

## President's Annual Report 2010

(Presented at the November AGM)

### **Introduction**

This fifteenth President's report covers the 12 month period from November 2009 to November 2010.

My thanks go to those who contributed to the group's activities during the year. I would like especially to thank my office bearers John Ley, vice president; Bob McFadden, treasurer; and Cynthia Groundwater, secretary and Joan Westaway who has ably filled in for Cynthia when Cynthia was away. I also thank Marion McConnell for her organising work and support, and St Ninian's Church for the use of its hall. Bill Bush, now that he has recovered, contributed much during the year.

### **Events of significance**

Drug law reform changes are slow to occur. Last year I reported on decriminalisation changes in some countries and the report by the UK based organisation TRANSFORM. Individual states in the USA have moved to change laws in respect of cannabis. Although some have not succeeded, people in that country have been engaged by the debate.

In the UK in some respects backward steps have been taken by the government but there are strong individuals such as Prof David Nutt who, sacked by the government, has found funds to continue his good work (see editorial Nov Newsletter).

In Australia the medically supervised injecting centre has finally been moved from the status of a trial to that of legitimacy as a treatment service and in the ACT momentum is building for a first needle and syringe program in the new AMC prison.

At the UN level the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime has moved from a drug free world mantra and is showing some acceptance that alternate approaches need to be tried. There appears to be only one organisation, the International Narcotics Control Board, that is holding to the old position.

Even the UN General Assembly has recognised that change is needed. In a report of special rapporteur Anand Grover the General Assembly heard criticisms that the current drug system focussed on creating a drug free world relying

almost exclusively on law enforcement and criminal sanctions despite the mounting evidence that such an approach has failed because it does not recognise the realities of drug use and dependence.

Grover's report recommends inter alia that:

- all harm reductions measures be made available,
- possession and use of drugs be decriminalised
- repeal or reform laws inhibiting the delivery of essential health services to drug users
- review law enforcement initiatives to ensure compliance with human rights obligations.

This report may have escaped the attention of Australian governments and it would be a useful task for next year to bring this report and its implications to the attention of our governments.

### **Involvement in the community or other organisations**

FFDLR is represented as follows:

**Community Corrections on Coalition:** Bill Bush, Brian McConnell, John Ley are FFDLR's representatives on this community coalition. The work of the group is important and aims to ensure that the new ACT prison meets the original standards set by the government.

#### **ACT Alcohol and Other Drugs Strategy Implementation & Evaluation Committee:**

Brian McConnell continued his representation on this group. The committee completed the new drug strategy for the next 5 years which built on the previous drug strategy. It was issued by the minister during the year.

**DIRECTIONS ACT:** Brian McConnell is a member of the Board whose aims are "to promote and maximise the health and well-being of individuals, families and communities affected by alcohol and other drug related harms". That organisation is gaining in respect for the work it undertakes.

**Inquiries into AMC:** Two inquiries were being conducted into the AMC. Brian McConnell is represented on an advisory group related to one of those – an inquiry into the health aspects of the AMC conducted by the Burnett Institute.

## **Constitution Change**

A special general meeting was held on 25 March to consider a change to the FFDLR's constitution. The change which enabled the Tax Office to approve FFDLR as a "tax concession charity" was approved by the special general meeting.

## **ATODA**

A new peak body for the ACT "Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Association" was formed during the year. FFDLR attended a number of forums to assist the new organisation develop its policies.

## **Representations**

**FFDLR members met with and made representations to the following:**

### **Meetings with:**

Amanda Bresnan, ACT Greens

Andrew Leigh, the new MHR for Fraser.

Robbie Swan, representative of the Sex Party.

Attempts were made to meet with Nicola Roxon and Rachel Sewert. It is becoming more difficult to obtain meetings with federal MPs.

**Drug Action Week.** Even though FFDLR did not organise an event this year many of our members attended events and seminars organised by others.

## **Submissions**

FFDLR made submissions commenting on the ACT Drug Strategy and the National Drug Strategy.

FFDLR responded to the ACT Greens paper on NSPs in the AMC.

Drug Driving legislation was a focus during the year. FFDLR made a submission, pointing out the serious problems with the legislation.

Amanda Bresnan of the ACT Greens was also lobbied on the issue. Consequently some changes were made to the legislation.

FFDLR made written and oral presentation to the Queensland's Parliamentary inquiry into the harms of cannabis. A follow-up submission was forwarded to the inquiry at a later date.

## **Published opinion pieces**

**Letters** – a number of letters were sent to newspapers by members of FFDLR.

## **FFDLR Awareness raising activities**

FFDLR had a stall during Canberra Connect's Multicultural Week in mid February.

Brian presented to a mental health quarterly forum in June.

The FFDLR website was revised and updated during the year.

The monthly Newsletter provides a means to keep in touch with members. Some members have asked for their Newsletter to be emailed which can mean faster delivery for the member and a saving of postage to FFDLR. The Newsletter is also forwarded to all members of parliament.

FFDLR is now on Facebook as a cause for other members of Facebook to join.

Getup! issued an invitation to list possible campaigns upon which people could vote. FFDLR put forward Drug Law Reform as a possible campaign. Currently it is ranked 19<sup>th</sup> and has received 420 votes.

**Media:** .

## **Public forums**

FFDLR had a stall at the Canberra connect Multi-cultural Day.

Candidates on Drugs was a public forum held on 9 August where candidates for the federal election responded to a list of questions that were provided to them a week prior to the forum. The Democrats, Greens and ALP presented. ADLRF hosted a visit to Australia by Ethan Nadleman. Ethan will be in Australia from 22 November to 3 December.

## **Monthly meetings**

Meetings were held every month from February to November. Many important and topical issues were discussed and action taken where appropriate.

## **Guest speakers at monthly meetings**

Jason Morressey from Directions was guest speaker for our October meeting. His topic was "Drug & Alcohol Interventions are Mental Health Interventions".

## **Remembrance Ceremony**

The 15<sup>th</sup> Remembrance Ceremony was held on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> October at Weston Park. The speakers were Jo Wade, Amanda Bresnan, ACT Greens, and Rev'd Rex Graham from the Uniting Church.

The Cashews provided the music and Directions staff, Stasia Dabrowski's son as well as FFDLR members assisted with the refreshments. Over 80 people attended the ceremony.

Brian McConnell, President