

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

**INQUIRY INTO STRATEGIES TO REDUCE ALCOHOL ABUSE
AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

At Byron Bay on Tuesday 8 October 2013

The Committee met at 1.00 p.m.

PRESENT

The Hon. N. Blair (Chair)

The Hon. J. Barham

The Hon. G. J. Donnelly

The Hon. N. Maclaren-Jones

The Hon. H. M. Westwood (Deputy Chair)

CHAIR: Welcome to the inquiry into strategies to reduce alcohol abuse among young people in New South Wales. This is the fourth public hearing of the Standing Committee on Social Issues of the New South Wales Legislative Council into strategies to reduce alcohol abuse among young people in New South Wales. I acknowledge the Arakwal people of Byron Bay of the Bundjalung nation who are the traditional custodians of this land. I would also like to pay respect to elders past and present of the Arakwal people of Byron Bay and extend that respect to other Aboriginal people present today. As a Committee we welcome the opportunity to investigate social issues of significance to the New South Wales community and as such we look forward to developing recommendations to reduce the impact of alcohol abuse on young people.

Community participation is an integral part of the Committee's inquiry. On behalf of the Committee I would like to express my thanks to all those who have taken the time to provide us with a written submission. This afternoon we will hear from representatives of the Tweed Byron Local Area Command, the Byron Bay Liquor Accord, Byron Youth Service, Last Drinks at 12, Byron and Tweed shire councils and Lismore City Council. Following the public hearing the Committee will also meet with members of the Northern Rivers Youth Council to hear views of young people in the area. We are pleased to hear from these stakeholders who have volunteered their time to assist the Committee, for which I offer our thanks. Today's hearing is open to the public and a transcript of today's proceedings will be placed on the Committee's website when it becomes available.

Before we commence I will briefly explain some of the procedures for the hearing. The Committee has previously resolved to authorise the media to broadcast sound and video excerpts of the public hearing. Copies of the guidelines governing the broadcast of proceedings are available at the table by the door. In accordance with the Legislative Council guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings, a member of the Committee and other witnesses may be filmed or recorded. People in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photographs. In reporting the proceedings of this Committee, members of the media must take responsibility for what they publish or what interpretation they place on anything that is said before the Committee. Finally, before we start I remind everyone to turn off their mobile phones for the duration of the hearing.

STUART JOHN JAMES WILKINS, Detective Superintendent, Tweed-Byron Local Area Command, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Do you want to make a brief opening statement?

Mr WILKINS: I am the local area commander here. I arrived in Tweed-Byron approximately three years ago and identified an issue with alcohol-related crime when I arrived. From that time we have been working in collaboration with the community, the council and the liquor accord to develop strategies to reduce the incidence of alcohol-related violence. When I first got here and started to develop a process of responding to alcohol-related crime there was some resistance and ignorance but I believe that we are all on the same page now. We understand that there is an issue with alcohol-related crime in Byron Bay and we are moving forward and taking steps to work together to ensure that we try to reduce that.

CHAIR: I will open to members of the Committee to ask questions.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: In your opening statement you referred to your perspective as a police officer and certainly as the commander on the effect of alcohol abuse in this area. Will you give us a bit more information about what you see as being the greatest effect of alcohol abuse?

Mr WILKINS: There is no question that Byron has a reputation and it is a violent place at times. Clearly the statistics show that over the past 10 years there have been issues with the consumption of alcohol here. That can be attributed to a whole range of factors; it is not only about licensed premises but also about backpackers and the environment. Byron is a wonderful part of the world and it has a really nice environment but late at night it can become violent. It is about the consumption of alcohol—the continual use and abuse of alcohol in this environment. That is not unique to Byron but this is an issue we have identified ourselves. It is about working through strategies to reduce the incidence of violence. As my commissioner has said many times it is not only the police. We cannot arrest our way out of this. We do this all the time; we deal with a lot of licensing and legislation issues. Last year Byron Bay issued 11 per cent of all licensing offences in the State—tickets for failing to quit and for licensed premises not complying with the legislation.

We do business inspections—for 12 months we were number one in the State—and we walk through licensed premises. Our actual response as a policing organisation has been significant. In this area of Tweed-Byron—the north region and some other places in this State—we lead in things such as street offences, person searches and moving people on as a result of the power that we have through legislation to move people on and to try to reduce alcohol-related crime. We are at the forefront of interaction with people who consume too much alcohol. Whilst we have had some success, for example, earlier this year with some collaboration with the liquor accord, in the reduction of alcohol-related assaults, that has not been replicated later in the year. The assaults have actually gone up in August and September.

We have done a lot of high-profile, high-policing processes in this environment. We have a lot of festivals in this command. The festivals do have an impact but they are not the answer and they are not the main issue that we have to deal with. We have Splendour in the Grass, Blues and Roots and the Falls Festival and a lot of people come to town for those festivals. We have one that is about to come up for schoolies. We believe that we have a relevant and appropriate response to that and we work with the licensed premises. I have encouraged the police from here to get assistance. I am a firm believer in assistance from outside—resources that we do not have to commit to an issue. The Public Order and Riot Squad comes to schoolies, Splendour in the Grass and some of the other festivals. The Mounted Police, the Dog Squad, the Police Transport Command and a whole range of policing units come and help us police those issues.

Whilst schoolies for us in general terms is loud and unruly, it is not that big a problem for us. The kids are generally well behaved and we do not always have a significant issue with schoolies. It is about keeping a hold of them. The groups that assist us—the Red Frogs—do a wonderful job in the harbour and in other areas and manage the schoolies themselves. We have a lot of festivals that bring a lot of people into this town. Taking Blues and Roots as an example, we have 20,000 people or thereabouts for five days over Easter which has an impact. Splendour in the Grass has an impact because 20,000 people come into town and 17,500 tickets are sold. But there are the add-on people who work there or who just come for the joy ride. People lose their phones and people are assaulted unfortunately because a lot more people are in town.

We have developed strategies for the liquor accord. They have been well represented and they have been adhered to but we had some reluctance at the beginning, or some teething problems. It appears that at the end of the six-month trial we put in, with self-regulated conditions on their licences, we got 100 per cent compliance with those conditions. Whether or not that is having an impact is an issue. Those are the licensing conditions that the liquor accord presented itself—that is, no shots and four drinks after midnight.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Do you have any sense of the proportion of the problem that is created by tourists who are either here on holiday or for festivals, as opposed to local residents?

Mr WILKINS: We have looked at this a fair bit. I get asked this question a lot and it is difficult to pin it down. There are the people from Byron Bay who are directly involved in it and then there are the locals from the outer environment of Ballina and Lismore who come for the weekend. Whilst it is not a long distance away we almost classify them as locals. We do have groups who come from the Gold Coast and Brisbane—there is no question about that—for football tours, weekends away or bucks parties. They come in groups. So you have locals on the fringe and then, of course, the international tourists who come in. It is an even balance of all of those who are either victims or witnesses in some of these assaults.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: You referred in your opening statement to providing service for about three years in Byron Bay. I gathered from your comments that earlier on there may not have been recognition of the fact that there was an issue in Byron Bay. Would you explain how you went about working with others to come to terms with the fact that there was an issue and how you started dialogue in the community to resolve how to deal with it?

Mr WILKINS: A lot of the reluctance came from acknowledging that there was a problem. There was a lot of debate about how the figures stacked up and how we came to the conclusion that Byron was one of the worst suburbs in New South Wales for alcohol-related assaults. We continually met with groups of people to ensure that they understood and we would go through the debate many times. We came to a conclusion at some point in time that enough was enough in the debate about whether or not this was happening in Byron. I think the telling point was when one of the locals got badly assaulted; I think he was a local chef at a café. When one of their own was assaulted by an alcohol fuelled thug that was the telling point in our process of collaborating with people to help them understand that there was a problem. It really was a communication process. Whilst the liquor accord was already in place it was probably defunct or not working.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Did that pre-date your appointment?

Mr WILKINS: Yes. Do not get me wrong; the liquor accord was in place but it did not seem to have the vision and the focus. The Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing jumped on board and we now have good collaboration and a good partnership with the liquor accord. The meetings are well attended and are comprised of people who are responsible for the service of alcohol in the Byron Bay area. It is about collaboration with everybody. I think we came to the point where we were going down the track of a police liquor accord. I think those in the liquor accord understood that we were heading down a track where we would have complete control over the licensing conditions, or police and other government agencies would have control of the licensing conditions. To their credit they jumped on board and imposed some restrictions on themselves which initially saw a reduction in alcohol-related assaults.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Referring to the alcohol that is available, is alcohol brought into Byron Bay from outside or is it mainly purchased locally?

Mr WILKINS: I really do not know. I think it is a bit of both. It is not only about licensed premises but also about preloading at units and the backpackers having parties in their own environment buying alcohol or bringing it in. I really do not know; I would only be guessing. Certainly you do see them buying some alcohol here. It is entertaining to watch the schoolies with their trolley loads of alcohol heading down to their accommodation once they get here. It is a phenomenon that you should see.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: They buy that at a bottle shop?

Mr WILKINS: Yes, in bulk and they travel to their accommodation.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: You mentioned the reluctance of people to accept that there was a problem before. Will you clarify that? My understanding is that the community had been aware of an alcohol problem for

over a decade, that it developed a community safety plan and that it had written to the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing which came to Byron Bay in 2005. However, nothing came of that after a task force was set up. In 2010 council unanimously supported a request for the liquor accord to trial the Last Drinks campaign. For the benefit of Committee members I want to be clear that what you are saying is that industry was reluctant to accept there was a problem. It definitely was not the community as it has been very aware that there is a problem.

Mr WILKINS: That is right. It was the licensed premises and the licensees without question. To clarify, some work was done before, make no mistake, but it was not working.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I think one of the reasons it was not working was because of a reluctance by the licensed premises, but you are saying that you felt a point was reached earlier this year where they imposed conditions upon themselves because it was obvious that there was going to be a move from the Government to enforce?

Mr WILKINS: Yes, that is right.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: You said there was 100 per cent compliance. I have not been around much this year but I have been reading the local papers and I understand there have been two breaches of those trial conditions.

Mr WILKINS: Not the conditions, because the conditions are voluntary. They cannot be breached for voluntary conditions.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: So it is non-compliance with the voluntary conditions that were imposed?

Mr WILKINS: No, that is not what they were breached for. My understanding is they would have been breached for licensing law breaches, not the voluntary conditions. The voluntary conditions are voluntary so there is no power for the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing or for police to take action against a voluntary condition.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Under this regime there is no opportunity for the community to be aware of the level of compliance or success. You said that assaults have gone up.

Mr WILKINS: The Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing has gone through and done a number of compliance checks on the voluntary conditions from the start to the finish, as have the police. There have been a significant number of covert and overt inspections of all of the premises to ensure compliance with the voluntary conditions. We talked very openly to the liquor accord and said it is useless if not everyone complies. If not everyone complies with the voluntary conditions it is unfair to those who are actually complying and being good corporate citizens to ensure that they are very robust in the responsible service of alcohol. If someone over here is not doing it at all that is unfair.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: What do you think is needed in this situation to better manage and control the problems associated with alcohol abuse particularly with young people in Byron?

Mr WILKINS: That is a very good question.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I am sure it is a very complex one.

Mr WILKINS: It is. It is a very complex question. It is my personal view that there is more that can be done by everybody. I honestly think wholeheartedly that the main part of Byron needs lighting up. When it is dark it is dark. We talk about a whole range of conditions to implement that will assist in reducing alcohol-related crime or the follow-up of those assaults that take place or other issues. Lighting in the community is a significant issue for us, and we have raised this before. Closed-circuit television would help us in at least the process of solving crimes if not as a crime deterrent.

There was an assault over the weekend outside one of the late-night food traders. The taxi rank sits right where one of the late-night food traders sits and where one of the nightclubs is. I understand the debate that the nightclub provides security for the taxi rank to ensure their safety. I would like to see them at a transport

hub—a well-lit, well-organised transport hub out of that main area of the central business district where people are crossing the roads and there are those other issues of safety.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: It sounds as though most of these measures would cost quite a bit of money. I think the community probably already feels that by being a tourism town it bears a lot of the cost of some of these activities and their impacts. Do you have any suggestions about how they could be funded? I think the council already tries to get funding from the State.

Mr WILKINS: I do not know.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Those would all be cost measures.

Mr WILKINS: But there are a whole range of other measures that go in. That is just part of it. There are also issues about continuing a strong, robust licensing response. It is about visibility of policing and ensuring that I send a significant amount of my resources within this command to Byron Bay and in particular to the areas of greatest need at the time of greatest need. Again, the environmental factor is one. The licensing laws and liquor are another. The police presence and visibility is another. There are a whole range of strategies that need to be put in together.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: What percentage of either the victims or perpetrators of the alcohol-related problems that you confront are in the age group that we are looking at of 25 and under?

