

Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform (ACT) Inc

Committed to preventing tragedy that arises from illicit drug use

NEWSLETTER



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PO Box 4736
HIGGINS ACT 2615
Tel: 02 62542961
Email: mcconnell@ffdlr.org.au
Web: www.ffdlr.org.au
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NEXT MEETING

Thursday 22 August, 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

History lessons

In the last two months my wife and I travelled through Queensland and the Northern Territory to the Kimberley region in Western Australia. After crossing the border into WA we saw large signs asking drivers to make sure they were not carrying cane toads into that state.

Following the apparent success of the cane toad in eating the beetles threatening the sugar cane plantations of Puerto Rico, and the fruitful introductions into Hawaii and the Philippines, there was a strong push for the cane toad to be released in Australia to negate the pests that were ravaging the Queensland cane fields. As a result, in 1935, 102 toads were collected from Hawaii and released in Australia.

Belatedly the Commonwealth Department of Health banned further introductions until a study was conducted into the feeding habits of the toad. The study was completed in 1936, the ban lifted, and by March, 1937, 62,000 toadlets had been released into the wild.

The toads are now firmly established and they are marching across the top end of Australia and down south. They have been found in NT, NSW and one has been found in Broome. So it is little wonder the WA government is concerned.

The damage that the toads do is well known. They and their tadpoles have caused the death of many native species because the tadpoles are highly toxic and the Toad carries glands on its back that secrete poison to our native animals.

What is now known is that the toads were not successful in reducing the cane beetle because the beetle lives at the top of the cane stalks and the toads are poor climbers.

Australia now has a serious problem of its own making because the introduction of the toads was the result of great pressure from cane growers with no forethought of the possible consequences. Even when the research was undertaken, it was poorly thought through and narrowly applied. One could also speculate from the brief period of the study that there was also pressure applied to the Department.

History has a tendency to repeat itself. The US perceived a (moral) threat from certain drugs and applied great pressure on the rest of the world to adopt its approach to prevent the production, sale and use of those drugs. Worldwide, countries acceded to the rhetoric, they believed that the arguments rang true. It proposed an instant solution to a perceived problem but little or no research was undertaken into the broader consequences. This, despite the US having very clear lessons from its foray into alcohol prohibition.

There is as yet no absolute solution to the cane toad, although educating some native animals to avoid eating cane toads is showing promise. And crows have taught themselves to avoid the poison by flipping the toad over and eating from the belly of the toad.

Likewise education to our young people to avoid taking drugs can help, as can safe use messages (not unlike the crow adopts a safe feeding practices). But in society's haste to adopt the false promise that the criminal justice system would solve the so called drug problem, many other problems have been introduced.

There is however a glimmer of light on Australia's horizon. An election is looming and some political parties are proposing change to the current prohibition laws, or actions that could very well lead to change.

In this Newsletter, and with the permission of "Of Substance" magazine, are statements from parties contesting seats in the House of representatives. Read them carefully and for each party ask yourself "will this policy statement represent an improvement over the current or recent past position or is it more of the same?".

There are also some parties contesting seats in the Senate. The following are two such parties:

The Hemp Party supports the re-legalisation and regulation of Cannabis for personal, medical and industrial use in Australia. <http://australianhempparty.com/>

The Drug Law Reform Party supports legalisation, regulation and taxing of cannabis. It also aims to raise awareness of the serious harms caused by laws criminalising drug use and is calling for a royal commission into drugs. <http://www.druglawreform.com.au/>

In the forthcoming federal election vote early, vote wisely.

Drug policies: You be the judge 2013 federal election

From Of Substance July 2013, ofsubstance.org.au

With the 2013 Federal election just around the corner, Of Substance invited political parties seeking seats in the House of Representatives to contribute a statement of their

policy positions on alcohol and other drugs (AOD), to help you with your decision on September 14. We are pleased to present you with statements from the Australian Labor Party, the Australian Sex Party, the Coalition (Liberal/National) and the Greens (listed in alphabetical order).

Katter's Australian Party was also invited to submit, but declined.

Variations emerge both in the parties' positions on AOD as well as the specific strategies they propose to achieve their goals. Their views also differ on the emphasis that should be given to law enforcement, decriminalisation, treatment and research. The alternative approaches to alcohol policies are particularly noteworthy.

The statements are presented unedited and demonstrate wide differences in the priorities given to strategies to address such issues as law reform around, and policing of, illicit drugs, alcohol pricing/taxation, prescription heroin trials, medicinal cannabis, civil liberties and prevention strategies.

