

# The last chance for a generation

Alcohol Law Reform in New Zealand 2012



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*“This may be the last chance for a generation to address the serious problems of abuse of alcohol.”*

Dame Silvia Cartwright,  
Submission to the Justice and Electoral Select Committee, February 2011

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# Foreword

This booklet was produced by Alcohol Healthwatch and the New Zealand Drug Foundation during 2012 as part of the *It's our turn to shout* campaign.

It is designed to present a range of perspectives documenting alcohol law reform during recent years by interviewing key players or observers about the progress of the Alcohol Reform Bill into law.

The nature and quality of liquor legislation can have an enormous impact upon society. For this reason the major review and reform of our alcohol laws, something that happens only once every 20 years, is seen by these two organisations and others as something momentous, significant and worth documenting.

We would like to express our thanks to all those who took part in interviews for generously giving us their time and their opinions.

We hope this booklet will be read into the future; perhaps it will be a useful resource in another 20 years when we go through this process yet again.



Rebecca Williams, Director  
Alcohol Healthwatch  
February 2013



Ross Bell, Executive Director  
New Zealand Drug Foundation  
February 2013



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# How did we get here?

Ross Bell, Executive Director  
The New Zealand Drug Foundation

*For the last two decades or more, communities have been paying in pain and blood for New Zealand's weak liquor laws. How has it come to this?*

We have been steadily liberalising legislation around alcohol for the last century but the most significant cause of our current woes was the Sale of Liquor Act 1989.

This legislation was intended to help transform our restaurant and café culture, turning New Zealand into a tourist haven where good food and alcohol were available 24 hours a day.

The number of outlets selling alcohol grew rapidly (more than doubling from 6296 in 1990 to 14,424 in 2010) and, unfortunately, it wasn't just the tourists who began taking advantage of increased availability. Little thought was given to the effects more outlets would have on

communities and no provision was made for communities to have a say over how many local licenses could be granted or where outlets were located.

The Sale of Liquor Act also allowed supermarkets to begin selling wine, and legislation during the 1990s went even further, allowing alcohol advertising back onto the television and lowering the purchase age from 20 to 18.

Alongside all this we have a largely unregulated and powerful alcohol industry that successfully lobbies politicians to protect its profits and tries to distract the population with arguments about personal responsibility and how you "can't change culture with legislation".

We let the industry monitor its own advertising and behaviour, which is an odd thing to do when the product is as potentially harmful as the profit-margins are potentially high. The industry may

*"Put this all together and we end up with a social environment that can't help but promote and normalise excessive drinking."*

have agreed not to promote such things as success with women or sport or to show people enjoying intoxication, but one look at the alcohol advertising on TV tells us they know how to push the boundaries to the very limits, if not beyond.

Put this all together and we end up with a social environment that can't help but promote and normalise excessive drinking. And, alcohol is everywhere we go and aggressively marketed as each company strives to increase its





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market share.

This drives prices down (beer as low as 67 cents per can), and drives pursuit of new products for new markets – think ready-mixed alcohol aimed at young girls.

The advertising is everywhere and includes sponsorship of sports and cultural events, social media, billboards etc. \$150 million is spent marketing alcohol each year in New Zealand.

So have we become a nation of drunks? Maybe that's an overstatement, but there's little doubt alcohol has become central to just about any social gathering. Can you remember the last time you went to a party or dinner and there was no alcohol present?

While many New Zealanders drink responsibly, it seems many also do not. More than 700,000 New Zealanders over 18 binge

drink. More than 120,000 New Zealanders currently suffer from a clinically diagnosable alcohol use disorder.

The social costs of the way New Zealanders drink are enormous. The burden on society of alcohol-related harm is estimated at \$5.3 billion a year.

But who can put a dollar figure on the misery, pain and loss many New Zealand families suffer as a result of excessive alcohol use in terms of family violence, relationship break-ups, personal tragedies and the loss of loved ones?

In recent years community and public health efforts have challenged consecutive governments to change aspects of the law, including lowering the legal alcohol limit for driving (we currently have one of the highest

*“The Law Commission received nearly 3000 submissions... The largest number ever received on a social issue in New Zealand.”*

legal limits at 0.08), restricting alcohol advertising and returning the purchase age to 20.

By 2008 a number of different Bills concerning alcohol were being reviewed and the government of the time commissioned the first major review of liquor laws in 20 years.

This review was undertaken by the Law Commission, an independent advisory body headed by Sir Geoffrey Palmer. The review aimed to examine all aspects

of the law concerning the sale and supply of liquor, and make recommendations to Parliament.

Following the 2008 general election the new National Government supported the Law Commission's review and brought the reporting timeframes forward. The Law Commission produced its final report, *Alcohol in Our Lives: Curbing the Harm*, in April 2010.

The report contained a 'mutually supportive package' of 153 recommendations covering issues relating to alcohol pricing, marketing, licensing, purchase age and sale and supply.

The Law Commission received nearly 3000 public submissions on the issue paper.

This was the largest number of submissions ever received on a social issue in New Zealand. In response to the Law Commission's report, the Government released its draft Alcohol Reform Bill and called for public submissions to the Justice and Electoral Select Committee. The Bill adopted, in full or in part, 126 of the 153 Law Commission recommendations. The Select Committee reported back in August 2011 and the redrafted Bill was supposed to be voted on in September 2012.

However, Government delays and a large number of amendments from politicians who believed the Bill was now too weak, the vote was delayed the vote considerably.

The Bill was eventually passed on 11 December 2012, with little fanfare because, essentially, it hadn't changed from what the Government originally proposed. The opposition just didn't have the numbers to have any influence.

Nearly 9000 public submissions were received by the Justice and Electoral Select Committee in response to the draft Alcohol Reform Bill.

The high number of submissions to both the Law Commission and the Select Committee suggest that, after decades of liberalisation, the tide of public opinion was shifting in favour of tighter control.

Such a comprehensive overhaul of our liquor laws is something that only happens once in a generation. So have we gone far enough or have we squandered an important opportunity?

There are some positives to the new legislation, including local alcohol policies for communities, that parents must consent to their kids being given alcohol, and a reduction in the number of places from which alcohol will be available; but the most important ways to reduce alcohol-related harm have remained neglected.

For instance, little was included that would address the low price of alcohol, long hours of availability, saturation advertising, the purchase age, or providing

*"Such a comprehensive overhaul of our liquor laws is something that only happens once in a generation."*

adequate treatment for people with alcohol problems.

The Government has left open the possibility of addressing minimum pricing and lowering the blood alcohol content for drivers in the future. Both are proven measures that will reduce alcohol-related harm. It would be good to see a concrete timeline for action on these issues.

It's a shame the opportunity to make a significant difference has come and gone.

It's taken us decades to develop our current harmful drinking culture, and that's not going to be reversed by the mere tinkering around the edges this new legislation amounts to.

Let's hope we can do better in 20 years' time.



# Alcohol snapshot 2012

These basic facts provide a snapshot of the drinking culture in New Zealand when the Alcohol Reform Bill became law in 2012.

Was it time for reform?



The alcohol industry's yearly marketing spend is around \$150,000,000.

Alcohol advertising is self-regulated.



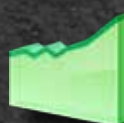
1000 New Zealanders die each year as a result of alcohol.

Alcohol is available 24/7 in most places.



A scene depicting alcohol occurs every nine minutes during prime time television.

