

WCTU E-Issues

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The Parliament of Australia resumes on 26th August and the Government's increased tax on "alcopops" (Ready to Drink – RTD- spirits and soft drink mixes) has to be passed by the Senate. This is one measure that the Government has taken to reduce harmful drinking, especially by young people. The Opposition has vowed to oppose this tax so it will require the support of the Greens and the 2 Independent Senators, Steve Fielding and Nick Xenophon if it is to be passed.

The recent report of the Senate Community Affairs Committee that investigated the effectiveness of the "alcopops" tax concluded:

- 4.76 Young people are particularly vulnerable to alcohol in terms of its effect on their development, their lack of experience of drinking and the increased likelihood to engage in risky behaviour which may result in their harm or the harm of others. The Committee recognises that the vast majority of submissions from researchers, health and medical professionals supported raising the excise as a significant step to address this public health issue.

Please email Senators Steve Fielding, Nick Xenophon, and the Greens Senators whose votes are necessary for the tax to be passed, asking them to support the government's tax rise on alcopops in the Senate. Even a brief email will be important. The same message can be sent to them all. Points you can make are:

- The Liquor Merchants Association of **Australia** (LMAA) and DISTILLERS (DSICA) are fighting hard to have this tax removed by saying that it is not a success and that people are just switching from Ready to Drink 'alcopops' to buy straight spirits and mixing their own drinks, thus endangering their health because they don't know what a standard drink of their spirits is. Why would they oppose a tax that is not effective and actually increasing their sales as they claim? Are they concerned with the health of young drinkers? I think not. They know that the tax is working and are desperate to maintain their profits from the RTD market that is targeted especially at young girls and women.

- According to the Australian Tax Office, sales of RTDs (ready-to-drinks) fell by 54 per cent in the three months, and - while full-strength spirit sales did rise by 7per cent (according to Nicola Roxon this is a seasonal increase that also occurred last year) - there was a fall of 23 per cent in overall alcohol sales.

- A 13-page document, headed "Impact of the Rudd Government's alcohol taxation policy", based on an analysis of packaged liquor sales data collected by leading market research firm ACNielsen for corporate clients, shows there is a considerable decline of over 1.1million litres of pure alcohol consumed since the tax changes. With approximately 10ml of pure alcohol per standard drink this figure translates to 110 million less drinks consumed during this period.

- Sales of RTD's took off after the tax on them was decreased by 20% in the 2000 budget. The new tax is just bringing the tax back in line with pre 2000 levels.

- While increasing taxes has long been shown to be one of the most effective methods to reduce alcohol consumption, other measures are also needed. These Senators should use their influence to **also** get the government to hasten to implement other measures such as a hard-hitting educational campaign regarding alcohol consumption, banning alcohol advertising and sponsorship, putting graphic health warnings on all alcohol containers, reducing liquor outlets and hours of opening, reviewing all alcohol taxation, and limiting the alcohol content of alcopops to 3%.

Email addresses: Greens:

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Independents:

senator.fielding@aph.gov.au

Nick Xenophon and the other Greens Senators have online contact forms. Google "Parliament of Australia" and click on Senators' Home Pages.

Thank you for your support.

Anne Bergen
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