

**Submission  
No 18**

**INQUIRY INTO STRATEGIES TO REDUCE ALCOHOL  
ABUSE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN NSW**

**Organisation:** Byron Youth Service

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The Director  
Standing Committee on Social Issues  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St  
Sydney NSW 2000

**Re: Submission by Byron Youth Service to the Inquiry into Strategies to reduce alcohol abuse amongst young people in NSW**

Dear Committee Members,

Byron Youth Service (BYS) has been established 25 years and is the primary provider of support services to young people aged 12-25 in Byron Shire. We have had a considerable amount of experience in dealing with young people and the issue of alcohol, having been early initiators of street-based early intervention programs that have been running for 13 years and, more recently, as recipients of a national binge drinking initiative grant and crime prevention grant focussing on young people and alcohol. We also experience and influx of approximately 10,000 school leavers each November/December for annual schoolies celebrations, and host major music events such as BluesFest and Splendour in the Grass that attract considerable numbers of young people and young adults to the region.

As a result of BY'S long-term involvement in coalface alcohol issues, in 2012 BY'S initiated a new national campaign to reverse youth binge drinking called "Cringe the Binge". Our initial launch strategy involved a National Weekend of Action that was launched by the President of the AMA Dr Steve Hambleton. Cringe the Binge aims to change the binge drinking culture amongst young people and reduce risky drinking statistics in the under 25 population. See more information at [www.cringethebinge.com.au](http://www.cringethebinge.com.au) or [www.facebook.com/CringeTheBinge](http://www.facebook.com/CringeTheBinge).

During 2012 BY'S staff, committee members and young people were also involved in community action to prevent Dan Murphy's from obtaining a licence to operate in the Byron Bay CBD, speaking out at the ILGA community conference, and we attended the National Summit on Alcohol Advertising and Young People in Canberra. BY'S is a member of the NAAA (National Alliance for Action on Alcohol) and the new NAAPA (NSW/ACT Alcohol Policy Alliance) and auspices the local Community Drug Action Team BUDDI – The Byron Underage Drinking & Drug Initiative – a NSW Health drug & alcohol strategy program.

We are extremely concerned about the current alarming statistics relating to the range of harms impacting on young people as a result of alcohol mis-use, and would like to put forward the following comments on each of the Terms of Reference to be considered by the Standing Committee for Social Issues:

**A. the effect of alcohol advertisements and promotions on young people, including consideration of the need to further restrict alcohol advertising and promotion**

The current self-regulation of alcohol advertising by the industry itself is totally unacceptable. BY'S would like to see the development of an advertising standard and codes of practice that prevent early exposure of children and young people to alcohol advertising in places and

spaces where young people are likely to engage eg online, at sporting events, at music and art festivals, public transport hubs etc.

We believe that stringent penalties should be developed and applied for breaches by the industry once alcohol advertising standard have been adopted.

Young people in Australia are regularly exposed to alcohol advertising in traditional print, radio and TV advertising, and with the expansion and prevalence of advertising on popular youth multimedia platforms such as facebook, youtube, gaming sites, smartphones etc the exposure of children and young people to alcohol advertising is increasing. Much of the existing alcohol advertising promotes an unrealistic and glamorous lifestyle associated with consumption of alcohol that does not reflect the harms associated with alcohol use by young people.

Similarly the increase in alcohol promotion and sponsorship at major music festivals – that, for example, includes specialty bars such that are setup at festivals in our own local area such as Splendour in the Grass' Jagermeister Bar, Smirnoff Bar, SS Strongbow etc, heavily promotes and encourages the engagement of young people and young adults in alcohol consumption. Many festivals do not have alcohol free areas or fail to restrict alcohol consumption to areas where underage patrons cannot enter.

The Alcohol Ad Review Board established by the Western Australian McCusker Centre for Action on Alcohol and Young People has already developed a code of practice that should be considered for use in NSW, as it has been developed with the health and wellbeing of young people as its primary focus. The code of practice can be downloaded from their website [www.alcoholadreview.com.au](http://www.alcoholadreview.com.au)

## **B. the effectiveness of alcohol harm minimisation strategies targeted at young people**

See our comments on a range of harm minimisation strategies:

**> Education** – Its very disappointing to see that the Drug & Alcohol team at NSW Dept of Education and Training has recently been defunded and dissolved to save money. This means school-based education programs will be under-resourced to tackle the growing problem of teen binge drinking. We believe that pro-actively delivering school-based education is essential to developing protective factors in young people. Evidence suggests that inoculation education during yrs 7 & 8 can help to prevent early initiation into alcohol consumption, and harm minimisation strategies should be taught from Yrs 9 -12 recognising that young people in this age group will experiment with alcohol and should be aware of risks and strategies to minimise the associated health and crime risks.