In the last decade alcohol has become much more affordable relative to income.



The cost of alcohol-related harm is around \$4.4 billion a year.



Someone on the average wage earns enough to buy the alcohol needed to reach the legal driving limit in seven minutes.

275,000 adults set out to get drunk on their last drinking occasion.

60-70 percent of injury-based cases at emergency departments on weekends are thought to be alcohol-related.

More than 300 alcohol-related offences are committed every day.



Police estimate 100 people are charged with drink driving every day.

700,000 New Zealanders have been categorised as binge drinkers.

Our current blood alcohol content limit is 80mg per 100ml of blood. Australia's is 50mg.



1.2 million adult drinkers are okay with bingeing.











An adult man can drink a bottle of wine in 90 minutes and still legally be able to drive.



# ALCOHOL MILESTONES IN NEW

Acknowledgement: A form of this timeline first appeared in the New Zealand Drug Foundation's *Matters of Substance*, August 2012

 <p>Captain Cook brews beer flavoured with rimu leaves and bark, while harboured at Ship Cove in Queen Charlotte sound</p> <p>1770</p>	<p>First commercial brewery is established in Kororarereka/Russell</p> <p>1835</p>	 <p>First alcohol tax by British Colonial Secretary Lord Normandy (excludes beer)</p> <p>1839</p>	<p>First temperance movement meeting is held in the Bay of Islands</p> <p>1863</p>	<p>Licensing Act is passed, prohibiting the sale of liquor if two thirds of residents petitioned against sale</p> <p>1873</p>
<p>A 240,000 signature petition calling for prohibition is presented to Parliament</p> <p>1918</p>	 <p>Votes of 32,000 New Zealand soldiers returning from WWI stop the passage of prohibition</p> <p>1919</p>	<p>Workers in Greymouth boycott local pubs for four-and-a-half months after they raise the price of beer</p> <p>1947</p>	 <p>Arnold Nordmeyer's 'black budget' increases tax on beer</p> <p>1958</p>	 <p>Alcohol can be served with food in restaurants</p> <p>1961</p>
 <p>Number of off-licenses has almost doubled from 1989 levels</p> <p>1995</p>	<p>Alcohol purchase aged lowered to 18 years</p> <p>1999</p>	 <p>Supermarkets allowed to sell beer</p> <p>1999</p>	<p>'Sherry tax' is introduced by Economic Development Minister Jim Anderton, almost doubling the price of cheap but high alcohol drinks</p> <p>2003</p>	 <p>Labour Government asks the Law Commission to review liquor laws</p> <p>2007</p>

# ZEALAND



King Country Te Rohe Potae is declared a special Māori 'no-license' district (locals vote to restore licenses in 1954)

1884

Alcoholic Liquors Sale Control Act is passed, making licensing areas consistent with electorates and allowing for licensing polls to be held every election

1893

Masterton declares itself a dry zone and all pubs close (none reopen until 1946)

1909

Nationwide referendum held on prohibition of alcohol (56 percent vote in favour of prohibition, shy of the 60 percent needed for it to become law)

1911

A law forces pubs to close at 6pm as a temporary war-time measure (this remains for the next 50 years)

1917



Six o'clock swill ends with pubs opening until 10pm

1967

Drink drive blood limit of 100mg per 100mls introduced (lowered to 80mg in 1978)

1969



New Sale of Liquor Act liberalises liquor law (supermarkets can sell wine and 24/7 trading allowed)

1989



Broadcasting Standards Authority (BSA) is established, with one of its roles to review alcohol advertising

1989



BSA allows alcohol ads after 9pm in exchange for free airtime for alcohol health promotion

1992



Law Commission tables 153 recommendations for Parliament to change liquor laws

2010



Justice Minister Simon Power writes the Alcohol Reform Bill

2011

August: Government backs down on proposal to limit RTD alcohol content to 6 percent

2012



August: Parliament votes to leave the alcohol purchase age at 18 (68 votes for status quo; 53 back a return to 20)

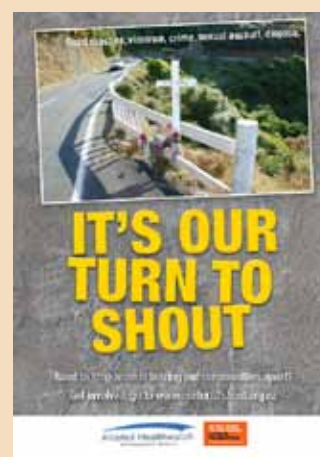
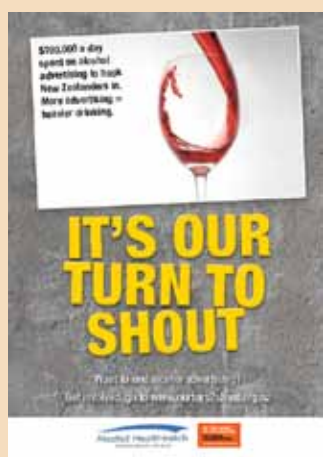
2012

December: Government passes the Alcohol Reform Bill. Critics say the legislation is weak and fails to address important issues such as marketing, price, availability and treatment

2012



# IT'S OUR TURN TO SHOUT



*It's our turn to shout* was an initiative launched early in 2010 by Alcohol Healthwatch and the New Zealand Drug Foundation to help individuals and communities have a strong voice in the alcohol law reform debate.

The Law Commission had just finished its review of New Zealand's liquor laws and Parliament was beginning to consider its recommendations. The idea was to send a clear message to New Zealand politicians and decision-makers that the public wanted effective and more sensible alcohol laws.

*It's our turn to shout* encouraged community groups to use their networks to motivate members and sought to give them the tools to be heard. We wanted

ordinary New Zealanders to know that they weren't alone in being concerned about the harm alcohol was doing society. By knowing there was a groundswell of public opinion towards reform, we hoped individuals and communities would be more motivated and confident in speaking out.

### The name

The name of the campaign reflected that we believed the public now needed to have the loudest voice to make sure it was heard above the alcohol industry which has had the most influence in shaping decisions about alcohol policy in the past.

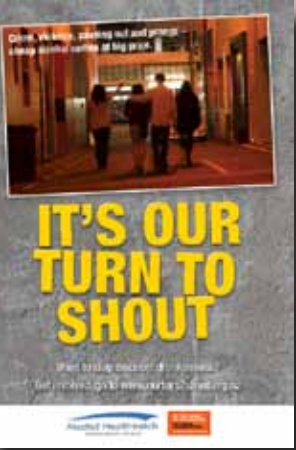
### What we did

The *Shout* team put together a large database of contact details

for groups and individuals and set up an online subscription form so others could join. We sent out regular pieces for newsletters and noticeboards and asked the groups to publish them or pass them on.

We also had a series of A5 posters designed that captured our main messages and highlighted the social damage caused by excessive alcohol use. These were printed and made freely available to anyone who wanted them.

We issued a number of media releases and opinion pieces about alcohol issues. These were usually published by newspapers, and we also put them on the *It's our turn to shout* blog – along with other guest articles written by concerned members. We also used Facebook and Twitter to encourage online



### Who was involved?

The core *Shout* team comprised Rebecca Williams (Alcohol Healthwatch), Ross Bell (New Zealand Drug Foundation) with Liz Price and Rob Zorn (Communiqué) in a secretariat role.

