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## Presentation to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into strategies to reduce alcohol abuse amongst young people in NSW

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee. I am here today representing the workers, volunteers and committee members of Byron Youth Service and the young people in our community. I am accompanied by Deborah Pearse – a BYS youth worker with 13 years experience working with young people in our community on alcohol-related programs and issues. Deb has worked almost every Friday in Byron Bay during that time - on our street-based early intervention program Street Cruise.

I am here as an advocate for the safety, health and wellbeing of children and young people in our community. Five young Australians die each week as a result of alcohol-related causes – which are largely preventable....and 3.8 billion dollars is spent on ARH – making this is a social issue which we need to address immediately.

I would like to present what we believe are the top strategies to reduce alcohol related harm amongst young people:

### **1. Alcohol advertising and promotion.**

We believe there should be a total ban on alcohol advertising in spaces and places occupied by young people – especially children and young people under 18 years of age. This includes during family focused sporting and cultural events, on TV during their prime viewing times, and throughout social media sites that young people frequent.

The current self regulation of advertising and promotional activities by the liquor Industry through the Australian Beverage Advertising Code is totally unacceptable. This has been demonstrated over and over again by the Alcohol Advertising Review Board which has determined in its first year that 104 out of 152 complaints breached their standards – which have been developed with the safety of young people in mind.

I'd like to acknowledge that the recently developed OLGR Liquor Promotion guidelines are a good step forward however they are, from what I gather, principles in nature and not law. The process for making complaints about alcohol advertising and promotion in NSW is not promoted or understood by community members and is not easily accessed or understood via the OLGR website. So as a result I have limited confidence in the Venue Self Compliance process in relation to the Liquor Promotion Guidelines.

I believe OLGR issued seven 'written directions' to 6 local licensees however the results are unclear six months later. The process and outcomes have not been made public, and this is what is also of concern to community members and organizations.

Advertising and promotional activities have a powerful effect on young people and their cultural and behavioural approach to alcohol use. Alcohol use is way too often

glamorized and glorified in all areas of our community – at sporting events, music festivals, and widely through internet based social media platforms.

Academics such as Professor Sandra Jones have established that point of sale promotional activities such as multi-buys and heavily discounted products encourage overconsumption. The big alcohol retailers use these strategies without thought to the effects on the health and wellbeing of young people....resulting in binge drinking, trauma associated with domestic violence

Members of the Byron local liquor accord have avoluntary agreement to not sell goon sacks – four and five litres casks of alcohol – in Byron Bay and I would like to acknowledge this as a positive strategy to reduce rapid intox by young people. We'd like to see them also review their in house promotions to ensure they are not encouraging over consumption by young people through discounting practices, inappropriate theme nights and novelty sales strategies – all of which are heavily entrenched within our local nightclubs.

## **2. Trading hours**

Evidence from Australian and international research shows that reducing trading hours – particularly night late trading- can significantly reduce alcohol-related harms. In areas where there are significant evidence-based alcohol-related problems, like Byron Bay, I believe there should be a review of the trading hours and practices of licensees by ILGA.

In Byron Bay the evidence of significant alcohol-related harm exists on a range of social indicators including:

- Risky Drinking rates amongst teenagers
- Drink driving crashes
- DUI rates
- Alcohol-related (non DV) assault
- Sexual Assault
- Sexually Transmitted Infections

All of which are much higher – often double and triple - the state averages

## **3. Limiting liquor licenses and density of outlets**

Byron Bay has 3 times the number of liquor licences per head of population based on state averages for 100,000. And they are located in a high density cluster.

Reducing availability of supply is an evidence-based strategy proven to reduce alcohol-related harms at the local population level. There is currently no limit on the number of liquor licenses that can operate within a defined community – making community concerns difficult to address by local councils and community action alike. It seems the onus rests with the community to fight new applications when they find out about them, and there also seems to be limited grounds on which local councils can legitimately refuse a DA's for new or transferring liquor licences. This

was the case in last years Dan Murphy application. I believe that we need a mechanism that enables a cap on liquor licensing numbers.