**> Early intervention** – Currently there seems to be very limited funding available to deliver street-based early intervention and harm minimisation strategies in local communities. At BYS we believe that street-based interventions are vital to keeping young people safe in our community. Every weekend there is an influx into Byron Bay of visitors that come to party. We experience high numbers of these visitor types during events, festivals and peak times such as Schoolies and Summer holidays. A street-based service that looks out for young people is essential to creating a safer community and also enables the development of close working relationships with key stakeholders such as police, medical services, licensees, local businesses etc to ensure emerging issues affecting young people are addressed.

BYS has been providing a street-based early intervention program – called Street Cruise – for the past 13 years. This program initially had some crime prevention funding, has been variously funded by businesses and local government, and most recently a federal government Proceeds of Crime Act grant. Despite engaging with, and directly assisting, thousands of at-risk young people during this time, the program lacks consistent and ongoing funding. Yet despite the significantly higher crime statistics, the heavy tourism traffic and the high profile nature of alcohol issues in Byron Bay, there seems to be little state government assistance. Short-term funding of programs to address long-term problems is frustrating and ineffective.

Each November 10,000 school leavers arrive in Byron and the community, local government and emergency services are forced to respond. Four years ago the Byron Schoolies Safety Response Group was formed to co-ordinate actions to address the negative impact of

schoolies on the community. BYS is a key stakeholder and active participant in the group. A Safety HUB is located at main beach for 20 days during schoolies and staff by over 100 local volunteers. This harm minimisation strategy is effective in enabling a central location point for visiting schoolies, where they can access help from friendly locals, including water, condoms, health information, legal info, basic first aid, chill space, access to police etc. We believe this strategy is highly effective during the schoolies period, and takes some of the pressure off police and health workers. This type of strategy should have more funding and support from State government.

**> Support Services – D & A counselling, AA etc** – It is well recognised that in regional areas such as Byron Bay there are not enough support services for people with alcohol misuse issues and young people are particularly affected by that. Lack of, or unaffordable transport to, better-serviced regional centres such as Lismore and Tweed Heads, makes it difficult for young people to access a range of services. The emergence of online support can potentially help to fill this gap, however these services aren't well-recognised as yet.

Group-based support programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) are available in Byron Bay however, are not always appropriate for young people, and our experience is that they can deter young people from attending/seeking help. Currently there is no group support program specifically designed to meet the needs of young people/adults aged under 25 who are struggling with alcohol issues.

**> Alternative alcohol-free socialising spaces for young people (particularly those aged U/18)**

BYS believes that it is important for communities to offer young people (especially those aged under 18) a range of alcohol & drug free events and activities that offer alternatives to street-based loitering and boredom – which is well recognised as a contributor to anti-social behaviours and a risk factor for alcohol mis-use.

Over the past four years our local Community Drug Action Teams (Byron and Brunswick Heads) have been heavily involved in developing and delivering a range of programs that offer young people drug & alcohol free entertainment – particularly focussing on the U/18s. With annual NSW Health funding of only \$3000 per year, it is difficult to do much, and all programs rely heavily on volunteers, fundraising efforts, local council contributions and local business support, hence burnout and volunteer fatigue often becomes a problem. Increased funding would make these strategies more viable.

**> Health promotion/prevention strategies and campaigns** – BYS believes that health promotion campaigns and activities targeting young people are best developed and delivered by, or with, community and youth organisations. It is our long-term observation that young people generally view government labelled campaigns with disregard, therefore minimising their impact.

BYS believes that peer-developed resources and campaigns tailored to address local issues can have a better impact on the choices young people make around alcohol consumption and provide better value-for-money than expensive government funded, state-wide campaigns. However despite this preference BYS is committed to working with other stakeholders in promoting safe choices and distributing relevant health information about the negative impacts of alcohol on developing young adults.

### **C. measures to minimise the impact of alcohol in the workplace**

No comment

### **D. the effectiveness of measures to reduce drink driving**

In Byron we have had very high DUI statistics for a long period of time, demonstrating a chronic problem, that doesn't seem to have reduced despite regular police RBT blitzes on our roads, and statewide road safety campaigns targeting drink driving.

Though visitor numbers may contribute to the higher than state average figures for DUI, chronic local problem exist and there have been few localised efforts to address the problem. Few venues in Byron offer patrons breathalyser services or publicly promote designated driver programs. Poor accessibility to taxi and transport options seem to account for a large

part of this problem, and though a nightrider bus service was trialled some years ago, local clubs and venues couldn't make this financially sustainable.

A few of the licensed venues offer transportation services for patrons, however BYS believes that the transport issue is a critical one. Current measures have been ineffective and some new strategies around transport are definitely required. Some of our suggestions include more taxi's, a night bus service, developing a light rail train service on existing shirewide tracks, providing incentives for more venues that provide transport to patrons or compulsorily requiring venues to contribute to local nite-time transport solutions.

#### **E. measures to reduce alcohol related violence, including in and around licensed venues**

Currently there are no state government planning guidelines around the maximum number of liquor licences that are acceptable in a community, making local government control of the number of licensees difficult. This needs to change if local government is going to be able to responsive to community issues and alcohol-related issues.