A Steering Group was also established to provide expertise to guide and inform *Shout* activities. The group consisted of:

- Matthew Allan (Alcohol Policy Advisor, Allan & Clarke)
- Sue Bradford (Political Advisor)
- Lynette Hutson (Addiction Programme Manager, Salvation Army)
- Mike Ikilei (Community Action on Youth and Drugs)
- Ross Henderson (Health Protection Advisor, Waikato District Health Board)
- Fergus Wheeler (Alcohol Action).

discussion and interest.

### Main messages

*Shout's* main message was that New Zealand needed to change its drinking environment and culture because the community is paying a terrible price for liberal alcohol laws. The focus was environmental – on the circumstances that contribute to alcohol abuse, public drunkenness and anti-social behaviours. It was never about blaming individuals.

Some specific targets included:

- the high number of liquor outlets
- the excessive marketing of alcohol
- the low cost of alcohol
- reducing the blood alcohol limit

- communities having a say on licenses
- increasing the availability of treatment for people with alcohol issues.

### Workshops and marches

The *Shout* campaign also took to the streets, helping with a march for alcohol reform in Manukau (in conjunction with Alcohol Healthwatch and other groups).

Up to 1000 people attended and heard from various politicians and speakers.

We also went on the road organising workshops for stakeholders on how to best use media opportunities and how to make submissions to the Select Committee. These were led by Drug Foundation Director Ross

Bell, media advisors Anna Kenna and Rob Zorn, and political advisor, ex-Green MP and activist Sue Bradford.

Workshops were held in Whangarei, Auckland, Waikato, Palmerston North, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin. Participants were informed about how the parliamentary process works and how to write an effective submission.

Role-plays were held to give stakeholders the skills and confidence to present effective oral presentations to select committees.

*It's our turn to shout* was wound up in July 2012 as, at that time, Parliament's second reading of the Alcohol Reform Bill was thought imminent.

# Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Palmer QC

*As President of the New Zealand Law Commission and having been the Minister instrumental in creating the Sale of Liquor Act 1989, Sir Geoffrey Palmer was well-suited to lead a review of New Zealand's liquor laws, as requested by the fifth Labour Government in 2007.*

In fact it was Sir Geoffrey himself who suggested to Prime Minister Helen Clark that the review should be done by the Law Commission.

"I think it was pretty clear to everyone there were deficiencies in the way the 1989 Act had worked out. It was just a question of how best to review the law to correct those deficiencies. Considering there were at least 14 different ministries or departments of state with a concern regarding alcohol, and that each of these had differing points of view that had to be reconciled, I thought an interdisciplinary team with a range of expertise was required.

"The Law Commission is like a Royal Commission in continuous session and it was the correct body to sort out the competing claims in this vexed area."

Sir Geoffrey says not everything about the 1989 Sale of Liquor Act was a failure and that it did help bring about a more sophisticated café and restaurant culture, something with which he is quite pleased. He points out the Act did not lower the purchasing age, and that it only allowed wine

On 30 July 2009 the Law Commission held a press conference to release *Alcohol in Our Lives*, its second of three reports on options for alcohol law reform.

This day also marked the start of the Law Commission's three-month public consultation to canvass the views of ordinary people.



Photo courtesy of Alastair Thompson – Scoop.co.nz



*“The idea the Law Commission’s recommendations have been adopted is not correct.”*

sales in supermarkets (beer in supermarkets and the purchasing age of 18 happened under the Shipley Government in 1999). However, he concedes the Act helped create a new market for the alcohol industry, which was eager to recruit new drinkers. Television advertising increased and there was a proliferation of new products aimed at new markets such as women and young adults.

“But perhaps the biggest problem with the Act,” Sir Geoffrey says, “is that it created a tendency to treat alcohol just like any other commodity, which increased our already pronounced tendencies towards binge drinking.

“And this tendency has worsened over time, firstly with the lowering of the purchase age, which I think was a disastrous decision, the consequences of which we are still reaping. Furthermore, the failure

of Parliament to change that this time around is something I think New Zealanders will live to regret, because it means the drinking culture migrates into lower and lower age groups. Now we get people of nine or ten going into stores and buying alcohol, and there are documented cases of that.”

*“In our report we included a number of fundamental points that we argued were part of an integrated package that could not be cherry-picked.”*

Sir Geoffrey says the Law Commission did a lot of research as it set about finding ways to redress the imbalances of 1989.

“Going in to this review we were much better off than we were in 1989. The amount of social science

research on alcohol is enormous compared with what it was then. In particular there were large amounts of worrying evidence on the health effects of alcohol on its consumers. Policy ought to be research-based. You ought to learn from empirical research about what the consequences of existing laws are and revise them in order to reduce the harm. It’s all about harm reduction.”

Sir Geoffrey said that, as part of the research, he and other Law Commission members and staff went out with police in various cities around the country as they dealt with the effects of excessive drinking.

“Going out with the police at midnight convinced me we were sitting on a social and health time bomb. People drink lots of alcohol cheaply at home before they go out and the scenes of chaos become very substantial.

It's a problem that imposes enormous costs on the tax payer with the amount of arrests and court appearances and associated difficulties.

"The police say it's the biggest problem they've got, that the amount of crime generated by excessive consumption of alcohol is palpable."

Sir Geoffrey says whether or not the new legislation could be called successful depends on how you perceive the purpose of the review.

The Law Commission saw the purpose as producing a harm reduction Act, but the Government's approach has been one of sale and supply, and the law, as enacted, takes a much more neutral approach to the problem than that contained in the Law Commission report.

"In our report we included a number of fundamental points that we argued were part of an integrated package that could not be cherry-picked.

"We said research showed increasing the price of alcohol through excise taxes would reduce consumption. Despite there being a wealth of evidence for this it was rejected.

"We said promotions should be regulated, especially those that increased consumption or purchase, and that New Zealand should move over time to regulate alcohol advertising and sponsorship. Neither of those things was done.

"We clearly recommended the purchase age be increased to 20 years, and that wasn't done either."

Sir Geoffrey says many of the recommendations that were accepted were softened and weakened. These included more stringent licensing provisions and

*"As the principal author of the report, I would have to say we've missed a considerable opportunity and I am left with the inevitable conclusion that these issues will have to be revisited."*

more local input into licensing decisions.

"So the idea the Law Commission's recommendations have been adopted is not correct. The Law Commission did a great deal of public consultation, so we felt our report represented where the public was at on these issues, but I think the views of ordinary people have not been reflected in the decisions taken.

"Now, of course, I can see why that may have occurred. The alcohol industry is a large industry with a lot of employees. And it is a very powerful lobbying group."

At the urging of then Minister of Justice Simon Power, the Law Commission produced its report a year ahead of schedule. Had its review gone the full term, a draft Bill would have been included as part of the report, and, Sir Geoffrey says, this would have made it much more difficult for the recommendations to have been 'slid off' in the way they were.

"As the principal author of the report, I would have to say we've missed a considerable opportunity and I am left with the inevitable conclusion that these issues will have to be revisited.

"But the difficulty is that policy making, especially on the issue of alcohol, is not rational. People tend not to look at the research, and

*"The timetable chosen reflects the lack of priority the Government has afforded the alcohol issue and, from where I sit, Parliament has let New Zealanders down."*

base their views on their personal experiences instead. That's not an effective way to make policy, but the politicians have made their decisions and will need to take responsibility for them.

"On a personal level, I'm disappointed. You go to the trouble and expense of a two-year review and reject its most significant recommendations. Then very few people read it, so the research and analysis get lost.