Mr WILKINS: The majority of them sit between 20 and 30. We do not have a documented or obvious problem with under-age drinking. I certainly would not sit here and say we do not have it, because we certainly do, but it is not an in-your-face problem as far as the police are concerned. The majority of our bad assaults and those that we are talking about happen between 12 midnight and 3.00 a.m. The lockout works well. One of the conditions is a lockout between 1.30 a.m. and 3.00 a.m. and that is working well. The police tell me all the time that the place is quiet between those periods. The lockout is actually working quite well.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Do lockouts work because they enable the police to have time to deal with what is happening on the street before the venues close down and more people come out? My understanding from Newcastle is that it created that time frame for clearing the streets.

Mr WILKINS: It is not so much a clearing-the-streets process. The streets are quiet during that period, so it reduces the impact of assaults and the chance of assaults. Seventy per cent of the alcohol-related assaults happen outside licensed premises.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Do you have enough police numbers up here to deal with these issues?

Mr WILKINS: That is another very good question. I get asked that question a lot and it is a relevant question. Byron Bay could certainly use more police. If I had more police I would certainly be able to use them. It is a busy town. We do divert resources. I have a team of eight proactive police and they spend a significant amount of their time at Byron Bay on an operation called Ballast. From the start of our issue with the liquor accord and our collaboration with the council I have undertaken to ensure that we run an operation every weekend on a Friday and Saturday night with enhanced policing response to Byron Bay. That is Operation Ballast.

In general terms, policing is more complex in the country than it is in the city in that a lot of our resources are tied up with a lot of other issues. Then you have alcohol-related crime and break and enters and all those other issues that come up within these country communities that are an issue for us. We are relevantly staffed at the moment. We are 154 and we are right on the position of 154, plus the highway patrol works out of this area. But if someone said to me, "I am going to send you 12 more staff next weekend", I would be happy.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: When you say 154, is that operating at full capacity?

Mr WILKINS: No, my authorised strength is 154. I think I am at 155 at the moment but that will drop very shortly because it is a working movement; it changes almost daily. Our operational capacity is less than that because we have people on sick leave, maternity leave and other issues that impact on our operational strength.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Is there a police youth liaison officer for the Byron area?

Mr WILKINS: Yes, there is. Mark Harrison is the Police Youth Liaison Officer and we also have a student liaison police officer.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Do they deal with local young people about the issue of alcohol abuse, and have any strategies arisen from that collaboration?

Mr WILKINS: They do a lot of work with schools and a lot of work with youth. Nathan Verinder is the Student Police Liaison Officer. He is an excellent police officer and he is very well regarded in the community for his work with youth.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Have you formulated a view as to why there has been a culture of alcohol abuse?

Mr WILKINS: It is a culture. Whilst I can speak about personal experience and my views, Byron is no different to Kings Cross or any other place that has significant licensed premises and nightclubs within a very small area. I was born and bred in Manly and they have the same issues on the Corso. This is a cultural issue. Having a 21-year-old daughter, I understand it probably as well as most others. It is a culture of drinking before you go out, binge drinking until such time as you have put in as much as you possibly can until you fall over and then you go home. There is no question that it is a culture.

I was talking to friends recently who had just come back from Europe. They say that alcohol is available in vending machines with no control at all but it is not an issue. The culture does not dictate that youth will go out and get drunk to any great degree. It is certainly a cultural issue here and it is reputation. Byron has a reputation of being a great place, and it is, but it also has a reputation of going on football trips. We have had significant numbers of young men come here in the last couple of weeks for end of season football trips. Not only are they going to the Gold Coast but also they are coming to Byron Bay.

We have schoolies, and schoolies is a growing entity. Big numbers of kids come to schoolies. The phenomenon of schoolies coming to Byron because it is quieter and less problematic than the Gold Coast is interesting. A lot of the schoolies who come here say, "We went to the Gold Coast for a night; this is much better because it is much quieter." Having spent some time at schoolies on the Gold Coast last year I must say it was bedlam. It was a really interesting phenomenon of culture.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: In relation to your student liaison police officer, are any programs run through schools to educate children about alcohol and also to engage with parents? Is there a need to educate parents better?

Mr WILKINS: I think there is. From my background and where I have been, I have been to lower socio-economic areas as a police commander and had 10- and 12-year-olds walking the street at 2 and 3 o'clock in the morning. We have actually had to take them into the police station or look after them because their parents were not doing it. The education of parents is significant, and the responsibility placed upon parents is significant as well. There are a whole range of programs run through schools. We run different programs about the effect of alcohol and so does the council in collaboration. We do a lot of stuff about drink driving and the impact of it with the young teenagers getting their L-plates. We run a lot of those programs but I think it is when they get out of that process of going to school and they become young adults with money either studying or working that they begin to understand the culture of binge drinking, preloading and coming out and causing problems.

CHAIR: We have heard about preloading in other areas. Some of the evidence we have been getting particularly from licensed venues is that they are very heavily regulated and a lot of the problem relates to preloading. Is that a big issue up here as well?

Mr WILKINS: I think it is. I honestly think it is, because one of the strategies of the liquor accord is that if anyone approaches premises with alcohol in their hand they are barred, they are not allowed entry, which is really relevant and shows that people are drinking on the streets. Most of Byron Bay is an alcohol-free zone but it is really difficult for us because the legislative power is there for us to seize open containers of alcohol but not seize alcohol and it is difficult for us to take action.

CHAIR: Even in an alcohol-free zone?

Mr WILKINS: Yes. It is difficult. There are difficulties with the legislation and with case law for that. It is difficult for us to take action.

CHAIR: Is that something that we need to look at?

Mr WILKINS: It is my personal view that the licensing legislation laws are complex. They are complex for minor issues.

CHAIR: Surely it is an issue if you are in an alcohol-free zone with alcohol in your hand, even though it is not open, and the police are powerless to do something?

Mr WILKINS: Not if it is not open. You cannot if it is not open. If it is open we do the tip out because there is some case law that precludes us from giving out tickets for people being in possession of alcohol. It is like Queensland; you cannot drink alcohol in public places in Queensland at all. It is an offence straight up but people still do it. This is a resourcing issue. New Year's Eve is a good example. A lot of people come to Byron on New Year's Eve with alcohol under the arm in alcohol-free zones. We are working with the council to say there has got to be signs up there to say that there is to be no alcohol in here at all, this is a family-friendly area and do not bring alcohol into Byron Bay for New Year's Eve.

CHAIR: You are not suggesting that you would be picking people up while they are taking the stuff home, but what about when they coming into town with the intent?

Mr WILKINS: We do but that is again a matter of resourcing. We put a bin at the railway tracks at the entrance of the town to say stop here, but it is a big problem.

CHAIR: Do you think the rules around the supply of alcohol to minors are clearly understood?

Mr WILKINS: It is clearly understood by the police because we understand it every week in our operational response.

CHAIR: What about by the general public?

Mr WILKINS: I think it is. That is a personal view, but I think generally people would understand that you have got to be 18 before you drink, parents should not be supplying alcohol to people under the age of 18 and certainly you should not be buying it and then walking out of a bottle shop and handing it over to a youth.

CHAIR: What about if it is my kid and it is my home? Do you think the general perception out there is that it is at home, it is safer here and they should be drinking here under my supervision before they get into any trouble out in a park?

Mr WILKINS: I can only use my experience as a parent there. I certainly would not let my 21-year-old drink at home before she was 18. I have got two others on the way and they will not be drinking at home. But that is my personal view and I suggest that people probably have a more liberal approach to that than I do.

CHAIR: Do you think that the voluntary code should be mandatory?

Mr WILKINS: We have finished the trial, and we have a liquor accord meeting tomorrow and want to discuss it with the liquor accord tomorrow. I think personally they could be more robust. It was my view to support the trial, and I was encouraged that all those involved in the trial complied with it in the end and a couple of the stragglers jumped on board, so that was good. I think there is probably a little bit more that we could do and we are going to discuss that tomorrow. I know that there is some feeling between the office of liquor and gaming and ourselves, the police, and the community, that a precinct liquor accord may be forthcoming.

CHAIR: Is there any explanation as to why the statistics went up in August and September?

Mr WILKINS: There is no real story to it. Again it is the assault factor of violence and alcohol, and I cannot sit here and say Splendour—Splendour had a minor impact. On the long weekend, this weekend, we had

a few assaults. There were a lot more people in town, and I do not know if the people were here, but it was busy, busy, busy on the weekend. The place was packed. There is no rhyme or reason as to why it has gone up, so it is actually unremarkable, which is a bit strange.

CHAIR: What is the percentage of outlets that are under the voluntary code? Do you have that information? You can take it on notice, if you like.

Mr WILKINS: Yes.

CHAIR: Is there anything that we, as a committee, should be looking at and recommending that would assist the police in trying to drive down this violence?

Mr WILKINS: I think the environmental factors are important. Back to Jan Barham's point that they do cost money, I think it is a good investment. I think it would be a wonderful investment for some money to be set aside for those fundamental issues of lighting and CCTV, enhancing the transport hub with the environment. I would always welcome extra police and I think that the liquor accord is certainly trying in their endeavours to reduce the spotlight upon themselves by complying with the conditions that they have placed upon themselves.

CHAIR: Are the documents you have for us or just for your reference?

Mr WILKINS: No, just in case you asked for specifics.

CHAIR: Could you just chase up that percentage for me and come back to us?

Mr WILKINS: Yes.

CHAIR: The Committee has resolved that any questions taken on notice be returned within 21 days. The secretariat will liaise with you to facilitate the response. On behalf of the Committee, I thank you very much for your time.

(The witness withdrew)

HANNAH JANE SPALDING, Executive Chairperson, Byron Bay Liquor Accord, and

LOREN ALLEN NOWLAND, Vice Chair, Byron Bay Liquor Accord, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Would you like to make a short opening statement before we proceed to questions?

Ms SPALDING: Essentially the Byron Bay Liquor Accord has definitely been a lot more active this year since we have become formal. We have a constitution and a set of formal terms, which has never been done before with our local accord, which I think is a lot of the reason why we have seen some strong movement. The accord is working as hard as it can within its realm to be able to try to change the impact of alcohol in Byron Bay.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Are all of the licensees or representatives of all licensed premises part of the liquor accord in Byron Bay?

Ms SPALDING: No, we have approximately 25 members.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Do you know what proportion that would be?

Ms SPALDING: If you go by the statistics, we have approximately 70 licences in Byron. A lot of those are restaurants or catering licences. The major venues, being the hotel licences in town, bottle shop licences and night club licences, they are all members and active participants of the accord.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Detective Superintendent Wilkins was telling us about the voluntary conditions. Are these conditions that the accord developed, and did you develop those in collaboration with the police or with the community?

Ms SPALDING: Definitely. We spoke at length. There was a list of terms given to us by the police and suggestions from the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing [OLGR]. I had spoken with some community groups, but essentially we looked at what had been asked of us, where it had happened in other areas, and we looked at how we thought it could fit our town. For example, in Newcastle, they have no shots and no doubles after 10 o'clock every night of the week. Byron being a tourist population, we understand that people will often come here in a very different realm to a city like Newcastle, where a large majority of the population are here to socialise on weekends, so we do no shots, no doubles and no jugs at any time of operation. That way we are sending a message. If someone went out for lunch, the message was the same as if they went out for dinner or went out for a drink later at night.

Mr NOWLAND: If I can add to that, there is a little bit of misinformation in the last statement. The word "voluntary" has really done us a disservice. The only voluntary part of it was that we offered them up ourselves. We all signed a declaration with the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing, and they are enforceable. In those instances that we were talking about with people that were fined, it was under that.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Yes, but it was the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing, not the police force.

Ms SPALDING: No. What occurred was that out of the two that have been in the paper recently, only one of them had been caught for not doing the terms. The other one was for licensing conditions that were on their licence document. They now have the conditions that are part of the accord imposed on their licence, so it is now a statutory declaration. If any of us within the accord do not do the terms, that will be placed immediately on the licence, and it comes down to your licensed venue. Any condition on your licence is onerous, not just for trade but also for on sale, if you were to sell your business.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: If it is not too long a list, could you tell us what those conditions are, because we do not have a submission that outlines those.

Ms SPALDING: We have a 1.30 a.m. lockout. Previously it was 2.00 a.m., so we brought that forward by half an hour. We have no shots, no doubles and no jugs at any time, and no entry to patrons seen drinking on approach. We have a maximum of four drinks after midnight and the reduction of stockpiling of no more than two drinks per person on a table after midnight; and cease sale of alcohol 15 minutes prior to closing. I am sure I

am missing one or two here. Bottle shops we have also got. We had big feedback from the community about four litre casks, and I know from watching television that you did see a lot of people, especially over summer, walking around with a four-litre goon sack on their arm, which is something that we felt a big need to address. We have no more than two litres, which also reduces the price structure because a two-litre cask is not anywhere near as affordable as a four-litre cask, and no super cheap cleanskins sold in bottle shops, just to reduce the extremely low-cost alcohol sales that especially a lot of the youth target as well.