Only parties registered at the time of going to press were asked to make policy statements.

So read on, and you be the judge.

Australian Labor Party

by the Hon Mark Butler MP,

Minister for Mental Health & Ageing

The impact of drug, alcohol and tobacco use is felt by millions of Australians and has a devastating effect on young people and disadvantaged communities. Labor is the only party that has demonstrated a willingness to invest and the ability to tackle the big issues. We delivered major reforms, like world-first plain packaging laws to minimise the impact of tobacco use, and we are delivering over \$1 billion to support the National Drug Strategy and National Partnership Agreement with states and territories.

When Labor was elected we recognised there was a gap in national policy to address risky drinking, following years of neglect by the Liberals. Labor acted by designing Australia's first National Binge Drinking Strategy, with more than \$100 million funding. This funding has been supporting the roll-out of community projects across the country, and campaigns like Be the Influence, which uses sporting clubs and role models to deliver positive messages to young Australians.

Alcohol and tobacco use are risk factors for many chronic and preventable diseases, including diabetes, heart disease, stroke and cancer. Chronic conditions, many of them preventable, are one of the largest threats to a healthy Australia, and the sustainability of the health system. To combat the rise of chronic disease, Labor established the Australian National Preventive Health Agency, strengthening Australia's investment in preventive health and supporting initiatives targeting obesity, harmful alcohol consumption and tobacco.

And the prevention of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorders has been a focus under Labor, helping women make healthy choices during pregnancy or when breastfeeding.

We know the spread of illicit drug use – so damaging to the lives of Australians – places pressure on our police and health workforce. Labor has taken a strong and active role in combating drugs and we have seen success in reducing the prevalence of drug use and limiting the impact and harm it causes. Central to our drug strategy are the principles of prevention, early intervention

and harm minimisation. We must target the underlying causes in order to reduce demand and increase the opportunities for treatment and harm reduction. Our response has been, and will continue to be, tough, targeted and evidence-based.

Linked to these programs and strategies, must be worldclass drug and alcohol research. Recently, Labor announced \$24 million funding for a network of National Research Centres – the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, the National Drug Research Institute, and the National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction – to enable better coordination and research. Labor will continue to prioritise our world-class research capabilities – including the work of the National Health and Medical Research Council – to ensure we are leading the fight against the damage caused by drugs and alcohol.

For more information about Labor's policies, visit: www.alp.org.au.

Australian Sex Party

by Fiona Patten, National President

The Australian Sex Party advocates for the immediate decriminalisation of all recreational drugs, especially cannabis and ecstasy (MDMA). This includes the purchase, possession and consumption of an amount equal to, or less than, 14 days' supply for one person. The regulation of recreational drug use should be treated within an administrative framework outside of the criminal justice system and with an emphasis on health outcomes rather than on punishment or incarceration.

In 2010, the Global Commission on Drug Policy concluded a major research project by saying, 'The global war on drugs has failed with devastating consequences for individuals and societies around the world.' Punishing people for seeking pleasure and relief from life's pressures through an arbitrary prohibition on certain substances (marijuana and ecstasy) and not others (alcohol and tobacco), is unfair and discriminatory and completely ignores the evidence of harm to an individual or society. It is also an unwarranted interference in personal life.

Our two primary drug policies are based on the verifiable evidence of over 100 years of regulating drugs through prohibition and the criminal justice system. The end result of that is that 70% of people in Australian prisons are now there for drug-related crime at a cost of some billions of dollars to the taxpayer. Children as young as 13 and 14 are being brought into a lifelong relationship with crime, through natural teenage curiosity and experimentation.

In relation to injecting drugs, we support the establishment and funding of overdose prevention and disease control initiatives including:

- medically supervised injecting facilities
- appropriately located needle exchange vending machines
- the provision of needle exchange programs in prisons
- aerosol dispensed narcotics being made available
- legalising the prescription of heroin to registered habitual users.

We support the immediate cessation of the use of sniffer dogs in pubs, clubs, dance parties and festivals which simply cause many young people to empty their pockets and ingest overdose-levels of drugs. We would also remove the prohibition on the sale of smoking paraphernalia which only forces young people to smoke cannabis out of toxic milk containers and plastic pipes.

We also propose that drug testing for employment reasons only be used where there is an impairment that affects safety of self and others and that tolerance levels be established with benchmarks similar to alcohol.

State governments should legalise electronic cigarettes, with and without nicotine capsules, as an evidence-based nicotine replacement therapy.

