

# President's Report 2011

I must first record my thanks to my office bearers: John Ley, Bob McFadden, and Cynthia Groundwater and to my committee members for their efforts during the year. I make also special mention of Bill Bush and Marion McConnell who have been tireless and have picked up the baton when I dropped it. While not a great deal has happened here in Australia a great deal is happening globally. That and what we have done this year may bear fruit in the near future.

## **World events**

**There is a great deal of movement in respect of drug law reform overseas:**

- There are now nine countries that provide diacetylmorphine (pharmaceutical grade heroin) on prescription as a substitution (for street based) heroin.
- Portugal, Spain, Italy, Mexico, Argentina, Czech Republic, The Netherlands, are among countries that have decriminalisation of personal use of illicit drugs. Uruguay never criminalised personal use. Additionally some US States and Canada allow personal use of cannabis for medical purposes.
- Global Commission on Drug Policy: This Commission, comprising many past world leaders released its report, world wide in June this year. It reported that the war on drugs was not working and amongst the recommendations it said:

*"Act urgently: the war on drugs has failed, and policies need to change now."*

- Transform Drug Policy Foundation: Not only has this organisation produced its "Blueprint for Regulation" but its website has many publications including "Tools for the debate".
- **Global initiative for drug policy reform:** This is a joint initiative of the Beckley Foundation and the All-Party Parliamentary Group in the UK. Among its objectives it aims "to promote health-oriented, cost-effective drug policies based on scientific evidence and human rights". As recently as 17 November it had organised a House of Lords meeting - a meeting of government leaders, policy-makers and experts to debate the effectiveness of alternative policies. Members of The Global Commission on Drug Policy will attend the Meeting, and present their *Report*. Invited also are countries that have implemented progressive approaches to drug control to present evidence and discuss the results of their policy decisions. We await reports of those meetings.

## **Australia and ACT**

### **Memberships**

FFDLR is a member of the following organisations:

- Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia (ADCA)
- ACT Hepatitis Resource Centre
- Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Association (ATODA)
- ACT Council of Social Services (ACTCOSS)
- Australian Drug Law Reform Foundation (ADLRF)
- Family Drug Support (FDS)
- FFDLR has joined the Joint initiative of the Beckley Foundation and the All-Party Parliamentary Group in the UK on drug law reform.
- Brian is a member of the Directions Board and a member of the ACT Drug Strategy Evaluation Group
- Bill is a member of Community Correction Coalition, Hep Resource Centre and is the FFDLR representative on the Mental Health Community Coalition.

- Marion is a member of the ADCA Families and Community Working Group.

### **Meetings and Newsletters**

FFDLR held regular meetings of members on the fourth Thursday of the month during the year with the exceptions of the normal December and January meetings. There was no meeting in June allowing members to attend the Drug Action Week events..

A regular Newsletter was issued for each month (again with the normal exception of December and January) which kept members up-to-date with events in Australia and throughout the world. The editorial has over the years become a regular feature.

### **Public Meetings**

One public meeting was held during the year. Dr Caitlin Hughes spoke at a forum organised by Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform on 17 November. Dr Hughes spoke on “What can we learn from the Portuguese decriminalisation of illicit drugs? 60 people attended at the ACT Legislative Assembly. Amanda Bresnan, Greens member for Brindabella hosted the event.

### **Contact Canberra**

FFDLR set up a stall on the Multicultural Festival, Contact Canberra day in February. It was a very successful day and the stall was awarded a \$50 meat voucher prize for the most informative stall. A BBQ using the meat was enjoyed by members in June at Commonwealth park.

### **Drug Action Week**

Drug Action Week was held in June and although FFDLR did not organise an FFDLR event this year however Marion and Bill were members of the ACT events organising committee.

### **Submissions**

In 2010 FFDLR made a submission to the Queensland Legislative Assembly Social Development Committee and made an oral presentation to the Committee: The Committee’s final report was released this year and contained thirty-eight recommendations mostly about education campaigns and drug testing. FFDLR’s suggestion about using an evidence-based approach was noted by the Committee.

FFDLR made a submission on the discussion paper on implementation of Model Schedules for Commonwealth Serious Drug Offences. The submission stated in part that *Based on past experience, even though it may seem to make prosecutions easier and more uniform, it will probably make little difference in the long term. The possible prosecution or the strength of the penalties, according to many criminologists, has not been a deterrent to crime. Other factors are usually at play but the discussion paper is narrow and it does not explore a wider range of options.*

### **Meeting with parliamentarians**

FFDLR, during the year, met with Andrew Leigh, Simon Corbell, Amanda Bresnan, and Jeremy Hansen. In the main the issues discussed were about the possible needle and syringe program in the prison, the Hamburger and the Burnett reports into the prison.