Mr NOWLAND: We felt that as the accord was driving part of the preloading, you know, you could jump on the internet—and I had backpacked through Byron 10 years ago and it was all about the goon sack. I remember people giving me a hard time because I was the rich guy drinking a case of beer and it was like, "I'm not going to drink a box of wine", it was not my thing, but yes, a major problem for us.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: We have had quite a bit of evidence about Newcastle being the model and, as you know, the Police Association certainly supports that model. You mentioned no shots and no doubles. What other elements in the Byron Bay accord are different from Newcastle?

Ms SPALDING: There is not a huge amount. We close at 3 o'clock and they close at 3.30 a.m. Their lockout is 1.30 a.m. and our lockout is 1.30 a.m.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: What time do you close, I beg your pardon?

Ms SPALDING: Three o'clock is the final close. There are only five venues that trade until 3.00 a.m. I believe that there are more licences in Byron Bay that allow venues to trade, but those places do not and never have chosen to take up that licence to date. Of the ones that actually operate after midnight, there are five that trade past one o'clock. We have one of our larger venues cease alcohol at about 12.30, quarter to one, and they have everyone exiting their building from one o'clock.

Mr NOWLAND: I think it is important to note that Hannah mentioned that some of those venues do not use that part of their licence, or they have not, but it is also really important that during the winter months and a lot of the late traders close because there is just not enough business to sustain it, so although they may be able to and may choose not to, I would say that is more of a business decision than just choosing not to use it.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: With reference to the accord that has been operating, and this is a hypothetical question, if you could refine what is there or add to it elements that are not there, what would you propose?

Ms SPALDING: That is a tough one. I personally believe that if you look at any other liquor accord in the State, they have not put conditions upon themselves unless it has been under a precinct liquor accord or a direction from the Government to put something in as severe as the venues in Byron have on themselves. The word "voluntary" is there, but I think it is more commendable than anything that the venues have not waited for the Government to see what they do and slap it on them because we wanted to make an impact. A lot of what came about was from New Year's Eve and a massive uproar in Byron Bay due to the impact of New Year's Eve in Byron, where most licensed venues saw a 40 per cent drop in trade because people were street drinking. There were cars filled with alcohol brought into the town.

I do not know how we combat that as licensed venues. People, especially on New Year's Eve, were driving into town with boots filled with alcohol before they even got here, pulling up with their stereos. I spoke to numerous members who lived on Butler Street, which is just off the main street of the other side of the train tracks, and it was a huge impact. I think maybe a stronger collaboration with the backpacker association would be positive to try to address those issues of what stems from backpackers. Loren and I have discussed it, as he has been a backpacker whereas I have grown up in this town, so I have never seen that part of it in the same light. People choose where to go based on where the party venue is.

They often tell their patrons that they have to leave their accommodation by 10.30 or 11 o'clock and they are not allowed to party in that area, and then it is a free for all and they can do what they want because it is their accommodation. They are then coming onto the street right at the time when a lot of the impact increases. As the police said, there is a lot of failure to quit because the venues are refusing people at the door from coming in and that is why a lot of the licensing statements issued are on failures to quit because there are a high amount of venues that refuse to have those people that are preloading beforehand inside their venues.

Mr NOWLAND: To add to your question, you asked what we would like to see in addition. We cannot do it ourselves. That is really what it has come down to. We have a big meeting tomorrow to discuss our action plan and what everybody has completed on their action plan. The council has a piece of that, the police have a piece of that, and the Byron Bay Liquor Accord has. I cannot speak for any of the others yet until the end of tomorrow's meeting, but we have sat there as an accord and ticked every box that we set out to do originally. It would be very interesting to sit down with those other groups—and I can already tell you that some of those things have not happened because we do not have them—and really ask them for their help.

Ms SPALDING: And the document that Loren is talking about is the OLGR Byron Bay Alcohol Action Plan that was put together with a view that there needed to be collaboration from all stakeholders to actually see effective change in Byron Bay.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I appreciate that you have done those things voluntarily, but it comes after a long period during which concerns have been put forward. As I said, in 2010 the council voted unanimously to ask the Byron Bay Liquor Accord to take on some of those conditions because council has no role to impose them. It took a big event and a big community outcry for it to happen, but congratulations on doing that. In relation to the meeting tomorrow and fulfilling the requirements of the action plan, there are a lot of things that require other parties to do things, particularly the council. My query is about the licensees who profit from the tourism in the town, and the buying of alcohol and everything else. What is their contribution, back through the accord, towards dealing with those things? Is it a case that there is money collected that then contributes back to offsetting some of the impacts from alcohol?

Ms SPALDING: We have membership fees. We actually have some of the highest membership fees in the state. We have 25 venues which are part of the accord so that of course gives a limited pool of funds. From what the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing [OLGR] has said to us, we know without a doubt that the fees we request from our members are significantly above those of any other accord. We support services for schoolies, and we have done for a fair few years, with a donation to assist with the hub and to assist in lessening the impact on the town over that time. Once again, the fact that the accord is run by a committee means that we do have to vote on proposals. Tomorrow we are putting forward a proposition to donate towards New Year's Eve celebrations to try to improve the outcomes and manage the impacts in that peak period as well.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: What sorts of funds are we talking about donating to schoolies and New Year's Eve celebrations?

Ms SPALDING: So far we have donated \$3,000 to schoolies celebrations. Quite often individual licensees will contribute on top of that, if they wish; and that is separate to the accord, of course.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: What sorts of fees do you collect as a whole? The 2002 alcohol summit wanted mandatory membership of accords, which would have brought funds.

Mr NOWLAND: Without asking the Treasurer specifically, I think there was about \$16,000 in funds raised this year that we will distribute back to the community.

Ms SPALDING: As I said earlier, we have just become a formal body this year. We have never had a constitution and we have never been a formalised accord before so that is a process we went through this year.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Could you explain that? A liquor accord did operate for some time previously.

Ms SPALDING: Yes, it operated as an independent body. Not all liquor accords have a constitution. It is like with any not-for-profit organisation: you can have a constitution which formalises what the requirements are to become a member, how much their fees are and how the whole process works. That is something that the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing assisted with so that we could formalise the accord and really move forward by setting out a set of terms that members of the accord would adhere to. The constitution states that if you are a member of the accord then you must adhere to those terms. So it fortified us and formalised things in a way that we have never had before. That was in late March-early April.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Are you aware of the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing task force that happened in 2005?

Ms SPALDING: That is a little before my time. I had not moved back to Byron then. I was living in Sydney at that time.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: What about in April 2010 when council did vote unanimously on this?

Ms SPALDING: As I said, I was not a member of the executive back then. I have taken on being a member of the executive and the chairperson this year. In saying that, at our annual meeting this year for the first time we had a serious collaboration from venues that are a part of the executive. Among the four members of the executive we have a restaurant, a nightclub, a hotel and a bottle shop represented. This is the first time ever that we have had a cross-section of licensed venues driving the accord.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: You said that there were 70-something licensees. Does that include the restaurants?

Ms SPALDING: That is in total, approximately, from the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing. It includes restaurants, catering licences, special event licences, wedding function licences et cetera. So they are not hotel and nightclub licences—that is a lot more limited. But as far as attracting a wider range of people goes, we have been doing membership drives this year. The Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing have sent letters out on our behalf as well trying to get as many people as possible interested. One of our executives now is a restaurateur and we have been speaking with her a lot about ways to engage the restaurant community. We have scaled the fees differently, so of course restaurants pay a lot less. We are trying to engage them and get them to be part of the accord as a whole.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: So would you support mandatory membership of accords?

Ms SPALDING: Yes, I do not see an issue with that. There are definitely people out there who are not members of the accord but who do have an impact on alcohol consumption in Byron Bay.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Having grown up here, what do you see as the culture or identity of Byron and what part does that play both in the lives of young people growing up here and in the sort of people who are attracted to coming here. You both have a part to play in this.

Ms SPALDING: It really comes down to what you take from it. When I was 18 I went out and socialised a lot. I had a lot of friends who were able to go out before they were 18. I was very well known in the community and was never able to get into a venue. Licensing laws were a lot more lenient 20 years ago than they are now. But I used to get up in the morning and go paddle-boarding and enjoy what is out there for us to enjoy as free activities. I think those activities are still there for our youth, and a huge part of Byron is the environmental beauty we have here to enjoy. We had a large number of licensed premises back then. There were fewer conditions—for example, there were no lockouts.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: So what has happened? What has changed? Is it about a culture change or the party-town dynamic?

Ms SPALDING: It has been a party-town for a long time.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: But something has changed, obviously.

Ms SPALDING: Something has changed, and I cannot really pinpoint anything. I think a lot of it comes down to people taking responsibility for each other. There is more aggression with youth in general. Once upon a time if you saw a fight then it was one guy having a fight with another guy not five or six guys laying into someone. That is a new phenomenon which I know is not specific to Byron Bay. I do not have the answer to why that phenomenon is occurring.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Do you think it is tourism-specific?

Ms SPALDING: I think it is a cross-section of society. I agree with Stuart.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: It seems to be happening at Kings Cross, Manly and Byron Bay.

Ms SPALDING: I think that when you look at Byron Bay in a number of the stats you see that we are not right at the top. The number of incidents per head of population is very high. I think a large part of that has to do with accommodation. For example, this past weekend there was not a bed available for a 20-kilometre radius around the town. Everything was full. We have a large amount of accommodation in our area and a large number of tourists do come here. So our statistical population is very different to our real population—and that is the case for any tourism location; I know that King's Cross deals with the same issues, as does the City of Sydney.

I think for a small town Byron is quite unusual like that. If you look at towns up and down the coast of New South Wales you will see that no other place attracts such a diverse range of tourists and the numbers that Byron Bay does, and that has been the case for a very long time. We have had a diverse range of tourists here for decades, and it is one of the really positive things about Byron that I think we need to continue. We want to have young people here. We want to have young people visit here as long as those young people who come here are respectful. It is the same with middle-aged people: we want middle-aged people to come here if they are respectful. I think what we need to look at is turning away not a demographic or an age group but rather a negative behaviour from a small group of people who are coming here. Unfortunately, it is a small percentage of people who are ruining it for the majority.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: We are looking at strategies to deal with alcohol abuse. Can you put forward any ideas about what could be done to ensure people's safety and protection? I remember when you had the bus running years ago—that was an important initiative but it failed.

Ms SPALDING: Yes, it failed. I think transport is a large part of it. I know from speaking to a lot of young people that they heralded and wanted to bring back the 12.30 a.m. Blanch's Bus run that used to go out. I have had a lot of young people who work for us talk to me about that. You would laugh because at about a quarter past 12 you would see 30 or 40 people sprinting down to the bus station to catch the last bus home, and it was free or at least extremely affordable. We have had liquor accord buses in the past, and I think the reason they have not worked is that those services have not been run in collaboration with council. I have been part of a committee working with council on a grant that council has to formulate a transport strategy. I think that if a service is done as a combined scheduled route then it has a greater likelihood of success.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: One of the previous buses did work with council, but it did not work either. In terms of the youth focus, is there anything more that you think the accord could do specifically, whether it is financially or some move to some strategy to support young people?

Mr NOWLAND: Our big push is education. We have just spent the last six months working very hard to get the accord to be in the position that it is and to get everybody compliant. That has been a major drain on our time professionally. Moving forward, the accord is all about education—we want that to be in schools, in accommodation and in venues. We want it to be in the restaurant on a beer coaster at 2 o'clock in the afternoon. What is currently happening is that people are being educated at the time of offence. So I might walk up to a venue with my beer in my hand and the bouncer there will say, "Sorry, you are nice looking people but you cannot come in because you have got a beer." I might say, "What, are you kidding me. I will just tip it out and come in." And they will say, "Sorry, we cannot have you." That is happening to people stepping out of a taxi and it is happening to 18-year-olds walking around the corner; it is a range of things. So education is our big push.

I want to go back to one of your previous questions, if you do not mind. As the backpacker, you asked the question of what has changed. I put it to you that nothing has changed, and that is potentially our problem. So you may arrive on the bus as a young person from Brisbane or from an international destination, and you step off the bus at the station and see homeless people there sitting around in a circle and drinking. Half of them are sleeping and half of them are still going. That is your first experience. Then you check into your backpackers hostel where everybody is going to the shops to buy some alcohol and will then hang out there all day. It goes back to what Hannah was saying earlier, from whatever time they have arrived—whether it is 10 o'clock in the morning or 2 o'clock in the afternoon—they are going to hang out and party, and have their meal at the backpackers. Then the backpackers staff are going to say, "Okay, everybody get out on the street."

