Report: Community wishes overshadowed by alcohol industry power

Alcohol Healthwatch media release, 15 December 2016

New liquor laws promising increased community control over the sale of alcohol have been overshadowed by the powerful influence of the alcohol industry, according to a new report.

A central feature of the Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act 2012 allows each local Council to develop its own Local Alcohol Policy (LAP), addressing community concerns relating to the location and number of alcohol outlets, as well as their trading hours.

But an Alcohol Healthwatch report by researcher Dr Nicki Jackson, released today, shows that the Act has delivered very little in terms of increased community control.

The report found that, as at July 2016, 19 of the 67 local councils in New Zealand were yet to develop policies. Of the 31 policies which had reached the Provisional stage, the alcohol industry appealed all but one.

“Legal appeals of the policies by the alcohol industry have resulted in significant compromises being made by local councils,” says Dr Jackson.

“In many instances, the appeals resulted in the removal of effective strategies to reduce alcohol-related harm or they were watered down to the point where they have little hope of making any real difference”.

Dr Jackson said it was very clear in the council documents she researched that communities wanted stronger restrictions on where and when alcohol could be sold.

The review also found that local councils were entering into negotiations with appellants prior to appeal hearings, and that this was also resulting in policies becoming less restrictive.

“This is particularly devastating for communities who have fought so hard, and for so long, to address alcohol-related harm,” says Dr Jackson.

The report found that none of the 19 policies which had been adopted contained measures which would reduce the existing number of alcohol outlets. Dr Jackson believes that the lack of controls is likely to compound existing differences in alcohol-related harm across communities.

“In particular this is sad news for Māori, Pacific peoples and those of low income because these groups suffer the greatest harm from living in communities with high numbers of alcohol outlets.”

Alcohol Healthwatch Director Rebecca Williams says policy processes are being hijacked by those who are better resourced and who are driven by a commercial imperative.

“These policies were aimed at reducing availability of alcohol and improving community input into local level decision-making on alcohol. Clearly Local Alcohol Policy processes need to be reviewed to ensure that the objectives and intentions of the Act are fulfilled.”

The report, *A review of Territorial Authority progress towards Local Alcohol Policy development*, is available on the Alcohol Healthwatch website at:
<http://www.ahw.org.nz/resources/Documents-other/2016/LAPReport_FinalWEB%202016.pdf>

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