Finally, we need a new schedule on the Poisons Standard (the SUSMP) for low risk recreational substances such as synthetic cannabinoids. These new substances are game-changers for drug regulation. The New Zealand Government's decision to allow clinical testing and restricted sale of these products needs to be adopted immediately by Australian governments as the only way of regulating these products.

For more information about the Australian Sex Party's policies, visit: www.sexparty.org.au.

Coalition

by the Hon Peter Dutton MP, Shadow Minister for Health & Ageing

Much has been made in recent times of government offensives on licit products, most notably tobacco.

And the argument for Government action on tobacco is compelling with the dire health outcomes and costs to our health system well cited. Graphic health warnings, tighter bans on advertising and public awareness campaigns have seen the prevalence of tobacco use falling from nearly 24 per cent in the mid 1990s to around 15 per cent.

However, recent news regarding illicit drugs isn't as promising. Illicit drug use in Australia has become more prevalent since 2007. It is at a rate almost equal to that of tobacco use and the current Government has been strangely quiet on the issue.

Illicit drug use in Australia fell from 21.9 per cent in 1998 to 13.4 per cent by 2007 under the former Coalition Government. Since 2007, illicit drug use has already increased to 14.7 according to the AIHW. The fall in illicit drug use under the Howard Government followed the 1997 implementation of a 'Tough on Drugs' policy.

At a cost of \$1.6 billion over the following years, it was the biggest investment by a Government in Australia's history to fight illicit drug use and included a range of measures to disrupt supply, reduce demand and provide treatment for people with a drug addiction problem.

Former Australian Federal Police Commissioner Mick Keelty stated in evidence to a 2007 Parliamentary Inquiry that, 'The implementation of the National Illicit Drug Strategy in 1997 caused a significant increase in drug seizures. Together the agencies have prevented more than 14 tonnes of the most serious illicit drugs – being heroin, cocaine, MDMA and methamphetamine from reaching Australia's streets.'

The Coalition's approach also addressed demand through education projects and community campaigns. This included a Schools Drug Strategy, community grants programs and the national dissemination of information to the general community, universities, health professionals and health care facilities.

The Coalition's approach also supported appropriate treatment options. For example, over \$150 million was provided for the establishment, expansion, upgrading and operation of non-government drug and alcohol treatment services across Australia.

\$340 million was allocated under the Illicit Drug Diversion Initiative to provide a compulsory assessment, treatment and an education program for minor drug offenders aimed at keeping them out of the criminal justice system.

The Coalition remains committed to appropriate demand reduction strategies and treatment for those affected by drug addiction, but our law enforcement agencies also need political support and adequate resources to ensure those responsible for destroying lives and profiting from the drug trade are held accountable for their actions.

For more information about the Coalition's policies, visit: www.liberal.org.au.

The Greens

by Senator Richard Di Natale, the Greens' spokesperson for Health

The Greens' approach to drugs policy is one of harm minimisation. From a public health perspective, the current approach to illicit drugs is a total failure. There is also much work left to be done around alcohol policy in this country. Based on the best evidence, the Greens' policies go a long way to reduce the harms caused by alcohol and other drugs in Australia.

The Greens acknowledge that alcohol is by far the largest contributor to social harms of all licit and illicit drugs. To help reduce the enormous harms of alcohol abuse in our society, the Greens' policy calls for measures to curb the riskiest drinking behaviours. This includes mandating the use of strong warning labels on all alcoholic beverages including pregnancy warnings. As a first step to rationalising Australia's confusing system of alcohol taxes and excises, the Greens will abolish the Wine Equalisation tax and replace it with a volumetric tax on wine that brings it into line with other alcoholic beverages and reduces the incentive to produce the cheapest cask wine – but would keep tax rebates in place for small wine producers who produce high-quality products.

The Greens will close the loophole that allows alcohol ads to run on TV during children's viewing hours when part of a sports broadcast.

The Greens don't believe in legalising all illegal drugs. There is no clear, evidence-based model on how substances with such a high potential for harm would be regulated or dispensed. The Greens continue to support criminal penalties for drug traffickers. On the other hand, it is clear that bringing drug users into the criminal justice system is not an effective deterrent and is only compounding the harms of drug use. The Greens' policy is to replace criminal penalties for personal use of drugs with a graduated system of fines and mandated treatment.

The Greens are strong advocates for more resources aimed at treatment for those struggling with substance addiction. This includes further funding for opiate substitution therapies to remove the patient co-pay and allow more patients to stay on methadone and buprenorphine treatment.