It is no secret why incidents happen after 11 o'clock in the evening. I know Stuart was talking about 12 midnight, and a lot of people want to focus on issues after 12 midnight, but it actually starts from 11 o'clock—we should not kid ourselves. So that education program is our big push. We want to get out there and get our message in front of those people to educate them before they start so that they do not walk out onto the street

with their beer or go to a venue at 11 o'clock at night and be told what they can and cannot do; they should know the rules already by that stage.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: It is my understanding that the figures do not follow through on that and that it is not travellers or people from overseas who are the problem.

Mr NOWLAND: Byron Bay is a magnet, and you were talking before about what draws visitors and who they are. Byron Bay is a magnet, Manly is a magnet and King's Cross is a magnet. Through sheer numbers you get a small percentage who will always do the wrong thing.

Ms SPALDING: I think the other thing you have to be aware of with backpacker hostels here is that not only backpackers stay in them; they are quite often filled with a rugby group, an after season party group or a bucks party group. They are looking for a very cheap accommodation option—dorm-style accommodation—because they are not here to stay in nice accommodation; they are here for a different reason. If they come in and see that side of things initially, and have that freedom with no regulation or restriction on their activities before they enter licensed venues, then that is going to have flow on effects. It is about changing the behaviour from the beginning.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: You talked about what you would like to achieve with education. What is stopping those things from being done? What are the barriers?

Mr NOWLAND: We have to go to a vote tomorrow. To spend our members' money we have to go to a vote. At our last meeting, which was about three months ago, we were knee-deep in this issue. The press was all over what was going on in Byron. We run our businesses, we have young families and we try to keep the accord moving in the direction it should be. So tomorrow we will ask for that vote about education. We have identified some funds that, if we get approval, we can move forward with.

Ms SPALDING: We have already done some investigation into flyers, using Facebook and other ways that we can hit a range of targets. Once we have something available then we will be able to go to accommodation providers and really push them to come on board with what we are doing to try to educate their customers.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: What else have you got in the accord beyond the lockdown, the limited drinks and those sorts of things. What else is within the accord that you feel is tackling alcohol abuse in the area?

Ms SPALDING: Is really hard for us to do much that does not directly affect our business. We have no impact on police or council decisions of course and what happens in that realm. So the only area we can tackle is directly related to our businesses. In talking about what we have done, some businesses within the accord adopting these terms have taken quite a significant financial hit to their businesses—some more than others, and that is a choice they have made. As Loren said, it is about trying to find a way to educate more people. The other thing we are looking into—and we have yet to engage with this fully but we have discussed it and we will be voting on it tomorrow—is approaching local high schools to see if we can find a way to fund year 12 students who are willing to do a responsible service of alcohol course. It would mean that we would pay for their course and they would pay for their certificates to work. It would give them not only an education before they enter a licensed venue but also an opportunity for employment once they turn 18. So that is another targeted strategy that we are looking at and that we are planning to vote on tomorrow.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Before I hand over, I have one question about penalties for intoxicated people and move-on powers. Do you think those are adequate or could more be done?

Mr NOWLAND: I had a note here in the "other" category for the last option. Mr Wilkins sort of touched on this earlier. The move-on order, order 550, came in. It was high in Byron Bay, because as venue owners we know that if we refuse you service then you are going to get refused everywhere else. With one text message every security guard in town will know that the guy in the green coat is not to come in. So that was not our issue; our issue was that those people were stuck out on the streets. Of course when we get off the phone and we use that move-on order they have not been in our venue and we are not liable for anything. So we need to get this guy off our streets. What the police choose to do with this guy is up to them. The 550 order has shown some real traction. Drinking is a bone of contention. I grew up in Canada and there you do not walk down the street with a beer because you are guaranteed to get a \$250 fine.

Ms SPALDING: That is definitely something that I personally would like to see changed. The police should have greater powers over people consuming alcohol. My staff have told me that often people are drinking alcohol in the car park behind Lawson Street on Friday and Saturday nights. If the police come by, all they can do is grab the bottle they are drinking from. They could have another 24 beers or whatever sitting in the boot of their car. TV footage presented recently showed a large number of people walking around the streets with a bottle of alcohol in their hand. We introduced the no drinking on approach strategy because that is a big issue. I agree with Loren Nowland. There is a visual impact in the town that is not ideal during the day. People drink in our local parks. I will no longer take my two-year-old daughter to one park in town because there is a camp there where people are drinking and smoking ice. That is in the heart of Byron where everybody gets off. That is an issue.

Mr NOWLAND: Personal responsibility is an issue. I think it is fair to say that young people always struggle with authority and they choose to turn their back on it. Little fines could be imposed so that they learn about personal responsibility from a young age. For example, if they are caught drinking at 16 years of age they could be given an on-the-spot fine. I do not know how that works legally. That is when we start to see a culture shift. These kids are 18, 20 or 22 and the police are telling them to tip out one beer they are drinking and they are just laughing about it. There is no personal responsibility. That needs to carry through to the legislation for licensed venues. If someone is found intoxicated on a premise, nothing happens to them. The licensed venue is fined, but there is no personal responsibility for the person involved. They can go out the next weekend and behave in exactly the same way. That is where it has to stop.

CHAIR: You said you have met all of your targets in the action plan. Have you done a review? How do you qualify that?

Ms SPALDING: We have spoken directly with the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing and we have ticked off everything that has been requested of us.

Mr NOWLAND: The review starts tomorrow. The police and the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing have held their information really tight, which is difficult for us. It would have been nice to be privy to some of that information. We will find out tomorrow in front of all of our members how we have been performing. That is the start of our review.

CHAIR: Who should the Committee approach to get the results of tomorrow's meeting? Do we ask the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing, you or the police?

Ms SPALDING: The Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing will be providing most of the results. That will be a large proportion of it. Of course, our proportion is about what we are willing to vote on, our education and those sorts of things. There will be minutes of the meeting. Our secretary has sent out a huge amount of statistical information that can come out of those meetings. Sometimes it is not all captured. The police and the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing will be the best to approach to get that statistical evidence.

CHAIR: Will the Committee be able to get the plan and the results?

Ms SPALDING: The alcohol plan is on our website.

CHAIR: I am talking about the plan and the results.

Ms SPALDING: I understand that many of the things that have been asked of council are costly. Unfortunately, we do not get a lot of extra assistance, even though we have a huge tourism impact in our town all year around—it is not just seasonal; it is 365 days a year. Of course, the council has a smaller pool of funds because the number of people living here is very disproportionate to the number of people who are deemed to be living here according to the statistics. Most houses are full, especially in the summer months—there are five or six people in a two- or three-bedroomed house. There is definitely a higher proportion of population in this area than we have the funds for.

CHAIR: The accord strategies here are tougher than those in place in Newcastle. You said that it has an impact on businesses. What is attracting other businesses to sign up? You said it has had an impact on their business.

Ms SPALDING: The majority of those impacted are the labour traders because of the earlier lockouts and closures with businesses trading until midnight. There are definitely restaurants that have turned away because they want to do jugs of sangria and they do not want anything to have an impact on that. In saying that, some restaurants that have had that as part of their business have chosen to give it up. They have seen it as a collaborative response. We are trying to get the message across that it is about our tourism sector as a whole. We do not want to see a 10 per cent or 20 per cent drop in Byron Bay tourism because it is a major part of our economy. It goes further than licensed venues. If we have a significant drop in our youth numbers tour operators will suffer throughout the year. There are also businesses that provide things to venues and restaurants. It impacts on businesses other than licensed venues. We are trying to convey the message that if we are all part of it we will see a better impact.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for your evidence this afternoon and the work you are doing. The Committee will be in touch with you after tomorrow's meeting to see how things are progressing.

Mr NOWLAND: That is great. I would like to make a final point. Stuart Wilkins referred to the movement of crime statistics. He said he did not honestly know what could be done. Businesses are looking at it from a totally different perspective. Our dollar was as strong as it has ever been 12 months ago and that definitely affected our businesses. Turnover was down across the board. Like much of the east coast, we have had beautiful weather in Byron Bay that we have not had in previous years. We are a small microcosm of what happens in Australia, but all those little things affect us. It will be interesting to see the statistics tomorrow and to correlate them. However, we cannot compare what is happening now with how many beds were full this time last year.

Ms SPALDING: It is a lot harder to get all those statistics that affect the population in Byron.

Mr NOWLAND: We do not want to make excuses, but we need all the information to find the correct solutions.

CHAIR: As does the Committee. We appreciate that.

(The witnesses withdrew)

DI ELIZABETH MAHONEY, Director, Byron Youth Service, and

DEBORAH ANNE PEARSE, Senior Youth Worker, Byron Youth Service, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Do you wish to make an opening statement?

Ms MAHONEY: I represent Byron Youth Service, our workers, volunteers and community members. I have worked at the youth service for eight years and Deborah has worked for 13 years virtually every night on the streets of Byron Bay in our outreach program. I have been an interested party attending meetings of the Byron Bay Liquor Accord for the past five years. I have been a member of the Schoolies Safety Working Group for the past five years and I am also a member of the council's New Year's Eve Safety Committee. I have worked with the Byron Blues Fest, at Splendour in the Grass and other community festivals over the past five years providing breathalyser services and doing education promotion about safety. We will work with any group in the community to ensure that young people are safe, valued and happy. That is our vision.

I will raise seven issues in relation to strategies to keep young people safe or to reduce alcohol abuse by young people. The first is alcohol advertising and promotion. We should review how we are enabling our culture to glamorise and glorify alcohol use in the community. There are probably some point-of-sale issues specifically relating Byron Bay at venues and bottle shops. Trading hours are also an issue. The social data indicates that Byron Bay often records rates double or even triple on a range of social indicators, including risky drinking rates among teenagers, drink-driving crashes, driving under the influence rates, alcohol-related non-domestic assault, sexual assault and sexually transmitted infections. That demonstrates the need for a thorough review of trading hours.

Evidence from Australian and international research shows that reducing trading hours, particularly late-night trading, can significantly reduce alcohol-related harm. Byron Bay and many other tourism destinations are popular for people who want to open restaurants, businesses and licensed premises. At the moment there is no limit on the number of licences that can be issued in the community. That needs to be changed; there needs to be a cap on the number of licences that can be managed within a community to keep it safe.

Alcohol pricing is another issue. The liquor accord has done a good job in removing four-litre sacks from the market in Byron Bay. That is one really good thing that affects young people because goon sacks allow them to get intoxicated very quickly and very cheaply. That has been a really good measure. However, there is still a lot of discounting by supermarket chains and that is a real concern. Preloading is very challenging. It is a cultural issue and it is driven by the availability, advertising and promotion of alcohol. It is very difficult to address; there are very few effective strategies to prevent preloading or to manage it at the moment. The liquor accord has implemented the no alcohol on approach strategy, which is great. I wonder whether we need to go a step further and look at how we breathalyse people in venues or on the streets. I do not want to control people overly, but at some points the responsible service of alcohol system in venues might need to be reviewed in terms of how young people are presenting intoxicated. They are very good at hiding their intoxication and accessing venues, but it is still an issue that we need to work through.

Funding is a massive issue in this community for early intervention programs like street crews. We have no funding and we are constantly fundraising to keep this important program operating. It is a really important program to keep young people safe, but we have no funding to do it. Ten thousand schoolies will arrive in Byron Bay in a couple of weeks. This year the council has pulled \$10,000 out of its response and put it into a New Year's Eve strategy. Byron United has also pulled \$3,000 out of its response. We have been left with a budget hole that the community must pick up somehow. We have no State Government funding or involvement, apart from the police and health organisations being involved in the coordinated response. Given that we are the number one schoolies destination in New South Wales—and the second most popular in Australia—the high-risk consumption of large quantities of alcohol by young people needs to change.

Byron Bay is a real honeypot for young people because of the great entertainment on offer. I am glad to see that the New South Wales Department of Attorney General and Justice has provided some funding to enable the development of a late-night transport strategy and service for this summer. However, licensed venues and community stakeholders such as us and others must see how we can make that sustainable. That could help to resolve some of the problems with transport and young people and keeping them safe.

CHAIR: Can you table that document?

Ms MAHONEY: Yes.

Document tabled.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: I am interested to know whether you think there are particular harm reduction programs that are more effective for young people, given that that is really our area of inquiry, that exist either here that you have seen in Byron Bay, across Australia or, for that matter, any overseas jurisdictions that you are aware of?