Byron Shire already has 30% more liquor licences than the state average by head of population – and recent community outcry prevented the granting of a major new liquor license for a Dan Murphy's superstore in the main street. Evidence indicates that liquor outlet density contributes to alcohol related violence and Byron Bay CBD has a density considerably higher than the state average. So outlet density planning and licensing is a key means of reducing alcohol-related violence, however often out of the control of local governments. This needs to change.

We believe that the effectiveness of Liquor Accords and their voluntary measures has been rather limited in tackling the issues so far in Byron Bay for a range of reasons, including the size, type and scale of the problem, the reluctance of members to jointly fund strategies, the minimal involvement of council (which is currently changing) and the under-representation of some licensee groups within the Accord. Though members of the Accord seem to earn a lot of money from alcohol sales, they put very little money into funding strategies or programs that can address the negative impacts of their businesses because there is no mandatory requirement for them to do so. Perhaps a compulsory contribution should be levied on all licensees to generate a pool of funds for use in programs and strategies that address alcohol –related issues – and having a compulsory contribution would also mean that licensees would participate in the Liquor Accord process. The very nature of liquor accord activities being voluntary limits their scope, scale and effectiveness.

As a regional community with a small population and ratebase, the Byron Council struggles to keep up with the infrastructure (and other) costs associated with a large tourist population. For example, council clean up costs after a massive influx of party tourists on New Years Eve 2012, who left rubbish all over the beaches and parks, was approximately \$30,000! That amount of money that would easily fund a street-based intervention service for one year if it wasn't spent on tourism-related alcohol abuse. What is needed is a mechanism to ensure tourism contributes towards the costs of such clean ups. Various taxes and levies have been suggested and may be appropriate. However it may be generated, local government definitely needs more funds to help address the impact of party tourism and related infrastructure issues.

Transport issues are a significant contributor to street-based violence – a shortage of taxi services to service and take home people from the Byron CBD means (often intoxicated) patrons are queuing for long periods of time before exiting the area. Police have identified changes to the location and operation of the taxi rank as a priority if alcohol-related street-violence is to be addressed, and BYS agrees. In general, it is the observation of BYS and youth workers that RSA practices within and amongst venues in Byron Bay is a contributing factor to alcohol-related violence and intoxication issues. There are underage local young people being admitted to venues, there is too much intoxication being allowed within venues (creating a problem when patrons are then removed from venues), there is widespread use of promotions that encourage binge drinking behaviours (eg competitions, giveaways and promotions) and with few no restrictions on the sale of alcohol from bottleshops, we regularly see trolleys being wheeled to accommodation places by young party goers. The issue of pre-loading by visitors to Byron is

a major contributor to alcohol-related violence, and it is time to start with work with packaged liquor outlets and restrictions that will address this issue.

**F. measures to address the impact of alcohol abuse on the health system**

BYS youth workers and staff understand that emergency department workers are operating under significant stress and regularly dealing with intoxicated clients on late night weekend shifts. Frontline staff were very vocal about the stress they operate under at recent communities meetings called to address the New Years Eve problems in Byron Bay.

At peak times, like Schoolies, the Safety HUB located on main beach offers basic first aid in order to reduce the load on ambulance and hospital resources. First Aid and Mental Health First Aid training is offered to a limited number of the 100 or so volunteers that run the safety HUB 24/7 during the schoolies period in Byron Bay. Increased funds to offer training to more volunteers will assist in effectively dealing with minors cuts, bruises, sprains, vomiting etc prior to hospital and ambulance resources being needed. The Byron Schoolies Safety Response Group raises a small amount of money locally to co-ordinate the activities and volunteers in the Safety HUB. By contrast the Queensland Government recognises the major health risks associated with schoolies and on the Gold Coast has developed a co-ordinated response that is well funded. We believe there should be state government funding to support our community respond to the annual influx of schoolies so that the health system can deal with the increases.

We also believe that there should be greater support for Youth/Community Sector Organisations (and NSW Health funded Community Drug Action Teams) to tackle the issue of binge drinking in hotspots such as Byron Bay as a co-ordinated range of prevention, education and community mobilisation strategies could help reduce alcohol-related hospitalisations and long-term health impacts of binge drinking.

**G. any other related matter.**

BYS believes that the unhealthy culture of binge drinking amongst young people, and the peer pressure exerted that maintains, and reinforces risky drinking patterns, must be tackled. Binge drinking must become socially unacceptable. BYS believes that peer-driven and targeted campaigns developed by youth sector organisations such as "Cringe the Binge" can be effective in helping young people to re-think their choices and help change their patterns of drinking. We know that culture change will be a long-term process, however are committed to starting this process with the development of our new national campaign. State and federal government support for such initiatives would obviously help.

Regards,

Di Mahoney  
Director

Richard Heazlewood-Ross  
Chairperson  
Byron Youth Service