"Further, we produced the report in April 2010, in accordance with the speeded up timetable, and we're now well into 2013 and none of it, even in its more diluted form, is yet in force.

"The timetable chosen reflects the lack of priority the Government has afforded the alcohol issue and, from where I sit, Parliament has let New Zealanders down."

# The Reports

The Law Commission review produced a series of three reports.

## ***Alcohol legislation and the conscience vote (May 2009)***

The first report urged Parliament not to apply the conscience vote to alcohol Bills.

It said, due to alcohol's potential for harmful use, it needed to be treated with great seriousness. With conscience voting, outcomes are unpredictable and amendments more likely, leading to a statute that could "lack coherence and structural logic".

This recommendation was largely followed. Voting was party-based, except on the issue of increasing the purchasing age, which failed to pass.

## ***Alcohol in our lives (July 2009)***

The second report revealed the problems caused by alcohol that the Law Commission's research had encountered so far. It offered a range of options for dealing with these problems, but conceded submissions still needed to be received and consultations to take place.

## ***Alcohol in our lives: curbing the harm (April 2010)***

The final report set out the Law Commission's conclusions and made 153 recommendations to the Government on the sale, supply and consumption of alcohol in New Zealand.

The following quotes are from *Alcohol in our lives: curbing the harm*.

*"2015 out of 2939 submissions responded to questions about price and tax. Of these, 76 percent supported introducing a minimum pricing per unit of alcohol and 77 percent supported increasing levels of current excise tax on alcohol."* (page 52)

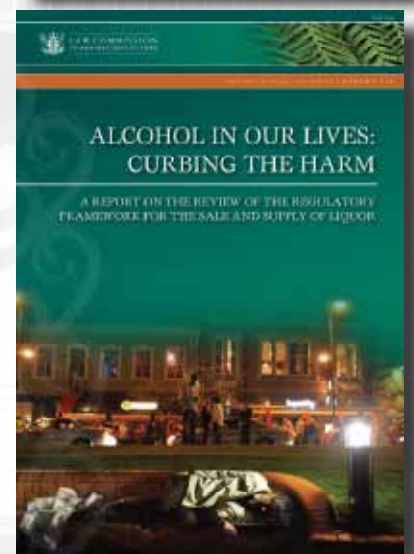
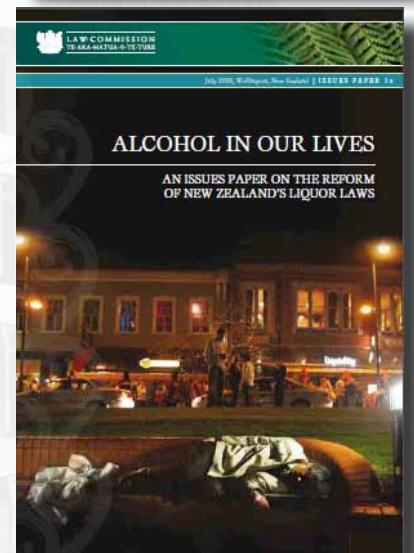
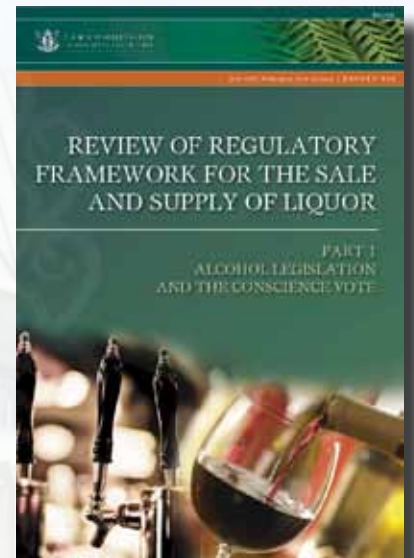
*"A wide array of evidence suggests that in response to an increase in prices... per capita consumption of ethanol falls. What's more, price increases reduce the prevalence of drinking, heavy drinking and bingeing, and appear to reduce the prevalence of dependence and abuse as well."* (page 289)

*"Alcohol is advertised on television and other media – indicating it's an ordinary consumer commodity just like any other. Alcohol is sold without a warning label – indicating it's totally harmless... Liquor companies sponsor sport – leisure activities symbolising health and vitality which are a fundamental component of Kiwi culture..."* (page 39)

*"The contradictory messages surrounding alcohol were raised repeatedly in consultations around the country. In Cannon's Creek, Porirua, a young mother asked: 'How can we tell our children that drinking can be harmful when the All Blacks have Steinlager on their chests?'"*

*"In Napier, a community worker asked: 'You tell us alcohol is causing all this harm and is carcinogenic but how can we expect young people to take this on board when they see that the whole adult world turns on it?'"*

*"In Masterton, a secondary school teacher commented: 'The key message the industry delivers to our children is that alcohol is the gateway to babes and good times.'"* (page 39)





# Hon Lianne Dalziel

Labour MP, Christchurch East  
Associate Opposition Spokesperson for Justice  
Associate Minister of Justice 2007-2008

*Hon Lianne Dalziel has long been a driving force behind alcohol law reform, but says, she didn't become involved for the reasons you might expect.*

"It was 2007 and Helen Clark had just done a complete Cabinet reshuffle. I had ended up with the Associate Justice role, and had become concerned with an anomaly in the Sale of Liquor Act which was forcing the owner of a prestigious wine company to complete a licensed premises' manager's qualification. It was a ridiculous situation that I wanted to change, so I asked to be in charge of the liquor portfolio.

"In that capacity I was invited to speak at an ALAC conference, so I started to do some research in preparation. I arranged to go out on patrol one evening in Christchurch, with Police Sergeant Al Lawn, the officer in charge of the Canterbury Police Alcohol Strategy and Enforcement Team, as well as Martin Ferguson with the District Licensing Authority.

"I was shocked to see how drinking had changed. It was like the hour of midnight had become a flashpoint when a new culture would emerge."

Ms Dalziel says in her younger days

people would drink at a bar in the evening, but things were more regulated and pubs had to close at 10 or 11pm. They might perhaps move on to a night club, which had to be closed by 3am at the latest. But now she says it's like people only come into town at midnight, already having consumed a lot of alcohol, and it's common to keep drinking and partying until daylight.

"Seeing this first-hand, and the amount of damage and degradation it causes, was a real eye-opener. I could see that the Sale of Liquor Act, which was supposed to usher in this culture of mature Kiwi drinkers, 'the café society', had in fact had quite the opposite effect."

She says there are at least three things that have helped push drinking to the level it's at today. The first is the way alcohol is advertised. It's promoted so aggressively, and deliberately targeted at specific demographics, such as young males, or new markets, such as women or even younger drinkers.

Second is the deception in the drinks themselves, specifically pre-mixed RTDs where the alcohol is hidden behind sugar and caffeine, which means people don't get to taste the alcohol and aren't aware

just how drunk they're getting and a lot of damage can result.

"I have a friend at Women's Refuge who says they should name a new police holding-cell after one of those drinks, because whenever there's an incident there's almost always a collection of this brand's empty cans lying around," Ms Dalziel says.

*"It was like the hour of midnight had become a flashpoint when a new culture would emerge."*

But she thinks the biggest contributing factors are price and availability. Alcohol is accessible 24 hours a day at discount prices and supermarkets have been driving down the price of wine and beer, which has impacted on the overall price, and fuelled pre-loading.