Ms MAHONEY: I have got a background in education and I was disappointed to see the New South Wales Department of Education get rid of the alcohol and drugs section. We have done a lot of education in schools with young people. We are not funded very well to do that so it becomes something that we chase money for. It concerns me that the liquor accord and the OLGR as well have developed some education materials and want to go in and educate young people. I think community workers and youth workers and educators are better placed to do that education in a more balanced way than liquor industry representatives. I think the focus in some of the research—education gets a bit of a bad name as not being a very effective strategy but I happen to personally think it really depends on the kind of education program implemented and I think we really need to focus on resilience-building type programs and encouraging young people to make good choices around alcohol and to understand the consequences of their choices given the context of alcohol-related harms.

Ms PEARSE: Can I just add briefly to that? I had a conversation with the school this morning. I think, and the school agrees, that we need to start educating young people a lot younger. We are trying to educate them and it is obvious there is a problem. We were just talking about getting stakeholders together and trying to organise some kind of program. But, as Ms Mahoney said, there is never any funding. I address the binge drinking issues every day and when I work at night with all the young people I work with that is kind of an ongoing part of my role, it is not a program.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: I am particularly interested to hear, because in Byron there are two distinct groups—your residents and you have got visitors—and I think, quite differently from any other tourist destination, it seems the greatest proportion of tourists are also young people. Do you think we need to have different programs aimed at your residents and your visitors? Do we need to approach those things differently or those private groups differently?

Ms MAHONEY: Yes, I think we do, given that we are an international destination and we have got people from all sorts of countries who have no idea what secondary supply laws apply in Australia and in New South Wales. We regularly hear from young people that backpackers will buy them alcohol because the backpackers do not really know at all about our secondary supply laws. So yes I think there are some very targeted campaigns we can do to certain visiting groups and I think for young people in high schools or even primary schools there are different programs that you might have in terms of the resilience-building approach.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I would like to find out your thoughts about the liquor accord that has been operating here. I think you were in the audience when the others who gave evidence spoke about it. Do you believe it has been a successful initiative and one that is worth continuing to be supported?

Ms MAHONEY: I have been involved for about five years. Initially when I was involved it seemed to be functioning okay but there were issues. It is a difficult concept at times, I think, anyway to have a whole group of competitors working together in a sense to address the impact of their business. So I think it is a challenging environment for the members. It did break down for about a year—there were no liquor accord meetings at all—and then since it was revived a couple of years ago I think the liquor accord has done a good job in tackling the issues and working together. I think they can do better on some issues but they have certainly had their work cut out for them. I acknowledge that getting some of the foundation stuff working is really good and important. I would like to see them do more work in certain areas.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Would you like to comment on where those particular areas are?

Ms MAHONEY: I would like to see them put more funding into some of the strategies to address alcohol-related harm. Three thousand dollars for schoolies is great because we are scratching around for money to help put up a coordinated response to schoolies, but it is not enough; really we need more funding to do

things like that. Schoolies is just one period of time whereas the whole of summer is really a challenging time for us. I think they can probably do a better job on reaching out to the rest of the community. Our organisation and the community drug action team have been involved as interested parties in the liquor accord but I think there needs to be greater consultation with other members of the community as well.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Would you mind describing for the benefit of the Committee the work you do in a very practical way in discussing, talking and engaging with young people about the dangers of binge drinking? How do you go about doing that?

Ms MAHONEY: It depends a little bit on the context. At festivals, for example, finding out where they are from, how long they are there for, what they are drinking perhaps, what they think of the price of drinks at the festival and how they are reacting to that. I had a conversation with someone at Splendour in the Grass where they were saying that "the price of alcohol is so expensive I might actually start to take some drugs instead". So we are always gauging the balance between those issues. In a school setting or within groups perhaps that we work with it is understanding what the issues are for young people and what the dangers are in trying to bring in strategies that might protect them against that danger and just checking in with young people a lot and where they are at.

Schoolies is another category where you are talking with a lot of young people from outside of this community but there are a lot of young people within the community who also get out during schoolies as well and want to be part of the schoolies action that happens here. I guess our focus is nearly always on safety—keeping young people safe—and talking to them about how they are drinking, what they are drinking, what strategies they have got to keep themselves safe.

Ms PEARSE: Can I quickly add another aspect to that? Part of the good thing about street crews is it is a point of contact for workers with young people. Most of those young people are local and I know them and many of them are in my groups or I am working at the school with them or doing individual support and I can follow up. So I might not be able to do that much on the night when they are vomiting in the gutter or we are taking them to the hospital or talking to the police about the best way to deal with the situation, but when I see them in the week when they are sober and they are at school then we can talk about the behaviour, the consequences, put a safety plan together, encourage consequential thinking, that kind of thing.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I was going to ask you that question. Thank you. What I do want to hear about, like the rest of the community, is what it is like on the streets. On a Friday or Saturday night what do you do when you are working with those young people and what are they confronting?

Ms PEARSE: That is such a big question. It is changeable: some nights it is reasonably quiet and we get to just walk around and talk to young people and check in with them, give them food, make sure they have got some way of getting home safely—all the kind of safety stuff. Other nights we are just responding to what is going on, which may be fights, which may be finding young people in the gutter, behind the shops face down in the dirt unconscious, young girls that are paralysed with fear because they are really young and there is some older guy hitting on them and they do not know how to extricate themselves from that situation; kids who have all come into town together and the initial plan is that they are all going to look after each other, but once they are all intoxicated they cannot even look after themselves let alone everyone else. So there are often kids that are scared, they do not know where their friends are, they are frightened what has happened to their friend, they do not know how to get home.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: What happens in the following week or whenever when you see them? What do they need after they have had that experience of being on the street and being vulnerable or being put in dangerous situations? What do you think, after many years of working with young people, is the trigger for how we can address that risk and unsafe behaviour to them transitioning to a strategy for greater awareness and safety for young people?

Ms PEARSE: I think that connection is really, really important and just cannot be understated. Lots of these kids have already had a hard life.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: You are talking about building trust with them?

Ms PEARSE: Yes, building trust, getting that connection with them, finding what they love, finding what they are good at and what makes them happy and trying to build on that so that they feel a bit better about themselves so maybe they do not want to go and trash themselves so much.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: To understand the role of the youth service, and I appreciate there are financial constraints, the services you provide link through all these different issues of trying to give them other interests and purpose as well as that understanding of self-respect. Does the Expect Respect project still happen, or some form of that, or Girls Group?

Ms PEARSE: Girls Group, yes.

Ms MAHONEY: Love Bites I think is the new Expect Respect.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Do they work through the youth service or through the school or both?

Ms MAHONEY: Through schools that one.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: What is the feedback from young people? What is effective?

Ms MAHONEY: I think it is hard to say just one thing is effective because every young person is different.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: We are trying to understand and we are getting different—

Ms MAHONEY: That is why I think there need to be multiple strategies in place because not everything will be effective for one young person. I do not think one-day workshops at schools are that effective; I think that long-term relationship building is probably a better strategy than the one-off intervention. But having said that, sometimes the one-off intervention can create a penny-drop for somebody and they see something that "okay I am not going to do that" or they learn something about brain development that might change their behaviour and their thoughts about drinking alcohol. So I think it requires a whole range of strategies.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: You mentioned the funding situation. Can you provide some information about what sort of funding is required to—

Ms MAHONEY: We have had \$13,000 pulled out of the budget for schoolies, for example. So that is being felt. We have luckily got a few grants in, but it just means you spend all your time writing grants and chasing money and less time on actually developing the strategies.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: But you are referring to schoolies—that is predominantly about—

Ms MAHONEY: That is just schoolies, but there are lots of other things that are hard to chase money for as well.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: But with something like schoolies is that traditionally or specifically a tourism thing or is that local kids getting involved with schoolies?

Ms PEARSE: All the local kids—I work in the week mainly in the north, so all the kids from Mullum, Bruns, Ocean Shores, out in the hills, all of them come to Byron, and younger; they are not even leaving school.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: It is just about hanging around wanting to be where the vibe is?

Ms PEARSE: Yes.

Ms MAHONEY: Just one other point about the funding, with schoolies, for example, Byron schoolies safety working group, or safety response group, is an unincorporated group of stakeholders coming together. Council has not taken leadership for the event or the response and the community are basically picking up some of the pieces there that I feel is in a fairly unsupported way. Having said that, council are making a contribution to it but there is just an unincorporated bunch of people and the council has walked away, Byron United has

walked away. If it got really tough for Byron Youth Service we might walk away as well and say, "This is too hard. We do not have the resources to do it." I do not know who would pick up the response in that case.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: You have had a lot of experience working with children and you have talked to them about why they are getting drunk. What are they saying about why they are doing it?

Ms PEARSE: I was just thinking while everyone was talking that we, as adults, have a huge responsibility to do whatever we can to change the culture in this country. Young people are almost powerless against it. There is so much pressure from their peers, the media. It is all about alcohol. Most of their parents drink; it is completely acceptable. It is the nature of being young to feel that you are invincible—nothing bad is going to happen to you. When they are young, they do not see that there is a problem until they have been assaulted in some way—arrested or something bad has happened to them. Even then that might need to happen a few times. There are all sorts of reasons. Some of them have had a terrible family life so it helps to kill the pain. Others just go along with it because all their friends do it. Most of them do not see it is a problem, especially the younger ones, because they just say, "Everybody does it."

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: When you speak to those who are under 18, do they say that their parents are concerned that their children are out?

Ms PEARSE: Yes, some parents are, some are not. Some give their kids alcohol. Some are really strict, and that does not work. I was saying to Ms Mahoney just before I came here that a mother stopped me in the street and said, "My 13-year-old boy says that he and his friends can get backpackers to get them alcohol from this licensed premises in the middle of town." They are 13. That is one thing I disagree with. I do not think we are doing enough about secondary supply. I work at night. We watch these older people go into bottle shops and come out with alcohol and hand it to kids, so that is something that needs to be worked on.

CHAIR: We have heard a lot of evidence about a lot of areas that have problems with the secondary supply and preloading issue in public spaces. It is quite evident that, particularly here, the accord and the licensed premises that are under that are actually heavily regulated, but there seem to be more problems outside those premises. I am not saying that people are coming from the premises intoxicated and then going back out, but it is almost coming the other way. You are seeing the end user, so is that the situation that your organisation experiences? Are you seeing more people who have been preloading or drinking in private premises—whether they are under age, above age, backpackers—and then moving into town, or is it coming out of the premises back into town?

Ms PEARSE: I would say both.

Ms MAHONEY: Yes, we do.

CHAIR: I guess there is no way to determine how many of those coming out of the premises have been preloading beforehand?

Ms MAHONEY: If you look at certain times and certain groups—the footy trips or schoolies visitors or people who come in at weekends at festival times—you can see that there is a lot of preloading going on. They are preloading to save money, they are preloading because it is fun, and they are still getting into venues after they have preloaded. Young people are very good at hiding signs of intoxication. They will straighten up. There have been a number of studies that show that young people can straighten up and get in a queue just to get in the door.

CHAIR: It is hard for someone on the door to tell—

Ms MAHONEY: I agree.

Ms PEARSE: Absolutely.

CHAIR: —when they have shot-gunned a few cans 10 minutes before they turn up at the front door.

Ms MAHONEY: Yes, I agree, and that is why it is a cultural issue. There are cultural drivers around the constant push and pressure of young people to drink and the constant advertising, and the availability, and the expectation for them to do it. Their role models are doing it.

CHAIR: I wrote down the seven issues that you have identified and we have heard the same thing from academics and from people in other areas. What is your experience, particularly here, of point-of-sale advertising? Are you talking about promotions such as two-for-one deals?

Ms MAHONEY: Yes. I have been emailing the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing about some show cause notices that were issued earlier in the year to six licensees. After being on the website of the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing, it is very difficult to understand the ramifications of that. We have no laws around alcohol advertising. The OLGR has developed a set of alcohol promotion guidelines and I believe that the six licensees were issued show cause notices because of the concern of promotion advertising. I have been on some of their Facebook pages recently. I have looked at how they are advertising. Throwback Thursdays, is that a good promotion? I do not think so.

CHAIR: I am playing devil's advocate here, but a lot of the companies have told us that the advertising is merely about brand selection. People who are going to drink will go to the bottle shop and drink anyway. They say their advertising is about brand selection and trying to get their brand sold over another brand.

Ms MAHONEY: Yes, but that does not recognise that there are not that many alcohol companies operating. They are gigantic conglomerates that have got lots of competing brands within their own company. I disagree with that.

CHAIR: What I am saying is that their argument is that the advertising is not encouraging people to drink; it is encouraging people to drink a particular type of drink.

Ms MAHONEY: I totally disagree.

Ms PEARSE: I do too.

Ms MAHONEY: The advertising is so pervasive and some of that point-of-sale stuff—I think multi-buys is a dangerous strategy that encourages drinking. You have probably heard Sandra Jones from Wollongong University speak, seen her submissions or read her work.

CHAIR: Yes.

