in the Northern Territory.

*"It's time to stop kidding ourselves that our drugs policies work. This Australia21 report outlines an evidence based roadmap that should be embraced."*

**Hon Mal Washer MP**, Doctor and Convenor of the Australian Parliamentary Group on Drug Law Reform.

*"As specified in the Australia21 report, we need a better harm reduction program for illicit drugs relying on a co-ordinated package that is implemented vigorously, including: Needle and Syringe Programs, Education (including explicit peer education) about the harms of drug use and Replacement therapies e.g. Opiate Substitution Treatment"*

**Hon Kate Carnell AO**, former Liberal Chief Minister in the ACT.

*"The proposal in the Australia21 report by Professor David Penington for a controlled legal market for cannabis and ecstasy (MDMA) now warrants very serious consideration by our politicians. We need to control access to these substances in the same way as we regulate other drugs, rather than leave their production and marketing in the hands of criminals"*

**Senator Richard di Natale**, Doctor and Greens Senator for Victoria.

*"Many politicians privately support drug law reform but only a very few have had the courage to speak up. Australia21 is now setting the agenda for reform and I hope their latest report will spark others to join me in having a frank debate in Parliament."*

**Professor Geoff Gallop AC**, former Labor Premier, Western Australia

*"One aspect of the so-called "war on drugs" has been the rejection of human rights and evidence-based approaches to health care. In some areas Australia has been a leader in a humane approach but this shouldn't tempt us to complacency. Studying and learning from the experience of others remains important and that's why the work of Australia21 is to be commended."*