"So when the Government passed on significant alcohol law reform opportunities, the grocery industry's one of the ones laughing loudest.

"That's an important point. People think those opposing alcohol law reform are the alcohol or hospitality industries, but we also get a lot of opposition from other industries like marketing, where there's a huge alcohol spend, and even from the media because alcohol adver-



*“In 10 years’ time we are going to be wringing our hands as we look back at this Act, agonising over why we didn’t do more.”*

tising is so lucrative.”

Ms Dalziel thinks, the Government has indeed passed on taking up opportunities that may not arise again for a long time, and says it’s quite bewildering they’ve chosen to ignore popular opinion and the wealth of strong evidence in favour of reform.

“Effectively nothing has really been done to change or address the problem. In 10 years’ time we are going to be wringing our hands as we look back at this Act, agonising over why we didn’t do more.

“The failure to lower the blood-alcohol content limit for driving is just one of many examples. People are legally allowed to drive drunk in this country. It’s unacceptable, and the public seems very much in favour of lowering the limit, but the Government has completely left BAC levels out of the equation.”

She says the reason most often

given for not going further towards reform is that ordinary New Zealanders should not be penalised for the sake of those who are problem drinkers, but argues that we’re all already sharing the problem.

*“People often ask me why politicians won’t make change, and the answer is simple: we lack courage, and we always will until we are prepared to stand up to the powerful vested interests who control the agenda.”*

“We just pay the price in our taxes being spent on police, courts and hospitals. And then we complain when the police can’t attend to burglaries because they’re in town dealing with alcohol-fuelled violence. We complain about elective surgery being postponed

when emergency operations take precedence – some of them caused by drunk drivers.

“People say they don’t want their cities awash with drunken people who stagger around the streets and vomit in the gutter in the early hours of the morning – causing trouble or becoming the victims of crime; or their streets littered with broken bottles, or their letterboxes trashed in the wee small hours; and yet those very same people say, ‘Don’t take away my right to buy cheap alcohol in the most convenient way’. We cannot have it both ways.

“It’s an attitude we must address, but the Government is too scared to tackle it. People often ask me why politicians won’t make change, and the answer is simple: we lack courage, and we always will until we are prepared to stand up to the powerful vested interests who control the agenda.”

# Hon Chester Borrows

National MP for Whanganui

Minister for Courts, Associate Minister of Justice,

Associate Minister for Social Development

Former Chair of the Justice and Electoral Select Committee

*Associate Minister of Justice Hon Chester Borrows, who chaired the Justice and Electoral Select Committee's oversight of the Alcohol Reform Bill, says a few things about the Bill that really stood out. The first was a virtually unprecedented amount of public interest.*

"The only other Bill I could compare it to would be the one to repeal Section 59 of the Crimes

Act which set out to abolish the right to use force when disciplining children," he says.

"However, with Section 59 the weight of public reaction was towards keeping the status quo. Submissions on the Alcohol Reform Bill overwhelmingly indicated there was a real public mood for change."

What was especially interesting about the Bill's huge traction,

he says, is that it ran counter to everything that's happened before. For the last 80 years New Zealand has been liberalising its liquor laws. This is the first time we've set about constraining them.

"I think that reaction took a lot of my colleagues in Parliament by surprise. Politicians have generally sensed a public warmth towards liberalising alcohol laws, and have wanted to avoid coming across as



**In memory of  
the thousands...**

Minister Borrows says a thought-provoking gift he received as Chair of the Justice and Electoral Select Committee is a beer bottle made out of solid granite.

"It's very heavy, and meant to represent the weighty decisions we have to make regarding alcohol."

The bottle bears the inscription:

*In memory of the thousands of New Zealanders who lost their lives, childhood, safety, health, wellbeing, security and family... to the bottle.*



*“You know, we’ve actually acted positively on the majority of the recommendations, and every action we take will be a positive step forward.”*

wowers.

“But it seems we’ve gone past that now, and the pendulum has swung back.”

The Select Committee received submissions from just about every segment of society. Some were well-informed, such as the one by Dr Paul Quigley from the emergency department at Wellington Hospital.

“He’s at the sharp end of the problem, and sees, better and more often than most, the problems alcohol causes.”

But Minister Borrows says the most compelling were the pleas from so many communities wanting better local control over where and how alcohol is sold and supplied.

And there were any number of anecdotal submissions from families and individuals about the havoc alcohol misuse can wreak

in people’s lives. These were often quite moving but, unfortunately, he says, you can’t make laws on the basis of people’s tragic stories.

On the other hand, some anecdotes can present real challenges to how to write the law.

“For example, it’s logical that revoking alcohol licenses for convenience stores would reduce access to alcohol, and therefore alcohol misuse. However, what about that small town where there’s a single store that sells general and farming goods, and the guy is running a small bottle store on the side. There’s good reason not to interfere with this. Revoking his license would mean people for miles around would no longer have access to alcohol. And that’s just one anomaly.

“The same goes for small boutique cafes that sell quality imported beers, for example, alongside gourmet food. You’d have to

revoke their licenses too, but they’re not contributing to the problem. There aren’t teenagers popping in to get pissed on cheap booze because everything they sell is expensive.”

The Minister is well aware of criticisms levelled at the National Government for not having acted on all the Law Commission’s recommendations, but says he’d like to see people concentrate more on what has been achieved.

“You know, we’ve actually acted positively on the majority of the recommendations, and every action we take will be a positive step forward.

“People also need to remember this is the first time in 80 years that we’ve tried to take a step backwards with regards to alcohol law. We didn’t liberalise alcohol laws overnight, and the pendulum won’t swing all the way back in one hit either.”

# Bruce Robertson

CEO, Hospitality NZ

*Hospitality NZ CEO Bruce Robertson says he feels a bit like the lone voice of reason amidst all the hype around alcohol reform.*

He doesn't deny there are some serious problems with alcohol abuse in New Zealand, but says the whole issue has been sensationalised by the media, leading us to believe things are much worse than they are in reality

"Media exposure has really exacerbated the sense that excessive drinking is wreaking all this havoc, but it's really no worse than it's been in the past.

"The facts are we have fewer under-18s drinking now than we

did 20 years ago and, despite the number of alcohol outlets having almost trebled in the last 20 years, data shows there's been no corresponding increase in sales.

"So we're actually not drinking more these days, but there's nothing shocking about that so you won't hear the media reporting it."

However, Bruce concedes there have been changes to the way some of us are drinking. He says the notion of going out or buying booze with the express purpose of getting drunk is a reasonably new thing, and he lays a large part of the blame for that on cheap alcohol available at supermarkets.

He points out that consumption at licensed premises has dropped

in the last 20 years from 40 percent down to just 25 percent of sales because pubs and bars can't compete with supermarkets' ability to absorb or avoid tax or wholesale price increases. This means there is much more unsupervised drinking happening today than ever before.

"This is why it makes no sense for the new legislation to target on-license premises. We're much better off having people drink in environments where there's a responsible bar manager in charge, and the vast majority of them are just that.

"But now they face increased restrictions and penalties that will make it even harder for them to operate. They only have 25 percent market share right now, so how much difference can concentrating on them really be expected to make?"