Ms MAHONEY: She has done a lot of work demonstrating that multi-buys and discounted alcohol actually increase people's consumption of alcohol, particularly vulnerable groups such as women, young people, and people who already have alcohol problems. The alcohol advertising industry will say what it wants to say about its own product in order to sell more of its product. It is regulated through the Australian Beverages Advertising Code. It is a joke, quite frankly. If we want to look at how that is being promoted, Jim Beam is being promoted to young people in little jackets. I encourage you all to have a look at the Alcohol Advertising Review Board and see some of the submissions that have been made. Out of 152 complaints, 104 were upheld against advertisers of alcohol products. That code has set its standards to protect young people and children from poor alcohol advertising. It has their best interests at heart, and I am not sure that the alcohol advertising industry does. It is in the business of selling products.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for your time this afternoon.

Ms MAHONEY: You are welcome.

CHAIR: We will take the opening statement off you. Thanks for the work that you do.

Ms MAHONEY: Thank you.

CHAIR: We will break and return at 3.00 pm.

(The witnesses withdrew)

CORRECTED

(Short adjournment)

BLAKE EDDINGTON, Last Drinks at 12, sworn and examined:

GRAHAM TRUSWELL, Last Drinks at 12, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: I welcome our next witnesses, from Last Drinks at 12.

Dr EDDINGTON: I am a doctor and an emergency medicine specialist and a member of Last Drinks at 12. We are a community group, so we do not have positions.

Dr TRUSWELL: I am a visiting medical officer at the Byron Bay hospital and a member of Last Drinks at 12.

CHAIR: We are limited for time. Do you have a short opening statement? If you have a longer one, you can table it and then we will go to questions—it is up to you.

Dr EDDINGTON: I have a PowerPoint presentation and I will go through it as quickly as I can. I cover Byron Bay emergency department 24 hours a day, seven days a week, all life-threatening cases. Last Drinks at 12 is a community group that was formed after a series of community meetings. The number one cause of residents in the town attending was found to be alcohol-related violence. We held three community forums, where we had 350 people attend, so we have some community support behind us. Our aim is to take Byron from one of the most violent communities in New South Wales to one of the safest. The way to do that is by using evidence-based, proven methods.

Dr Truswell and I became doctors in order to protect and stand up for people and to help them. I presume you became parliamentarians for the same reason. We believe the heart of the problem is the dangerous oversupply, availability and promotion of alcohol to our youth. There is a particular danger of preloading, if you are past drunk, and the failure to reduce this through the responsible service of alcohol. It is not a case of individual responsibility. We have to look at the social construct of drinking, and the influence of liquor advertising and the pervasive nature of the advertising industry. Looking at personal responsibility, blaming young people for getting drunk and being injured is like blaming fish for dying by swimming in polluted waters. I do not think we can put all individual responsibility onto our young, given the advertising environment we live in.

Why are we here today? We are here to work together across party lines to try to stop the physical and sexual assaults that are occurring. In medicine, we say that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Ironically, you six people here today and your colleagues are more able to prevent the injuries than Dr Truswell and I are. You have more opportunity to help people than we do, and more opportunities than the nurses, the police and the ambulance officers have to help people in this town. You now have the opportunity to prevent 300 physical assaults in Byron Bay per year, and potentially you have the ability to prevent 10 to 20 sexual assaults. I am showing a slide of 300 children, and that is the number of assaults that are documented in Byron Bay every year.

Unfortunately, 70 per cent of assaults go unreported. We have a strategy, a method, for reducing the number of assaults happening in Byron Bay by 30 to 40 per cent. That is the number of people that we could prevent from being assaulted. It is not just injuries; it is the death of first-hand, managed patients who die at one punch. One punch can kill, and I have a picture of a ventilated patient and a picture of a brain scan from someone who had a brain haemorrhage. You have probably heard it all before. I do not think that anyone should have such a heinous and preventable injury.

In medicine we use evidence. The families of the victims that Dr Truswell and I look after expect us to use proven, evidence-based procedures to keep them alive. The evidence for the benefits of decreasing late-night trading is compelling and convincing. We believe that in Byron Bay venues should be shutting earlier, as happened in Newcastle. In Newcastle, to remind everyone, when late-night trading venues closed 90 minutes earlier, they had a 33 per cent reduction in alcohol-related violence, and that has been sustained. They estimate that over 3,000 people have now not been assaulted because of that—that is, 10 times the kids in that picture. There has been a 26 per cent reduction in emergency department presentations. It had 82 per cent community support and 75 per cent patron support.

There is little or no evidence for methods other than what we have mentioned. The clear choice in this argument is you can believe us—the researchers, the Australian Medical Association, the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, the Royal Australian College of Emergency Medicine, the police and 80 per cent of the population, who support us—or you can believe the liquor industry. Only 4 per cent of licensed premises trade after midnight, and that is where we think the concern is. We would like licensed venues in this town, if possible, to reduce their hours of trading. All the evidence shows that for every hour that trading is reduced—from 3.00 a.m. to 2.00 a.m. or from 2.00 a.m. to 1.00 a.m., for example—it is predicted that alcohol-related violence will decrease by between 17 and 20 per cent. The average person charged with an alcohol-related assault has consumed 20 standard drinks. We are not talking about people being tipsy; we are talking about people being incredibly drunk.

I thank you for letting us speak. I invite any of you to come to the emergency department on a Friday or Saturday night in summer. I can clear you to come and work with me and we can have a look at what is actually happening in the emergency department. It is a very interesting experience. The final slide is of five children. That is the number of young Australians under 25 who die every week of preventable alcohol-related harm.

CHAIR: We cannot publish pictures of people without their permission.

Dr EDDINGTON: Sure. They are actually openly available on the internet. I have de-identified them by covering their eyes.

CHAIR: Are you happy for us to publish only the pages of text?

Dr EDDINGTON: The text is fine; that would be better. It was just to give you an idea and to add some feeling to it.

Dr TRUSWELL: I appreciate the fact that you are in Byron Bay because we think our town has a problem that we would like you to help us address. At a meeting earlier this year our superintendent of police said that we ranked third out of 154 local government areas in the State in alcohol-related violent crime. For a small town like this that came as a shock to me. It made me want to become involved in trying to address it. I have worked in the emergency department in Byron Bay for 20 years. I am very distressed at having to continually provide care for those who have been violently assaulted by people who normally can be quite decent people but when they are under the influence of alcohol they lose their inhibitions.

I have become sick of putting up with abusive, loud, angry and inebriated young people who present to our department impatient, disruptive and demanding urgent attention for issues that are really all self-inflicted. I also am sick of seeing my medical, nursing, clerical and ambulance colleagues putting up with their work environment. They have to put up with sexual harassment, intimidation, verbal abuse, foul language and, sadly, also physical assault quite frequently. I cannot think of another work environment anywhere, except perhaps for the police, where we employ people to put with that sort of work environment.

It is frequently the case that female nurses are in a high level of anxiety because a punch can be thrown at any one time. I think that the New South Wales Government needs to be more responsible for the welfare of its employees. We have an opportunity in Byron Bay to bring about a health and social change that potentially could cause close to a 60 per cent reduction in alcohol-related violence—and there is evidence behind that. No other health or social intervention that is cost free could ever come anywhere close to that. Immunisation, the introduction of antibiotics or smoking cessation—nothing comes close to what we are talking about creating here.

I am full of admiration for Australian parliamentarians who have introduced world-first smoking programs in Australia. We lead the world in smoking cessation. We started off after World War II with 75 per cent of Australians smoking and now we have around 13 per cent—a massive reduction—yet we are doing nothing about alcohol which I think is a crime. We choose to stand here to advocate for young people, for the community, for people who have to work at the front line with drunk people. Others in the community have been disparaging about what we are trying to do, and that is fair enough. We choose to try to involve members of the community and to let them know what we are doing. Hopefully we will be able to meet with all groups in the community. Incidentally, no group in Byron Bay says that the alcohol problem should not be reduced. No-one is saying that but how we go about it is another matter. We are really hoping that we will get the community together and come up with a community solution. If we do not we will be knocking on the door of the State Government and asking it to help.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Your opening statements certainly covered a lot of ground. Has the emergency department at Byron Bay noticed any difference since the introduction of volunteer conditions on licences? We heard from the liquor accord about changes—no double-shots and no jugs. Have you noticed any difference?

Dr TRUSWELL: Apparently there have been reductions in some months and some increases in other months. I do not think it is possible to say. Data of any use is collected over many years. The Newcastle data has been collected over five years. We are talking about four months of data so it is impossible to say.

Dr EDDINGTON: As the police superintendent said, there has been no decrease. I have not seen any decrease. We are still seeing violent and sexual assaults, so we have not seen any decrease. With the literature there is no evidence that a voluntary liquor accord has ever caused any decrease in alcohol-related violence, which is what we are talking about. In medicine we practice evidence. All the evidence shows that decreasing late night trading is what will decrease alcohol-related assaults. We are perturbed that the evidence is not being followed.

Dr TRUSWELL: We cannot see the point of following the line of looking at little things that make no difference and that are expensive to the community.

Dr EDDINGTON: You can do something that does not cost the health system or the police any money.

Dr TRUSWELL: It would reduce State expenses because you are not employing as many people in the Ambulance Service or the Police Force.

Dr EDDINGTON: If just four or five licensed venues shut at 2.00 a.m. and not 3.00 a.m. that would result in a 17 per cent reduction in alcohol-related harm. Professor Wiggers and Professor Peter Miller said that. The Norwegian evidence shows that. I am unsure why it is so difficult.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: You mentioned the very difficult conditions under which medical and health professional staff are working. Does that make it more difficult to maintain staff in those environments?

Dr TRUSWELL: We have many more staff than we need, for instance, security staff because a lot of them are often off on sick leave or stress leave. It is similar in the Police Force and for nurses. If somebody in the Ambulance Service goes into a pub to pick up somebody and gets hit from behind he may be off for months because of the trauma and stress of that. He is trying to do his job; very much so.

Dr EDDINGTON: I know some staff members who work at Tweed Heads. When they are dealing with people who get very drunk and their blood alcohol levels are six or eight times the legal limit, when they are brought into the emergency department, often by police, they are crazy. At times we physically have to hold them down and sedate them. We have used six of my security staff to hold them down and they have injured their backs. They get hit and they get punched. The next morning or in the afternoon when these people wake up they are just normal hard-working family men. However, they have such high levels of alcohol that it changes their personalities, they lose control and they lose sight of their behaviour. I know of people who have been injured.

Dr TRUSWELL: One of the interesting things about the alcohol issue and managing intoxicated people in the hospital setting is that you cannot do much about it. You cannot rehydrate them; it does not make any difference.

Dr EDDINGTON: There is no antidote. It is not like heroin or benzodiazepines.

Dr TRUSWELL: A lot of the time we are told that it is drug-related, but with drugs there are things that we can do. We can give antidotes to those who are on drugs. We can sedate people who have taken drugs and they will be fine. If we sedate someone who is intoxicated with alcohol that person will vomit and aspirate and we will kill them. We cannot do that.

Dr EDDINGTON: And it is not ice; it is not cocaine.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: I appreciate your forthright answers which will help us in our work. You touched earlier on sexual assault which is an area in which I am interested. The Committee has already received evidence that in relation to sexual assault it is usually alcohol-affected male perpetrators on young women who may or may not be affected by alcohol. Another area of research we have heard about is that because of the level of intoxication amongst young people there is a high incidence of unplanned sex which leads to unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Do you have information or experience that you can share with the Committee?

Dr EDDINGTON: I have spoken to Jane McGowan, the sexual assault counsellor for the area. We call her in when women have been sexually abused. She says that most girls are intoxicated. Often the young women that she deals with are very intoxicated and they present with little or no memory of the assault. Yet she often finds that there is disturbing physical evidence or eye witness accounts of the sexual assault or rape. If you look at all the evidence you find that alcohol increases the risk of sexual assault and it increases the risk of rape completion as women cannot fight them off. The other disturbing aspect is that the New Zealand Medical Journal found that alcohol was used by the perpetrator in greater than 50 per cent of all assaults. The Australian Institute of Criminology says that when victims are drunk the risk of sexual assault is significantly increased because they cannot detect the dangerous behaviour. As you are well aware, Byron has almost double the State average of sexual assault than the rest of Australia. Sexual assault is one of the most underreported personal crimes in Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research data.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I refer to the general cultural attitude of Australians towards alcohol and drinking and the need to tackle that. The Committee has held four public hearings and has heard from witnesses all around the State who have had various levels of expertise and experience. Time and again they have talked about this almost intrinsic attitude of Australians towards drinking and the propensity for young people to want to drink and to drink more. We have been told that before young people go out they tend to preload. You mentioned earlier that we have tackled smoking over time. I have no doubt about the fact that this is a really serious issue. We are dealing with complex cultural dimensions of drinking in Australia. How do we tackle that issue? Have you thought about that?

