

**Submission
No 85**

**INQUIRY INTO USE OF CANNABIS FOR MEDICAL
PURPOSES**

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Medical cannabis is entirely appropriate, as President Obama said. Making users register and regulate and tax a cottage growing industry to eliminate organised crime will show society in no time that prohibition is the problem not the plant, which has wonderful healing properties. An honest education program is critical to regain respect and in particular to eliminate the Australian habit of smoking cannabis with tobacco.

General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4

This letter has been on my mind since the inquiry was launched, and thank you for being on the committee. I have been very involved with cannabis users for over 2 decades being President of Nimbins HEMP Embassy and the Federally Registered Australian HEMP Party for most of that time. I ran as a Senate candidate for the NSW HEMP Party when it was registered so you can see it is an issue close to my heart.

Like many other marginalised people who use cannabis regularly, I moved to Nimbin to live almost 30 years ago to be among like minded people. I have run a tourism business, Nimbin Museum, in the village for all that time. After I moved here it wasn't long before I began to discover the underworld created by prohibition, mostly heroin addicts selling pot in those days.

I first discovered cannabis when I was 24 years old. Soon after I began using it I realised I was not getting my usual headaches or migraines which had afflicted me for years, like the rest of my siblings and our mother. Also my father's father had suffered bad migraines all his life. I have used cannabis for most of my life since then and find if I have steady supply it keeps me in order....no headaches, regular sleeping patterns, minimal stress and general well being. I used to drink alcohol, now hardly ever.

Many many cannabis users around Nimbin are ex problem drinkers who found that with pot they can keep their life together, unlike with grog. Especially aboriginal people many of whom have chosen to live in this area in the last twenty years because of cannabis supply. Again, it keeps them away from grog, and violence. I cannot emphasise enough how widespread cannabis use in aboriginal communities and how much of their welfare cheque is often spent on it. Many families spend the majority of their money on pot at the expense of food and rent etc. They never grow their own from my experience, but I'm sure they could learn!

I wonder if you will get any submissions from Aboriginal people? I would like to bring two to Sydney to talk to you about how popular yarrdi is in their communities and how prohibition affects them. One is a mother who has been dealing forever to support her habit and now

her 2 sons she has raised are both a mess using all sorts of drugs. Primarily because IN THE BLACKMARKET ALL DRUGS ARE AVAILABLE.

And because cannabis is by far the easiest to bust for police because it's bulky and smelly, many young people especially, start using powders and pills which are much harder to detect being tiny and odourless. To smoke cannabis is a giveaway, whereas a pill is popped without anyone noticing.

We began the HEMP Embassy here in Nimbin over twenty years ago to try and minimise the damage from prohibition which often makes the village look like a refugee camp from the war on drugs. After years of thinking about it I conclude drugs have always been with humans and the attraction is people simply trying to feel good, hardly a criminal offence. Be that physical pain relief or altering their mind, this herb seems to work for certain people. It gives enormous relief to all manner of pain as the history books confirm.

Not long ago at all cannabis was the risk free 'cure all' remedy for so many ailments (see advert below) which was only ceased with prohibition. It appears to me the war on drugs is a fight over the profits from pain relief, a sick business really. Many people cannot understand how it is that a herb that stops them getting headaches can be illegal?! Prohibition has consequently undermined respect for laws across the country because thousands of people like me have found enormous pain relief in a plant that nothing else could give us, and we are branded outcasts and criminals!

I do think in the future we will see that prohibition of nature's best pain relieving herbs had dire consequences, but I realise the change back to treating drug use as a health issue, rather than criminal, will be a slow process. Really cannabis could be managed by the TGA rather than the Police, who are definitely not the drug experts! To start the ball of change rolling I suggest a register of medical cannabis users, authorised by doctors, and we can monitor the effectiveness of the medicine at the same time, and gather some statistics. Of course there has been no official research on the benefits of cannabis because of prohibition.

I think the Canadian model for medical cannabis is worth a look as it truly took the supply out of the hands of organised crime. Allow registered patients to grow their own and allow those among them who want to grow more to supply dispensaries after they are granted a growers licence. Not for huge amounts, keep it more of a cottage industry and the employment benefits will be massive. Thousands of currently 'unemployed' people will have a legal job which they already have a lot of experience in!

Few realise just how widespread cannabis use is. I watch every type of person come to Nimbin day after day to buy their medicine. It costs people a fortune but they sacrifice almost anything for it.

I suggest their medical cannabis card allows them to carry up to an ounce. If they can, they can grow a number of plants but better it is left to the court to decide if it is for their personal use. If you make a plant limit, like ten, people will grow huge plants chemically boosted. Better to grow organic quality not quantity. Prohibit sales unless through a registered dispensary which is supplied by registered growers. There is a huge industry already happening which could be legalised with the stroke of a pen really. Regulated and taxed and employing thousands of people many of which are getting centrelink payments presently.

Is it addictive? With tobacco it is, yes, and unfortunately most Australians smoke with spin. This is a huge issue which I spoke at length to Della Bosca about trying to get health advice happening. Young Australians usually are introduced to cannabis through a bong and the pot is mixed with tobacco. Its a critical EDUCATIONAL POINT. Why do they do it? Because it makes the twenty dollar gram of pot go thrice as far, another consequence of prohibition preventing health education. Young people across the country wake up wanting a cone, because they are smoking with 'spin'. Tobacco is addictive whereas cannabis may be emotionally for some but is not physically addictive. Prohibition has glamourised drug use for youth. Making it a medicine is way less groovy.

Cannabis is the most passive of drugs, the opposite to so many of the other trouble making potions. In Nimbin the police have learnt if they leave the pot alone the place is more

peaceful. If they hassle the pot people drink more alcohol and use the easier to hide and more dangerous drugs and soon there is real police work!

I have met and talked to thousands of daily cannabis users over the last twenty years and without doubt the biggest danger they face from their medicine is getting busted. And the stress of carrying this tag around cannot be underestimated. PROHIBITION BREED LIES AND HYPOCRISY. Ordinary people go to extraordinary lengths to hide their use from friends and even family such is the strength of the stigma associated with being a 'criminal' or a 'druggie'. All of which just creates more stress and sickness of course. I have seen hundreds of people with cancer, or having treatment for cancer like chemotherapy, get enormous healing and pain relief from treatments with cannabis tincture. Unquestionably it helps in all sorts of ailments and I believe cannabis has real anti cancer properties.

In summary, I suggest as a matter of urgency you allow doctors to authorise patients to get a medical cannabis card so they can lose their fear on being arrested. And I suggest you licence growers from among them and allow dispensary licences which could also provide health advice and guidance.

Suggested TRIAL amounts which can be reviewed and adjusted regularly if need be, are to allow card bearers to carry an ounce, and buy an ounce at a time from a dispensary. Growers to be able to store their supply but NOT SELL UNLESS THEY HAVE A GROWERS LICENCE to sell to a dispensary which can supply those unable to grow their own. Growers licence to supply a limited amount, perhaps for no more than 100 patients.

I am more than happy to travel to Sydney to talk more about my years of living and working with daily cannabis users, who all consider their use is medicinal, which I agree with.

Yours sincerely, Michael Balderstone.