Bruce agrees getting alcohol out of supermarkets is now probably a bridge too far but says Hospitality NZ's suggestion about minimum alcohol pricing has largely been ignored. He says minimum pricing would help restore a balance of power by preventing supermarkets from selling alcohol at bargain prices and make drinking to get drunk a less likely option,



*“The whole alcohol law reform debate has been very academic and philosophical, and it’s quite naïve to think you’re going to change society with legislation and without addressing personal responsibility.”*



especially for young people.

He says Hospitality NZ made a number of other suggestions to the Law Commission review that have also gone unheeded.

“We suggested that if alcohol is bad for the brain development of minors, as the science seems to indicate, then why not introduce a minimum drinking age? If it’s an offence for people under 18 to drink, parents would find it much easier to say no to their children, and their kids wouldn’t be harmed by drinking when they’re too young.”

Bruce is all for communities having more say in what goes on within and around them, but he thinks the way the new legislation ‘abdicates’ power to local authorities could have some unfortunate consequences.

“Basically, you’re going to have these little committees deciding on

licensing, and the risk is they’ll get captured by rampant evangelistic wowsers who could effectively hurt legitimate businesses that are actually good for the community.

“The other danger is lack of consistency. If you have each local authority doing its own thing in terms of licenses and opening hours there’s going to be a lot of confusion for patrons.”

But perhaps Bruce’s biggest frustration is that he doesn’t think the Law Commission report, the new legislation, or any of those calling loudest for reform give sufficient weight to personal responsibility.

For example, Hospitality NZ has said that if we’re concerned about behavioural change and sending a message that excessive drinking is not okay, then we should reinstate the offence of being drunk in public.

*“Basically, you’re going to have these little committees deciding on licensing, and the risk is they’ll get captured by rampant evangelistic wowsers...”*

“The whole alcohol law reform debate has been very academic and philosophical, and it’s quite naïve to think you’re going to change society with legislation and without addressing personal responsibility,” he says.

“Instead of concentrating on what will actually work, we’ve opted for making hard-working licensees the easy target and nothing is really going to change as a result.”

# Doug Sellman

Director, National Addiction Centre  
University of Otago, Christchurch

*In 2009 a group of academics, namely Doug Sellman and Jennie Connor from the University of Otago and Capital & Coast DHB Chief Medical Officer Geoff Robinson, established Alcohol Action NZ (AANZ).*

AANZ was an initiative in response to the growing national alcohol crisis. The group was convinced by the evidence that Government-led alcohol law reform is key to reducing alcohol-related harm.

“Over the past 20 years Government has allowed the alcohol industry immense freedom to market and sell a Class B equivalent drug 24 hours a day and advertise it on national television. At the same time the industry has tried to absolve itself of all responsibility for the problems caused by alcohol by blaming them on a fantasy ‘irresponsible minority’, Doug says.

“Education campaigns have very little effect and the hope that individuals will spontaneously begin to act more responsibly is just wishful thinking.”

To nationally launch AANZ, Doug went on sabbatical and took to the road with a series of lectures entitled *Ten things the alcohol industry won't tell you about alcohol*. He toured from Kaitaia to Invercargill sharing the alcohol industry's secrets and encouraging the public to start their own Alcohol Action initiatives in support of alcohol law reform.

“We wanted to focus the lecture series on the industry because we knew it was a major barrier to effective change,” Doug says.

The lecture series title was chosen to draw attention to the deception he says the industry perpetuates about its product.

“We're led to believe alcohol is

glamorous, but there's complete silence about its realities, for example the aggressogenic, neurotoxic and carcinogenic nature of alcohol, and then there's the industry's dubious business practices, such as targeting young people.

“From the outset we knew we were on a collision course with the industry. Their own internal documents show they see alcohol reform as a major threat, specifically through tax increases, advertising restrictions, health warnings, lowering blood alcohol concentrations for driving, sales restrictions and increasing the legal drinking age.”

It's not surprising that these are virtually the same elements that make up AANZ's *5+Solution*, which is based on international evidence on what works in terms of alcohol reform according to the World Health Organization's publication *Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity*.

Doug delivered the lecture 43 times in 30 different cities with nearly 5000 people attending. As a result AANZ grew to having 40 active network members and a mailing list of around 4000 supporters.

Doug can think of a few reasons AANZ has been so successful in engaging public support.

## **THE 5 + SOLUTION**

- 1. Raise alcohol prices.**
  - 2. Raise the purchase age.**
  - 3. Reduce alcohol accessibility.**
  - 4. Reduce advertising and sponsorship.**
  - 5. Increase drink-driving countermeasures.**
- PLUS: Increase treatment opportunities for heavy drinkers.**





*“The industry has tried to absolve itself of all responsibility for the problems caused by alcohol by blaming them on a fantasy ‘irresponsible minority’.”*

“First, the name has been good, and that was Jennie’s idea. Alcohol Action sounds like something positive is going to happen rather than that you’re just a group that talks about the problem.

“Also, working alongside the Law Commission’s review of alcohol legislation worked well. Being government-initiated, the review generated an enormous amount of momentum and publicity, and we just got into the slipstream.

“Being academics, we would normally have seen media relations as a relatively low priority or avoided them completely, but we were determined to use the media to help get the nation’s attention. We spent a lot of time contacting the media, issuing releases and generally being available.

“As senior academics we were able to build a reputation for scientific

integrity. We made sure scientific evidence underpinned everything we said, and that helped us to be taken seriously.”

Doug has also learned a few other significant things.

“It’s important to be a part of a team that enjoys spending time together, as well as being well-supported at home. It can be tough when you’re weathering verbal abuse from the industry, being called a lunatic, a wowsler or an extremist.

“Another thing I value is the big picture perspective and the well-known Churchillian exhortation: ‘Never, never, never give up’. Just because you have a good idea doesn’t mean you can influence the public discourse.

“The trick is to work hard, make your ideas clear and communicate them strongly. Often good ideas have to be repeated a thousand

*“The Government has allowed the alcohol industry to market and sell a Class B equivalent drug 24 hours a day.”*

times by multiple sources to change the system.”

Doug is very disappointed with the extent to which the new legislation has addressed the issues so far, but remains optimistic.

“Despite this current government’s determination to please their alcohol industry masters and pass an Alcohol NON-Reform Bill, the public has been aroused and three-quarters of New Zealanders want strong alcohol reform. That degree of support will inevitably drive effective change to New Zealand’s damaging drinking culture.”



# How we see things from our front gate

*In 2011, Russell School became the centre for one small neighbourhood's battle. Its success in reducing harm from a poorly managed local liquor store shows what can be achieved when communities engage and mobilise.*

***The presence of Fantame Liquor almost right across the road from Russell School in Cannon's Creek as long been a source of concern for parents and the Board of Trustees.***

Principal Sose Annandale says the store was open until midnight most days and people would come from all over wider Wellington because it was the only place selling alcohol that late.

"They would hang around into the wee small hours and the school grounds became the obvious place to drink. In the morning there would be cans half full of alcohol

in the playground that kids could find, and there would frequently be broken bottles, smashed windows and other vandalism.

"But even during school hours people would come onto the grounds intoxicated or carrying boxes of alcohol they'd just purchased. One person even urinated in the playground while kids were being taught physical education."

Damage at the school costs the taxpayer about \$60,000 a year, but it's the dangers to the pupils that are most alarming and these include the normalising effects of

the shop's marketing on them.

Board of Trustees Chair Matt Crawshaw says Fantame Liquor's advertising was very aggressive, especially around ready-mixed drinks.