Dr TRUSWELL: I am not really a public health doctor but the evidence is that you can reduce drinking by reducing the amount of alcohol available. One of the interesting things about Byron Bay is that we have a lot of different people coming in here and we have been speaking to some of the people who run some of the backpacker organisations in this town. There are backpacker hostels which will be 95 per cent foreign backpackers and there are backpacker hostels nearer the centre of town which will have a much higher proportion of Australians staying overnight or for the weekend. They tell me that the guests of backpacker hostels that have 95 per cent overseas backpackers do not go out and get hammered. They do not go and get wiped: it is not part of their culture.

The interesting thing also is if you go to a backpacker hostel and you want a bed for the night and you are from Norway you have got a bed. If you are an Australian you are asked for a \$200 bond because the assumption is that you may well trash the place or make a nuisance of yourself. It is certainly a problem in New Zealand and the United Kingdom and many other parts of the world it does seem to be an Anglo-Saxon problem. It is all to do with the amount of alcohol. That is what it seems to be. If you are going to address it you have got to reduce the amount of alcohol available.

Dr EDDINGTON: Point one: If you watched any of the grand finals it is all alcohol advertising. Look at Woolworths, look at the shopper dockets—it is all alcohol advertising. I do not think we can blame it on the culture, personally. I think it is the pervasive advertising and it is marketed at children. It is marketed at children from the age of five upwards. Sporting heroes, cricket, rugby league and AFL are all sponsored by alcohol. These people are venerated as heroes to kids and they are wearing a Victoria Bitter or XXXX logo across their chest or "VB" on a cap. That is the culture. I do not think it is innate because we are Australians.

The second thing about it is the evidence by Peter Miller in the "Dealing with alcohol-related harm and the night-time economy" [DANTE] report where they examined the impact of trading hours and preloading where they compared Newcastle to Geelong. They found that because in Geelong venues shut later—they shut at 7 o'clock—people got to the venues later. Because they got to the venues later and the drinks at the venues were expensive they preloaded more at home. But in Newcastle once the venues were shutting earlier people preloaded less because they wanted to get into the venue because it was going to shut and they actually spent more money at the venue. Unlike Geelong, in Newcastle where the times went back and people preloaded less

and went out earlier and drank in the venues, more restaurants and more small bars started. I do not think it is a cultural thing. I think it is advertising and I think it is late-night trading. That is what is causing the problem.

If you know your band is coming on at 2.00 a.m. or 1.00 a.m. because the venue shuts at 3, 4 or 5 o'clock you are going to preload and then go see the band. But if your band is coming on at 9 o'clock you are going to have dinner and go see the band and then go home to bed. If it is 1 o'clock in the morning and you are tired because you have had five beers you are going to have a Red Bull. But if your venue is shutting at 1.00 a.m. you are not going to have a Red Bull; you are going to go home and go to bed. It just seems so simple to me.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I wanted to ask about your experience in the emergency department. What percentage of the people who present are under 25 years old?

Dr TRUSWELL: I will take that on notice. That is obviously vastly different here in Byron Bay. There are huge numbers of young people. I would say they are the vast majority but I do not know. One of the interesting things is that New South Wales hospitals started to use a new computer software program about four years ago. We do not collect alcohol data. Now that we are using that software package we do not collect data that we used to collect.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I heard that at another inquiry. That was why I was going to ask you whether you collected that data.

Dr TRUSWELL: There are certain places that do. For the past 12 years John Hunter has been collecting data. We think we should be collecting data because currently if somebody comes in and they have broken their leg it goes down as a broken leg; it does not say they fell off the table drunk at wherever.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: We heard that in one of our other inquiries. I was shocked that there is not consistent data collection. The Auditor-General has just done a report on the cost of alcohol but they do not even know what the real cost is in relation to impact.

Dr TRUSWELL: We have got amazing police statistics but we do not have health statistics.

Dr EDDINGTON: The reason we do not is because it is so pervasive and so common. Anecdotally, more than 50 per cent of my beds on a Friday and Saturday night are taken by alcohol-related harms. Then you think if it is the majority why collect the data. It is just happening so commonly people just stop collecting it.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Would you be able to provide more information about the age, even just anecdotally?

Dr EDDINGTON: Anecdotally, of the alcohol-related problems that we see it would be predominantly young people under the age of 25.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I am interested in the issue of alcohol-related causes of injury. You have spoken about preloading. Do you have any understanding of whether or not secondary supply is an issue? Do you get told by people that they were given the alcohol by a parent or by someone else in the community? Have you come across that or has Last Drinks at 12 collected any evidence that that is a big problem?

Dr TRUSWELL: In Byron we are trying to commence collecting that data but we have not got it. Sorry. It may come out during the course of the evening when you are talking to people. You have got to remember also that you get very little sense out of a lot of the people coming in because they are so drunk.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Last Drinks at 12 has put together a very clear position on wanting to see the venue hours wound back.

Dr TRUSWELL: Yes.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Can you tell us what sort of response you have had to that since the forum in August?

Dr EDDINGTON: It is interesting. The response has been great in that people are here today. We had a fantastic turnout—350 people turned up to the community centre to support us. We have people emailing us. We have a website. There are some people in town who are concerned about venues shutting early. I think Last Drinks at 12 gives them the idea that we want to shut the town at midnight. It is not that; it is just the last service of drinks. We are happy for the venues to stay open because all the evidence is that it is just the service of alcohol that is the problem, not the venues staying open. We would be happy with anything as doctors. If the venues shut one hour earlier and the violence decreased by 17 per cent that would just be fantastic. As Dr Truswell said, there is no other public health measure that could prevent 17 per cent of injuries. That would be like 100 less violent assaults on people in Byron Bay per year. That would be fantastic just with that one measure, and it would be free.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: You said before that a lot of people say that it is not really alcohol; it is polydrug use such as ecstasy or the pills or powders that people have taken on top. You seem to clearly say that is not the evidence.

Dr EDDINGTON: That is not it. In the last 12 months I have seen one person with ice that we have had to hold down and sedate. All the other cases are alcohol related. Sure, it might be alcohol and amphetamines, alcohol and Red Bull or alcohol and something else but alcohol is the big perpetrator. Everyone will tell you. We do blood alcohol levels on these people and it is six or eight times the legal limit. You listen to Gordian Fulde at St Vincent's: it is the same thing. He will come out and say it is nothing else; it is alcohol.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: We have had that evidence.

Dr EDDINGTON: It is the same up here. I never see marijuana—or very rarely.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: You have spoken about Friday and Saturday nights and New Year's Eve, but what about when major events happen in the area? Do you have evidence that events that provide alcohol translate to spikes in impacts at the hospital?

Dr TRUSWELL: That has changed because a lot of those festivals are outside of town now and they have doctors provided. That has been a benefit as far as the Byron hospital is concerned whereas when they were in town that was certainly very different.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Does the hospital receive additional funding for that non-resident impact?

Dr TRUSWELL: No. My understanding is we receive funding per head of population.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: It is still done on the regional distribution formula?

Dr TRUSWELL: Yes.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: So that will often mean that locals who are going to the hospital—

Dr TRUSWELL: The staffing levels do not adjust. Exactly, yes. It was interesting at schoolies last year and other big functions that the riot squad turned up, the police numbers go up but my understanding is that funding for the hospital does not change.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: What is the process once an intoxicated person who is admitted to the hospital has slept it off and is ready for discharge? Are there any ramifications for their behaviour, are they referred to someone or do they just leave?

Dr TRUSWELL: What happens to them in which way? Do you mean is there anything punitive that we can do?

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Yes.

Dr TRUSWELL: No.

Dr EDDINGTON: That is a great question. It is so accepted in our society that you can become ridiculously drunk and violent and then wake up in the morning and be a good guy and say, "She'll be right,

mate. I didn't mean to punch her; I was drunk." I cannot think of it happening. I do not think any of them are charged. I cannot remember a case where we have called the police in because that drunk guy was wrestling and the security guard twisted his back. It just does not happen. Again, it is part of not collecting the statistics, the pervasive nature, the acceptability and the culture.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Do you think penalties would have some impact on reducing incidents?

Dr EDDINGTON: No, I do not think so. These people are insightful because they are so drunk. They do not know what they are doing so they are not thinking about a penalty.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: But what if action was taken afterwards and they were given a fine to pay, and that money could go into the community? You do not think that would help?

Dr EDDINGTON: It is a great question. With all due respect, I do not know why we would look at that when there is so much evidence that other methods are so effective. If I can reduce trading by an hour and save 17 per cent in assaults, why would I look at something else?

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I think it is about being able to have not just one response but multiple responses such as education and earlier closing hours.

Dr EDDINGTON: I would have to take that on notice. I do not know.

Dr TRUSWELL: I think we have got to be wary of spreading the approach so wide that nothing ever happens. There are so many different parameters that people talk about. The thought is if you do all of these things you will make a difference, but each one of those things such as closed-circuit television, putting extra police on, putting extra lighting on and putting extra buses on may make 1 or 2 per cent difference. Add them all up if you did them all—great. But the big thing is reducing alcohol trading. Over 50 by bringing it back three hours. It is massively different. And that is completely free.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: But do you not think the individual should take some responsibility for their choice?

Dr TRUSWELL: We speak to the police and they say, "How are you going to enforce that? The guy was drunk; he did not know what he was doing. How are you going to blame it on him?" I just cannot see the legal system—

Dr EDDINGTON: And a lot of these people are coming from venues. I personally speak to them. They say they were at this or that venue. The responsible service of alcohol is not being upheld. All the data says that. They are drunk and coming out of a venue.

Dr TRUSWELL: The employer dealing with these people, the police, the ambulance service, the doctors, the nurses, the security guards and the clerical staff. They are all NSW Health State contracts. In that it says you cannot go complaining about your place of work. We do not go and complain to the venues about irresponsible sale of alcohol because it is in our contract not to do so and so nobody gets to hear about it. It is not being talked about because we are not supposed to. Yet, one of the measures to manage irresponsible sale of alcohol is to make complaints to the police.

CHAIR: Is there a fear that Last Drinks at 12 would push those people from the venue back out into the streets and then on to private residences to keep drinking? Is that something that has been discussed at any of the forums or meetings that you have had?

Dr EDDINGTON: We have discussed that. That was the thought in Newcastle when they cut it back from 5 to 3 o'clock and then 3.30 a.m. but there was no evidence that it happened.

CHAIR: Would Last Drinks at 12 still incorporate the no jugs, no shots, no doubles?

Dr EDDINGTON: There is no evidence for no jugs, so we do not have a problem with jugs. I do not have all the other things memorised, but I would like to see what happened in Newcastle but with the trading hours brought back.

CHAIR: Some of the measures here are actually harder than in Newcastle.

Dr EDDINGTON: That is what Hannah said. Some of them are, such as the no jugs—I am just referring to my phone because I have an updated email about it—but I believe personally that Newcastle is harder. The reason I think that Newcastle is stricter is because in 2008, in March, the licensing conditions were mandatory and immediately enforceable. Here they are not mandatory and they are not immediately enforceable. That is a significant difference. Also they were compulsory: all venues had to be part of it.

CHAIR: So you would support the accord being a mandatory thing for all licensed venues in this area?

Dr EDDINGTON: It would be fantastic if there was a precinct liquor accord. That would be fantastic. Just on that question, because I do not know if I answered it appropriately, as for people going onto the street, if you asked the police they would much rather deal with someone intoxicated at midnight or 1 a.m. than at 3 a.m. The reason is that they have more resources, and the second thing is that people are less drunk at 1 a.m. than at 3 a.m. because they have spent less time in venues drinking. I would agree that in hospital I would much rather look after someone at midnight or 1 a.m. than at 3 a.m. or 4 a.m.

CHAIR: Have you worked with the accord on this? I am not trying to challenge what you are saying, but I am thinking that if I were hell bent on getting a gutful, I would order a couple of jugs at 11.30 and then cruise out into the street, but at the moment I cannot get jugs in the venues. Is there not some middle ground somewhere? Should there not be discussion around not only the time that service finishes but the types of service and other events that are happening? What level of engagement does Last Drinks at 12 have with those venues that are participating voluntarily with the accord and with the ones that at this stage are not signatories to that?

Dr EDDINGTON: Basically, we have not been involved. We asked to come to the meeting and we were allowed to come and listen. We are not allowed to talk at the meetings and we are not allowed to vote at the meetings. When they say they have involved the community, apart from youth services, there has been no community involvement, no community consultation as far as I am aware.

CHAIR: Have you gone to them with some of your proposals?

Dr EDDINGTON: We had the public forum and we are going to go to the liquor accord meeting tomorrow, and hopefully they will let us have more of a say, but we have no voting rights. We can sit up the back and listen, and that is about it.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: When was Last Drinks at 12 established?