### **Campaigns**

**Getup Campaign:** FFDLR put forward to GetUp for consideration a campaign on changing the drug laws. The suggestion has received over 1300 votes.

**Petition:** FFDLR commenced in February collecting signatures for a petition for the Legislative Assembly to hold a public debate based on evidence and research about our drug laws and policies. A table was set up in Civic on two occasions to collect signatures. The petition was presented to Amanda Bresnan, Greens Member for Brindabella at the public forum on 17 November for tabling and to arrange for the debate to be held.

**NSP in AMC:** A number of reports, including the Hamburger Report and Burnett reports, the PHAA report and an audit by the Human Rights Commission, recommended the introduction of a needle and syringe program in the new prison. FFDLR strongly leant support to this proposal. It was involved in a Stakeholders Focus Group Workshop and Bill and Marion organised a delegation

to meet with the Chief Minister in September. The delegation included ATODA, the Hepatitis Resource Centre, the AIDS Action Council of the ACT, CAHMA and Paul Cubitt as well as Marion McConnell for Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform.

ADCA Families and Community Working Group: Marion was invited to become a member of this working group, the objectives of which was to develop a policy document for ADCA that was inclusive of families in respect of both policies and treatment services.

Bob Douglas from **Australia 21** (an independent, non-profit organisation whose core purpose is multidisciplinary research and inquiry on issues of strategic importance to Australia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century) proposes a round table cost/benefit analysis of reform of drug laws and policies. Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform is involved in this project.

### **Meetings and talks**

Brian spoke to a meeting of the Mt. Rogers ALP at Ginninderra Labor Club in June 2011.

Parliamentary Group for Drug Law Reform AGM was attended by FFDLR members. Ken Crispin as speaker and five sitting politicians and a number of journalists were present.

Brian, Marion and Bill attended the Intelligence Squared debate on the topic “All drugs should be legalized.” Interestingly the organisers took a poll of the audience before the debate and then again afterwards. The outcome was favorable for the case for the ‘Positive’ team. After the debate many who had previously been undecided came over to the ‘Positive’ side.

Brian spoke to the Kippax branch of Amnesty International about the proposed NSP in the AMC. The audience was supportive of both drug law reform and an NSP at AMC.

### **Conferences**

ACT Community Coalition on Mental Health held its second conference on Mental Health which Bill Bush attended.

**Symposium organized by the Richmond Fellowship.** Colin attended for the first half of the symposium in May. The theme of the Symposium was “Is Cannabis a soft Drug” and focused on issues around the question “Are people who use cannabis more likely to deny harms from its use?”

**The Kings Cross Medically Supervised Injection Centre celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary** in May. Marion and Brian McConnell attended this great celebration for the centre which had recently been advanced from its trial status and is now a permanent centre.

**Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drugs Association.** Marion and Brian were invited to attend a strategic planning meeting for ATODA. The facilitator for the meeting was Stephen Mugford.

### **Media**

Colin was interviewed by the Presenter of the ACT 7:30 Report (the old Stateline program) in September.

Several Requests for Radio and TV interviews were responded to.

Marion had an opinion piece published by the Canberra Times on 19 January titled by the Canberra Times – “Jail drug program is vital for ACT.

Several letters to the editor from members of FFDLR were published in the Canberra Times and other state newspapers.

The FFDLR website and Facebook page were maintained to a good standard during the year.

## **Guest Speaker**

**Guest speakers at FFDLR meetings** were Paul Cubitt from LEAP and Michael Moore. Michael spoke to his PHAA report “Balancing Access and Safety” which was prepared for the ACT Government on the implementation of an NSP at the Alexander Maconochie Centre. Paul spoke about LEADP Australia.

## **Remembrance ceremony**

A well attended remembrance ceremony was held at Weston Park in October, thanks to the good organising by Marion and Bill. During the year there was some discussion about the conflict with Overdose Awareness Day (31 August and originating from Southern Command of the Salvation Army) which is including remembrance ceremonies as part of this day. Eventhough Family Drug Support, which had held its remembrance day on the same weekend as ours, was likely to change to date of Overdose Awareness Day, members of FFDLR agreed to retain our current date and identify our event as a separate event.

Speakers at the Ceremony were Kerel Pearce, a family member, Andrew Leigh, federal member for Fraser, and Rev'd Duncan Macleod from the Uniting Church.

Brian McConnell

President