"The shop front was completely plastered with colourful posters and there would sandwich boards all over the footpath extolling the virtues of alcopops."

"Teachers walking kids to swimming lessons would hear them talking about how 'yum' the drinks looked and saying which ones they'd tried. These are primary school kids!"

When Fantame Liquor's off-license renewal was due in August 2011, the school community saw it as an ideal opportunity. If they couldn't have the store shut down, perhaps at least they could have its hours curtailed.

## **What they did**

Matt and others formed a core stakeholder group and began upskilling themselves to effectively oppose the license renewal. They attended some workshops by the It's our turn to shout campaign about how to come across well in the media and how best to write a submission.



*Matt Crawshaw and Sose Annandale*



*Thirsty Liquor, previously Fantame Liquor, is virtually right across the road from Russell School.*

The group decided to hold a public meeting for all those concerned to help bring about a collective 'show of force'. They knocked on doors throughout the neighbourhood inviting people to the meeting and delivered flyers to about 1000 households.

"So many people I spoke to had stories about the damage being done through the store's bad management. This showed we were on the right course, that the community was eager for a chance to speak up," Matt says.

Sixty people attended the initial meeting which is a lot for such a small community. At the meeting real effort went into educating people about how to make a good submission to the District Licensing Authority, and templates were given to those who needed them. All in all they managed to get 88 objections launched against the renewal.

Following advice from

organisations like the Drug Foundation, ALAC and Regional Public Health, members of the group sat outside the store until midnight a few times so they would have personal eye-witness accounts of the sorts of things that happened.

They studied the relevant legislation and did some research to see whether the proprietor was of sufficient good character to hold a liquor license. It turned out the store had twice been caught selling alcohol to minors and had already been sanctioned for excessive advertising.

The school community also made submissions to both the Law Commission review and the Justice and Electoral Select Committee. These focused mainly on the harmful effects of having a liquor outlet so close to a school and were themed, 'How we see things from our front gate'.

"We wanted to get our point

*"...Talking about how 'yum' the drinks looked and saying which ones they'd tried. These are primary school kids!"*

across that this is not the sort of community we want for our kids, where excessive drinking is seen as normal and they have to wake up every day with cans stacked on their lawn," Matt says.

#### **What happened**

What happened at the November hearing came as a devastating blow. Halfway through proceedings it was discovered the proprietor was illegally operating his liquor outlet and grocery store under the same license, so the hearing was adjourned before the community had a chance to have any say.

It took more than five months to get a second hearing. In the meantime, the store's lawyers



*Fantame Liquor becomes Thirsty Liquor and aggressive marketing is removed just before the first hearing. Matt suspects joining the Thirsty Liquor franchise was a ploy to convince the authority the store could be trusted*

got the legal situation sorted and Fantame Liquor began trading again as normal. It did, however, remove its aggressive advertising and rebranded under the Thirsty Liquor franchise (which Matt finds a powerfully unfortunate statement – associating alcohol with thirst, right across the road from the school).

“The hearing result was really bewildering and we felt completely deflated,” Matt says.

“The store was acting illegally, yet it got to carry on while the community had to wait. The whole legal process felt hostile and our little community just felt it had been slapped down and ignored yet again.”

The community also found the second hearing in early May 2012 intimidating. They were not allowed to speak to their submissions or address any new matters that had arisen, yet it seemed the proprietor’s lawyers could speak all day. They came away very despondent – thinking no one was listening and that nothing was going to change.

But the result showed they had indeed been heard and the community was elated. Its license was renewed but Fantame Liquor’s closing times were restricted to 8pm Monday-Friday, 9pm on Saturday, and 6pm on Sunday. It

now also has to shut 2.45-3.15 pm on weekdays to protect pupils travelling home from school.

Presiding judge John Hole said here was considerable evidence of bad management at the store leading to liquor abuse.

Principal Sose Annandale says the findings were a really important statement to the community.

“It seems like things have been righted. Now the bottle store has to shut in deference to the school, rather than the school having to defend itself against the bottle store.”

Matt, who lives near the school, says the vibe of the whole neighbourhood is now much better.

“You can walk down the street at 8pm and not feel threatened. There’s this huge sense of peacefulness now, like there should be, and people comment about it all the time.”

But the Fantame success was not the first for the Porirua community. In 2008 an application was filed to open another bottle store in Cannon’s Creek, directly opposite another primary school and just 500 metres from another bottle store. The community collected signatures and organised a well attended march on the day the application was heard. Overwhelmed by the public

opposition, the judge denied the application and the store never opened.

*“There’s this feeling now that, whatever comes our way, we’re ready for it.”*

Jenny Lester, Chair of the Porirua Alcohol and Drug Cluster which organised the march, said these two instances have had a significant positive influence at a local level.

“First of all it’s like people have become very aware. They realise now that alcohol abuse is something that affects the whole community; not just the school or those involved with the violence.

“But, they’ve also seen that it is worth standing up for what you believe in, and that things really can change when communities act with a united will.”

Matt Crawshaw agrees the initiatives have resulted in some real community building.

“There’s this feeling now that, whatever comes our way, we’re ready for it.

“We can’t wait for May when Thirsty Liquor’s annual license renewal comes up, and we’re already talking about what sort of shop should replace it.”



# Marching in Manukau

Rebecca Williams, Director  
Alcohol Healthwatch

*In August 2010 as many as 1000 people braved the wintry weather to attend a march in Manukau calling for alcohol law reform.*

The public march and rally was organised by the Manukau Alcohol Action Group (MAAG), The Salvation Army and other concerned individuals.

MAAG Co-ordinator, Alcohol Healthwatch Director Rebecca Williams, says the community efforts became more co-ordinated following a lecture by Professor

Doug Sellman of the National Addictions Centre, who spoke about the 10 things the industry doesn't want the public to know about alcohol in Manukau as part of a nationwide tour.

"At his presentation Professor Sellman encouraged communities to form alcohol action groups, and some of those attending went on to form the Manukau Alcohol Action Group (MAAG).

"We were looking for ways through which the public could demonstrate their concerns about

*"New Zealanders love a good march, and there's no better way of uniting the public to express concern in a highly visible way."*

alcohol and express their desire for reform. We co-ordinated with The Salvation Army, who were thinking the same way, and decided to hold a march.

“It’s important to identify key local groups or members in an initiative like this. Find people in your area who have a common interest and invite their participation in your event and planning processes.

*“There’s a lot more to organising a successful march than one might expect.”*

“Leadership is also really important. While local involvement is essential, you need people with the expertise to handle media and frame arguments to fit the purpose you are trying to achieve.”

Rebecca says there’s a lot more to organising a successful march than one might expect.

“The first thing we did was develop an action plan. One of the first tasks was to communicate with the police and council. We wanted to be open and clear from the very beginning about what we were planning, and we asked about what permissions were needed and sought their advice about how to hold the march safely. We found both the council and the police

very helpful and supportive.

“We needed to book venues, advertise and promote the march, organise security, figure out the time and place and plan the route. There were so many logistics, and we were running on a shoestring budget. Thankfully, we received a lot of help. Friendship House, for example, opened up on a Sunday so we could use one of their rooms as a hospitality centre.”

A significant challenge was publicising the march. Without the money to launch an advertising campaign, informing the public and getting people to commit to the march was no easy task. Organising committee members worked with their local community organisations, mobilising their networks to generate a crowd. They also contacted the local Manukau Courier, which ran a number of community notices about the march, and even featured the upcoming march on their front page.