Based on the success of safe injecting facilities in Kings Cross and around the world, the Greens support further facilities in Australia and will provide federal funding if required. The Greens support calls from public health experts and the medical community for a scientific trial of medically prescribed heroin to registered users as an important harm reduction measure.

The Greens support the legal availability of cannabis for medical

purposes where such use is supported by medical evidence.

The Greens will continue to support strong tobacco control measures. The Greens support the plain packaging initiative and led the campaign that saw the Future Fund announce its divestment of tobacco holdings.

For more information about the Greens' policies, visit: www.greens.org.au.

Greens announce call for drugs summit and inquiry

13 Aug 2013 | Richard Di Natale

Australian Greens health spokesperson and former drug and alcohol clinician, Senator Richard Di Natale, today announced the Greens' call for a National Drugs Summit to chart a way forward on illicit drugs policy.

"The current approach to drugs is not working," said Senator Di Natale. "Doctors around the country see the terrible health effects every day and hundreds of Australians die every year. We need to move away from sending drug users through the criminal justice system and treat the problem like the health issue it really is."

Senator Di Natale also committed the Greens support for a Productivity Commission inquiry into the issue of illicit drugs.

"We need to have a close look at the costs of the current approach. They are in the billions each year. A change of direction starting with a much greater investment in treatment and public health would not only save lives and keep families together but could save a fortune in direct and social costs.

"The status quo is not working. The Greens care for people and will always put the health of the community first."

Drug Law Reform Australia Party needs help on election day

The Drug Law Reform Australia Party is looking for assistance prior to and on the day of the election. The Party is fielding candidates for the senate in Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and the ACT.

If you are able to help please contact:

- The campaign manager Tim Peters for VIC, NSW and SA 0417 314 301
- Paul Cubitt for ACT on 0416167227

Volunteers can also sign up on the DLRA website on druglawreform.com.au.

Marijuana legalization in Uruguay: a path for Latin American countries?

August 15, 2013 <http://theworldoutline.com/2013/08/marijuana-legalization-uruguay-path-for-latin-america/>

Uruguay is the first country in the world to legalize the use and production of cannabis. After more than a year in public deliberation and an exhausting parliamentary debate, the lower Congress finally approved the bill to legalize and regulate the production and commerce of the drug. The bill is expected to be approved by the Senate, as the left-wing that is supporting the liberalization retains the majority.

With the new bill, Uruguayans are allowed to not only consume the drug, but also to grow a maximum of 6 plants in their homes

and to create marijuana clubs, where each registered person may spend up to USD 100 in marijuana legally acquired. The law allows the purchase of maximum of 40 grams a months from a licensed pharmacy for registered citizens over 18 years old.

Read more on the website above....

International Remembrance Day 2013 Kings Cross Tree Planting

On Monday 22nd July Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore planted a tree at Lawrence Hargraves Park, Ward Avenue, Potts Point to remember lives lost to drugs.

Tony Trimmingham made the following opening remarks at that ceremony.

On behalf of the organising committee I welcome you to this very important ceremony to remember as part of the International Remembrance Day those who have died as a result of drugs.

The organising committee is made up of those who are most affected by the deaths that occur. Drug users, their families and friends and those wonderful services that reach out to help here in kings Cross.

This tree in this place will become a permanent memorial to those we love. It will be a peaceful place to remind us of their talents and qualities and the time with them that we have lost.

Since I have lost my son 16 years ago, over 10,000 people have died in Australia alone and hundreds of thousands world wide as a result of a war that was declared 40 years ago – not against a foreign invader but which became targeted against our own sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, partners and friends bringing isolations, shame, discrimination and loss of human rights. The costs of this phoney war have been great and the benefits zero. Surely it is time to say – enough is enough.

With the planting of this tree we will remember them with our heads held high and with no shame. We will come here and remember their love, their laughter, their words, their struggles, their dignity – their existence.

Overdose deaths

Accidental overdose deaths from opioids appears to be on the rise again according to the 2012 Australian Drug trends IDRS report. (Report by Jennifer Stafford and Lucy Burns.)

While the later data for 2009 and 2012 is preliminary, in 2008 there were 500 accidental deaths. Thirty four percent occurred in Vic, with 74% of all opioid deaths occurring in NSW, Vic and Qld. Deaths reported are opioid related and not necessarily heroin overdose deaths. In Tas and NT where heroin is less available deaths are more likely to be related to pharmaceutical opioids.