#### **4. Alcohol pricing**

Young people – and backpackers who visit Byron Bay - are particularly price sensitive. This often results in shopping for discounted alcohol, point of sale promotions, as well as pre-loading prior to going out into venues. Cheap availability of alcohol can often contribute to its misuse – and therefore heavily discounted products need to be

I acknowledge that the BBLA has voluntary agreements around not selling 'super cheap wine' or product below cost, however local supermarkets still seem to engage in these discounting practices, as well as using shop-a-dockets – which encourage bulk purchases. I believe these practices should be banned.

#### **5. Pre-loading**

Pre-loading is a major issue amongst young people – often practiced to reduce the costs associated with going out to night clubs etc. At the moment there seems to be few effective strategies being implemented to reduce the effects of pre-loading.

We recognize that pre-loading is a drinking behaviour that has high-risks for young people, and Professor Peter Millers work on DANTE has demonstrated that. Pre-loading behaviour is encouraged by cultural practice amongst role models, cheap alcohol and easy access.

Pre-loading can be detected by good RAS practices at venues to ensure that patrons entering are not already intoxicated. Could breath testing on entry be a solution? I would love to see some research on this issue.

At Byron Youth Service we are trying to tackle the culture of binge drinking through our Cringe the Binge campaign and we recognize that sustained long term efforts are required to change some of these behaviours. We all need to work together to send out the right messages to young people about intoxication, but limiting the supply, promotion and availability during peak danger times can help reduce harms.

#### **6. Funding for harm minimization programs, strategies and responses**

Funding for early intervention programs, resilience building programs and alcohol-free activities for underage young people is extremely limited but a very important part of changing the behaviour and choices young people make around alcohol.

For thirteen years BYS has had our Street Cruise program keeping young people safe on Friday nights in Byron Bay . This program has received NSW Attorney Generals Dept funding in the past – I think it started with such a grant - however for many years BYS has conducted fundraising activities to ensure this program is implemented – as we believe it is central to our vision that young people are safe happy and valued within our community. We need more funding for this program –

particularly given that Byron Bay attracts so many visitors 23% of which are under 24 year of age.

Each year 10,000 schoolies descend upon Byron and the community addresses this issue without no funding support from the state government.

Byron Shire Council has this year pulled 10,000 dollars of support from the Byron Schoolies Safety Response Group in order to implement safety strategies for New Year Eve, and Byron United the Chamber of Commerce have pulled out \$3000 out of the safety response also.....leaving a budget shortfall for the community to pick up. Schoolies is a high risk time for Byron Bay with many young people binge drinking as part of school leavers celebrations.

Given the high risk nature of school leavers celebrations and the fact that Byron is the number one schoolies destination in NSW, and number two in Australia besides the gold coast, We believe the state government should be more involved in, and providing funding support, for our efforts to make this time of year a safe experience for young locals and visitors alike.

For the past six years, BYS has auspiced the activities of the Byron Community Drug Action Team – known as BUDDI. NSW Health CDAT grants of \$3100 annually are completely tokenistic and inadequate to do anything substantial to tackle drug and alcohol issues in our community. We believe a substantial increase in funds should be made available to support community and voluntary efforts to tackle alcohol-related harms, and that licensees or liquor accords should contribute to the costs of harm minimizations strategies. In Byron Bay the liquor accord contributes \$3000 to Schoolies Safety Response – and we'd like to see that increases.

We believe that providing support in hotspot areas...especially during peak high risk times such as schoolies, summer holidays and NYE really does help to ensure co-ordinated responses amongst stakeholders, and that. As the number 1 tourism destination in NSW outside Sydney, we believe it would be money well spent on ensuring visitors, and local alike, are safe.

## **7. Transport**

We believe that providing effective late night transport options are an important part of ensuring young people are safe when they are out. I am happy to see that the NSW attorney gen's dept has provided some funding to enable Byron Shire Council to develop a late night transport strategy and service for this summer.

We believe that licenced venues should contribute to the costs of ensuring their patrons have safe transport options. We acknowledge that some venues in Byron provide a courtesy bus for their patrons and we think that's a very positive strategy. However there are also venues that will provide transport to their business, but not home again, and this is not good enough.

Again I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to address the here in Byron Bay.