The team used Alcohol Healthwatch, The Salvation Army and others’ media contacts to get a couple of media releases out and each political party was invited to speak, which served as another ‘attention-grabber’ for the media.

Politicians who spoke included then Labour Leader Phil Goff,



Green MP David Clendon and National MP Dr Paul Hutchinson. Guest speakers included Professor Doug Sellman and Major Campbell Roberts of the Salvation Army. But, of course, having speakers meant they also had to hire a stage and organise power and sound.

“Despite only having a very small budget, we had a pretty incredible media turnout,” Rebecca says.

“The march featured on the news on TV1, TV3 and Radio New Zealand, and we got into most of the major newspapers. That level





of coverage helped convey the message to New Zealanders that if they think alcohol laws have become too liberal, they're not alone and they should speak up."

*"Several hundred to 1000 people mobilised to express their desire for alcohol law reform."*

A few days before the march, the organising committee got together to make signs for marchers who didn't have their own, and to make sure the key messages they

wanted to express were really visible. A large banner was printed that read: 'ALCOHOL LAW REFORM NOW!' – the slogan for the march.

On the day of the march the weather was pretty cold and miserable, but anywhere from several hundred to 1000 people mobilised to express their desire for alcohol law reform.

More than 30 Māori wardens also attended to provide security, guide people along the route and make sure of everyone's safety.

Rebecca says the whole day went

reasonably smoothly because of the action plan they'd made and the hard work of group members and their community networks.

"New Zealanders love a good march, and there's no better way of uniting the public to express concern in a highly visible way.

"It's a lot of work and there's much to organise, but it's highly effective if you get it right."



# Gerard Vaughan

ALAC Chief Executive 2007-2012

*ALAC was formed in 1976 as an autonomous Crown entity to provide evidence-based advice to Government and other parties about reducing alcohol harm.*<sup>1</sup>

"I think ours was quite an important contribution to the law reform process, particularly because of our autonomous voice. There was no benefit to us from the policies we formed, other than that they would reduce harm," ALAC's last CEO Gerard Vaughan explains.

"Our positions did at times create tensions with different groups, but that comes with the territory. Even so I think most acknowledged the value of having advice and research from an organisation like ALAC widely available."

In the very early stages of the law reform ALAC's main focus was

on encouraging public discussion around the problem of alcohol and its potential solutions. This included informing all major players within the alcohol-reform debate about research findings on things like drinking patterns, pricing, marketing and density of alcohol outlets – and their relationship to harm.

ALAC was also active in the alcohol policy debate before the current reforms began, particularly during the 2005 introduction of Labour's Sale of Liquor (Youth Alcohol Harm Reduction) Amendment Bill which sought to raise the purchasing age to 20 and strengthen provisions around supplying alcohol to minors. At the same time George Hawkins' Private Member's Bill proposed introducing community say and social impact as part of

*"If the thought is that this is it for the next 20 years, then, yeah, we really have missed that 'once in a generation' opportunity."*

the application process for liquor licences, and community problems such as those faced by Russell School (see pages 24-26) began hitting the media spotlight.

"ALAC's view at this time was that, although important, there was much more to New Zealand's alcohol problem than just youth drinking and community say," Gerard says.

"We believed in a broad package of reforms that would work together, and we thought issues like marketing, and particularly pricing, needed much more attention."

The ALAC produced series of controversial television advertisements also helped increase awareness and debate about alcohol. They included one where a drunken Uncle Mark accidentally swings a young boy into a wall and another which ominously suggests intoxicated Lisa was about to be sexually molested in an alley.



ALAC's Uncle Mark



“They were not pleasant ads and there was a bit of an uproar from some about the content, but I think they were successful in waking people up to the real and widespread consequences of the way many New Zealanders were drinking,” Gerard says.

ALAC’s media profile increased with Gerard often doing three or four interviews a day about the wider social problems associated with alcohol. It was a busy but successful time.

“It was great to see how the media picked up on the issues. They weren’t just reactively reporting on alcohol stories following incidents, they actually began to take a proactive interest in alcohol, seeking a broader range of stories and digging deeper into the problem and perspectives on solutions.”

With greater media interest, public debate gained momentum. Opportunities for ALAC to provide

advice increased as interest groups and communities impacted by alcohol harm began asking more questions about the nature of the problem and its solutions. This was also an opportunity for ALAC to work closely with the Law Commission review, putting it in contact with the wide range of people, groups and communities it wanted to hear from.

With debate now chugging along under its own steam, ALAC was able to spend more time meeting with MPs and staff from Government departments like the Ministry of Justice, helping them “get their heads around the issues”.

Gerard thinks that whether the new alcohol legislation is a success or a failure depends on whether it’s seen as the beginning or the

end of the process.

“After more than 20 years of liberalising, it’s hard to introduce all the needed restrictions at once. People get used to things like being able to buy alcohol cheaply and whenever they want, and it takes time to bring in extended change. So there’s still a lot to be done to get the right mix of laws on issues like marketing and pricing.

“But there are many positives to the new legislation, especially the community oriented aspects, so it’s a good first step. If the understanding is there are more changes to come, then there’s been a measure of success. But if we think this is basically it for the next 20 years, then, yeah, we really have missed that ‘once in a generation’ opportunity.”

*1. In July 2012, the functions of ALAC, along with those of the Health Sponsorship Council and other services delivered by the Ministry of Health, were combined under the new Crown Entity, the Health Promotion Agency.*



"Before, the ones who came to ED were just the ones who didn't have tolerance. It was often just the weaker one who falls over. But now, they intended to get smashed, to get wasted. Now getting drunk is their goal."

Wellington ED Doctor Paul Quigley to *Newswire*, March 2012

"Every time it goes down to the politicians, they seem to get cold feet."

Alcohol Healthwatch Director  
Rebecca Williams, *Close Up*, May 2012

"Unless a comprehensive approach is taken to addressing the problems that alcohol poses for New Zealand society, those problems will not be solved."

Sir Geoffrey Palmer, address to ALAC Conference, May 2010

"Alcohol is destroying our community. I work with families, and we can see the damage to them, to their children and to the wider community. I see it in the courts, the hospitals, the family violence."

A community worker in Otago speaks out at a consultation meeting with the Law Commission, 2010

"Current BAC limits are 'ridiculous'."

Minister of Transport Hon Steven Joyce speaking to a Local Authority Traffic Institute conference in Auckland, September 2009

"As a former MP, I know how powerful the alcohol lobby can be – the fridge in my office was constantly full of free beer."

Deborah Coddington,  
*New Zealand Herald*, May 2010

"At the Lion Red fishing contest... you see like slaughtered people, absolutely trolleyed, and it's just awesome!"

(Mark, 15-years-old)

"If we really want to change our drinking culture, we need to address the environment in which our young people are continually bombarded by sophisticated marketing messages that blatantly associate alcohol with social, sporting and sexual success and encourage heavy consumption."

New Zealand Drug Foundation, 2011

*“This may be the last chance for a generation to address the serious problems of abuse of alcohol.”*

Dame Silvia Cartwright,  
Submission to the Justice and Electoral Select Committee, February 2011

  
Alcohol Healthwatch  
Whakatūpato Waipiro



**AT THE HEART  
OF THE MATTER,  
NZ DRUG  
FOUNDATION.**

Te Tūāpapa Tarukino o Aotearoa