

Senate Standing Committees on Economics
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Senate Economics References Committee – Personal Choice and Community Impacts

To Whom It May Concern,

This submission regards the economic and social impact of legislation, policies or Commonwealth guidelines made, in particular reference to;

- a. the sale and service of alcohol, including any impact on crime and the health, enjoyment and finances of drinkers and non-drinkers;

and

- b. the sale and use of marijuana and associated products, including any impact on the health, enjoyment and finances of users and non-users.

Over the past four years I have created and contributed to a website focused solely on juxtaposing the effects of the consumption of alcohol with the effects of cannabis use on Australian society, with a particular focus on the health and law enforcement aspects of these substances and their respective impacts.

Responsible Choice (<http://www.responsiblechoice.com.au/>) was established out of concern over the distinct lack of enthusiastic and highly visible debate regarding cannabis' place in Australian society, specifically in terms of its illicit status as a recreational substance when compared to our ONLY legal similarly categorised substance, alcohol.

It is the express intention of Responsible Choice to enliven the debate as to whether or not cannabis should enjoy regulation within Australian society comparable to alcohol. It is also our intention to provide recent, relevant and factual information regarding both cannabis and alcohol and;

- their recreational uses
- corresponding relevant legislation (both historical and current)
- their costs to, and effects on individual users, their families and Australian society as a whole.

The responsible choice should ALWAYS be the safest option available. Without a choice we cannot make a responsible one.

Drug policy SHOULD always stem from the ideal of harm minimisation.

Up-to-date and well researched information provides the foundation upon which sensible and considered decisions MUST be made.

The future of our children's health depends upon us making the responsible choice now, so that they in turn have the opportunity to make it for themselves.

As I have stated from the beginning,

'I have had enough experience now in my life to have seen the negative effects of alcohol on my life personally and on the lives of my friends and family. As an educator I realise the profound responsibility we have as adults in providing our youth, being our own family and those belonging to our society collectively, with the information and experiences they will need to make responsible and informed decisions in their later life.

As a parent I have come to realise that I no longer believe alcohol is a recreational drug I would encourage my children to use. Knowing full well that when the time comes the choice will not be mine to make, I have made it a goal of mine to investigate, research and comment on current drug policy juxtaposed with the negative effects alcohol, with a view towards providing researched based information to those who are seeking it. This has allowed me to see the place that cannabis should rightly have in our society, specifically in its capacity to reduce the harmful effects of alcohol.

As a superior choice to alcohol in terms of its relative harm and negative impact on society, cannabis legalisation, or a repeal of cannabis prohibition, would spell a reduction in alcohol related death, disease and injury, whilst at the same time providing all responsible adults with an infinitely safer alternative to alcohol for their recreational drug use. Current drug policy is not based on the ideals of harm minimisation, nor is it grounded in the latest scientific research into the relative harms of drugs to users and those around them. This for me is unacceptable, as it flies in the face of what I consider to be the purpose of any policy enacted by any form of government, namely to protect the rights, best interests, health and well-being, and freedom of ALL citizens of the society in which it operates. Current Australian drug policy does not embody this, instead it reflects the fundamentally flawed approach to drugs and their use we have endured globally for the last 50 years.

In light of this fact I cannot, and will not, sit idly by and watch the horrific effects of the global 'War on Drugs' continue unabated on our children, our youth, and our families and friends. Nor can I watch our society continue to treat drug users as criminals, less than human, and as objects of derision and demonisation. For me, action is the responsible choice.'

My website contains research and media articles from 1995 onwards documenting the abject failure of prohibition as a part of Australian and global drug policy, along with the staggering social and health impacts of alcohol use and abuse in our country. I encourage anyone who has any interest in seeing improvements economically, socially and in relation to human health and well-being to visit the site and read through the various resources and media I have gathered there (<http://www.responsiblechoice.com.au/resources/>).

Amongst the many Australian and international research papers, journal articles and Australian studies available to view or download from the page linked above, there are a few that stand out as 'must-reads' for an inquiry such as this.

They include (but are not limited to);

[Cancer Council Australia Position Statement – Alcohol and Cancer Risk, May 2011](#)

[Drug harms in the UK: a multicriteria decision analysis – published in The Lancet by the Independent Scientific Committee on Drugs, David Nutt et.al, Nov 2010](#)

[War on Drugs: Report of the Global Commission on Drug Policy](#)

[Australia21 report – *The Prohibition of Illicit Drugs is Killing and Criminalising Our Children, and we are letting it happen*](#)

These four links alone should be enough to paint a pretty clear picture, and by clear I mean one in which we finally realise as a nation our drug laws are not based on harm, or its minimisation. They are certainly not based on science either. They are based on fear, not facts.

Even if they were based in fact, prohibition itself is a failed drug policy, and since its implementation under the moniker 'The War on Drugs', we have seen drugs become more readily available, purer and cheaper than throughout recent history. This has also corresponded with the requisite increase in organised criminal activities that are directly funded by illicit drugs. Perhaps the reason Australia is so reluctant to repeal our archaic prohibition laws is because, unlike America, we have never really had an Al Capone. We don't remember or see its effects as graphically as our American brethren, particularly the Mexican people who have tens of thousands of deaths every year directly related to the illicit drug trade and its respective bloodthirsty cartels. When we create a black-market why are we perplexed when criminals take advantage of the massive profits to be made, particularly given demand for drugs does not go down in correspondence with its relative scheduling/illicit status.

Maybe that's why pretty much every state in America is falling over itself trying to get through some sort of cannabis law reform, be it strictly medicinal or fully recreational. Maybe they finally realise the war is over, albeit decades too late for many. Colorado is making millions of dollars in tax revenue with no negative social outcomes after fully legalising the sale of cannabis, and with the current state of the world's financial systems a new and renewable source of tax revenue is the holy grail. America is the reason cannabis is outlawed in Australia as they requested we were signatories to the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs 1961, and that is pretty much the sole reason cannabis is still illegal today. If they aren't worried about it, why are we?

Alcohol is a dangerous drug that needs very careful regulation, education and associated health services available to users. Cannabis by comparison is a relatively benign drug, but which likewise needs similar regulatory mechanisms, along with comprehensive and science/fact-based evidence contributing to both education and harm reductive healthcare practices.

Take the power out of the hands of the criminals and put it into the hands of the Australian people. There are various regulatory models we can either adopt or consult in the creation of our own model for the retail availability of cannabis, many of which have been and are operating successfully throughout the world in places like Portugal, Washington, Colorado and Uruguay to name a few. The economic opportunities are immense, and the liberty of all Australians demands no less than an end to the redundant oppression of the individual right to freedom of thought. Our minds are our own, and we should be able to do with them as we see fit, as long as we don't hurt anyone else, and we certainly should not be locking our citizens up for doing just that.

Cannabis is the responsible choice.

Yours Sincerely,

Tim Nixon