Dr TRUSWELL: It was established in April. I do not know if you are aware, but after the town was sort of trashed once again at New Year's Eve there was a lot of community concern, so three public meetings were held and at each of those meetings the different problems in Byron Bay were discussed and, as Blake said earlier, alcohol came out as—

Dr EDDINGTON: The residents' number one concern.

Dr TRUSWELL: So we set up after that.

CHAIR: Unfortunately, we have run out of time and we could probably go for another hour—this has been exciting. On behalf of the Committee, thank you for your evidence this afternoon. I note that you did take at least one question on notice. The Committee has resolved that responses to questions taken on notice must be returned within 21 days and the secretariat will liaise with you about those responses.

Dr EDDINGTON: Could I say a couple of things quickly?

CHAIR: Sure.

Dr EDDINGTON: Stuart Wilkins mentioned that there had been no decrease. I just wanted to mention a couple of things that came up. I think Jan asked—

CHAIR: You can put in a supplementary submission with anything that you would like to add.

Dr EDDINGTON: Right, okay.

CHAIR: The secretariat will be in touch with you about the questions on notice, but feel free to add any other information and we will take that as evidence as well.

Dr EDDINGTON: Thank you.

CHAIR: You can read the transcript when it is published and, if there is anything else, send it in to us.

(The witnesses withdrew)

SIMON RICHARDSON, Mayor, Byron Shire Council

GREG IRONFIELD, Manager, Sustainable Communities, Byron Shire Council

LIZETTE TWISTLETON, Youth and Community Development Officer, Lismore City Council, and

SYLVIA ROYLANCE, Community Development Officer, Tweed Shire Council, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Have any of you prepared opening statements?

Mr RICHARDSON: Yes, a short one. Hopefully we can be as exciting as previously, for those who have lasted the distance. I will speak on the part of Byron, and particularly Byron Bay, as that is the general topic of conversation, and just start off by saying that we are a wonderful place. We have 1.5 million visitors, of whom the vast majority love coming and a large percentage come back again and again. We are a wonderful community. You have heard our youth workers, the Last Drinks community representatives and we also have representatives from Save our Nightlife, which is a younger persons response to Last Drinks with over 1,500 Facebook likes. We have one of the highest rates of volunteerism in the country and we have a lot of young people who often get tarred with the wrong brush but are a vibrant, creative and great bunch of people.

Byron Shire Council has the highest funding of social services of any local government in New South Wales, something that we are proud of. That is something that, unfortunately, we are having to do more and more as more and more cost shifting occurs. We also do have problems, which we have all heard. We clearly have an after-hours violence level which is inappropriate. We have disrespect and damaging of our towns. Even over this last weekend we had some amazing festivals and events, but the town is worse for wear and if you drive around you can probably see some of the property damage that has taken place. We are a town that can unfortunately at times, late at night, feel like we are under siege. We do need help. We need help from a council point of view with our planning powers so that we can clearly reflect the wishes of the community. We currently have the transfer of a liquor licence for a topless venue that the community does not want and the council was not even asked for its opinion. We need help with our licences and the liquor licence regime. We are losing categories of liquor licences, so people open a restaurant and then they transfer the licence to a topless bar, clearly having vastly different impact on the street and very vastly different use.

We need help with funding many of these measures. The Hon. Jan Barham mentioned the cost that I think Stuart Wilkins brought up of some of the measures. They are all costly. Council currently, as we all know, is pretty thin on the bone as far as available funds, so we need an increased capacity to gain grant funding. We have just found out we were denied a \$500,000 grant application in the Federal Government for our lighting whereas I would have thought if there is any local government in Australia that is clearly eligible and known to have a problem with lighting it is us, so we need some sort of support to gain grants as opposed to creating hurdles that are often very hard to jump. We have also got a grant application currently before the State Government for Destination NSW to create a master plan for Byron where we can get to a lot of these issues to make sure that our visitors have a wonderful experience in town at night and also our locals have a town that we are proud of. Again I would be hoping that we get support for that application.

Lastly, I would say that we can work together and create answers. I think the answers are more than just a simple "Close early", or say yes to this and no to that. At the moment we have great cooperation with local government and our business organisations, our youth groups, various community organisations, and with the liquor accord, and I am really confident that we can come up with some ideas. We need to get creative and innovative, which is very Byron. We need to try to get more people and different types of people on the streets at night. We need to increase diversity. We have a branding that the council has adopted which is, "Don't spoil us, we'll spoil you", which I think is a very bold statement to say that we want conditions on the people who come.

We want people to come and enjoy our town, and love our community, and if they do that and they do that respectfully they will get far more back than what they brought. I also urge you to read the City of Sydney night-time economy strategic action plan. I think there is a lot of great stuff in that about diversifying our streets at night, getting more reasons for different types of people, other than young people who just want to get smashed to come into our town, because that is often the best way to change behaviour, not just giving our streets over to those who perhaps want to disrespect it. Thank you very much for inviting us here today.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Thanks to all of you for joining us this afternoon. Like Jan, I have some experience in local government and am always interested to hear your perspective. Simon referred to Detective Superintendent Wilkins' earlier evidence when he spoke about environmental factors. Do any of you think that environmental factors are really significant in terms of the problems you are facing, like lighting, or where your taxi rank is located in terms of your licensed venues, and I would also throw transport into the mix.

Mr RICHARDSON: Absolutely. I am a huge supporter and advocate for place making, and I think currently if you look at some place making websites we are the poster child of poor place making and poor environmental design. Unfortunately, we have been a town that has not really changed its environmental design since the whaling days and it is coming back to bite us. We need more public seating. We need more lighting in our dark spaces—and creative lighting; we do not necessarily need blaring massive spotlights. We need creative spaces. We need to be allowed to create public transport—and we have all sorts of impediments there. We have a \$25,000 budget for a shuttle bus. We are not allowed to charge for that shuttle bus. If we could, we could have two shuttle buses, which would make it more effective. As far as infrastructure, clearly we need to do more, and I think certainly lighting and environmental design. We need to create more spaces that people want to congregate in and therefore allow policing and monitoring to be more effective.

Ms TWISLETON: I agree. We also are really interested in place making and there is certainly a direct correlation between the density of licensed venues and the number of assaults. For us, there is a little sort of hub of licensed venues in Lismore and there are quite a few laneways behind that. Police are often at our City Safe meetings talking about finding an intoxicated young woman totally passed out in the poorly lit laneways. We have a late night bus that is part of the City Safe program but does not really have enough funding to operate adequately and only operates within the greater Lismore area, not any of the outlying villages. We have a really big rural problem with people coming in from smaller villages, getting really drunk and then not being able to get home as there is no public transport.

Ms ROYLANCE: I would say definitely. In the Tweed shire we have just undertaken to do a joint community safety audit of one of our main parks in Murwillumbah—that is, Knox Park. We undertook a youth strategy late last year and early this year. Young people clearly identified in that strategy that that was one area where they felt very unsafe. We know that the police attend that park regularly, because the lighting in that park is poor, there are overgrown trees, there are very old toilets in that area and there are a lot of places where young people and other people can hide. There have been a number of assaults there. The park actually has a community centre within it, and homelessness services are also delivered within that park. So there is a real cross-vested delivery of services within the proximity of one small area.

So the safety audit brought forward some recommendations, and obviously some staff reporting to Superintendent Stuart Wilkins were part of that. They came up from Sydney to do it. Some of those recommendations fed into not only the homelessness study we are currently doing for Tweed Shire Council but also the youth strategy. We also received funding from the Regional Development Australia Fund to redevelop that park, at least for stage 1 of the youth precinct—and council will put in an equal amount of money. We were not successful in our secondary grant application on the proceeds of crime which was asking for closed-circuit television [CCTV] camera and additional lighting. That was going to complement the funding that we received to do stage 1. We are calling this area a youth precinct or a youth plaza. The works will mitigate a lot of those environmental issues using and drawing upon the recommendations from the community safety audit that we have just done.

We need another audit to happen along the Tweed coast as well, but at this stage they just came up and did one for Byron Bay on the same day that they did one for Murwillumbah. We were happy with that, but we know there are other areas that need work. They are hotspots. The police have indicated that there are hotspots. We know that there is a lot of secondary supply of alcohol that happens in that park and we know that young people are in that park regularly drinking and mixing with other target groups of concern, whether they be homeless people or a secondary group of people who are chronic users of the park for illicit behaviour. Obviously there are signs in the park but they alone are not worth anything. People are not moved on and people are not pulled up on the fact that they are drinking in a public space.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: My time for questioning is up so I will have to hand over to another Committee member despite the fact that I have many more questions.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Yes, we all have many questions. Just quickly I would like to go through the issue of younger people drinking. I just want to be clear: are we talking about an issue with respect to young people below the age of 18 drinking? In other words, they are drinking illegally.

Ms ROYLANCE: In Murwillumbah, yes—that is who the secondary supply of alcohol is to. The older people within that particular area approach the young people or the young people approach them. We know those people go into the centre of our CBD. We are aware of two licensees who provide young people with alcohol—and young people have provided us with their names. They provide the young people with alcohol which they bring back to the park. We have seen people bring alcohol back to the park and we have let the police know about that.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: And is this an issue that the other councils represented here today also experience?

Mr IRONFIELD: Yes, it is. Certainly from the age of 12 onwards we have issues with underage drinking.

Mr RICHARDSON: I can add to that as a high school teacher across two states. I do not think Byron Shire in particular is any different from elsewhere as far as underage drinking goes. I have taught in grammar schools in Victoria, in government schools and in independent schools. Young kids do drink whilst they are under age. They might be perhaps statistically getting a bit younger, as they are doing a lot of things at a younger age now, but in Byron Shire late at night we have a bigger issue with violence—it goes far beyond underage drinking.

Ms TWISLETON: In Lismore we have quite an issue with off-licences. For example, licenced shops, particularly in the housing estates, sell alcohol from really early in the morning. They have a licence so if they wanted to then they could actually sell alcohol from 5.30 a.m. until midnight. They open at 7 o'clock in the morning, and a lot of the alcohol bought is taken straight around to the community. So there are huge issues there around what happens to the alcohol once it gets home. There are families where there is a lot of neglect. Certainly in Nimbin we have a really big issue with secondary supply.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: On the issue of the direct cost of alcohol abuse to local government, we probably have a general understanding of what that might mean. But could you go through and list some of the examples that you have experienced as representatives from councils of the direct cost impact of alcohol abuse in your respective communities.

Mr RICHARDSON: I can give a couple of examples, and Greg can certainly give you some more. Last year we spent nearly \$50,000 more than budgeted to clean up the mess from New Year's Eve alone. As I said, there has been damage to the roundabout in Byron Bay where some of the fencing has been destroyed. Certainly as far as infrastructure damage goes, the cost is considerable. Of course we are also allocating \$25,000 for a shuttle bus service. We subsidise the Mullumbimby and District Neighbourhood Centre. Because that centre is on Crown land, the State Government is forcing us to charge that centre commercial rates. We think that is unfair because the centre is not a commercial enterprise. So we are subsidising that centre to the tune of about \$60,000 a year to keep that facility open. That is just one example. That \$60,000 could fix a lot of potholes.

Mr IRONFIELD: There is also the cost of staff time and resources. Obviously we are stretched across a number of different areas in what we would call community services. Community safety has really started to dominate a lot of the allocation of staffing and resources, and that is in response to the clean ups, the vandalism and the violence that is on the streets. There is damage to both community property and private property.

Ms TWISLETON: Lismore City Council has a city safe program which council funds, and there is a special rate that businesses pay as well. We have put in closed-circuit television [CCTV] that is monitored both at the police station and by independent security. On Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights it is monitored until around 4.30 a.m. or when the last people leave town. There are also two security guards on foot until the cameras are turned off. So that is a cost to council, as is the malicious damage and vandalism that occurs.

Ms ROYLANCE: I would say that our experience is the same as that of the other councils. We are currently subsidising an after-hours anti binge drinking service called CoolHeads because they were funded for two years and then that funding ceased. They go out to those hot spot areas after-hours to engage young people

in positive activities instead of having those young people engaging in high-risk behaviour, because we know that they are out there and they are going to drink. It is actually funded by us right now to keep it going—otherwise it would have ceased.

Because we are a cross-border area, and I have to bring that up in this situation, we have worked in partnership with the Gold Coast City Council. One of the councillors from the Tugun area put in \$85,000 for a bus service which ran for nine months. That was the night link bus. It took people out of Coolangatta as far down as Kingscliff. We then put on a bus to take them from Kingscliff the rest of the way down to Pottsville. We charged passengers for our service whereas the service provided by the Gold Coast City Council was free. As I said, that cost \$85,000 for nine months. Some 65 per cent of people who go into the Coolangatta area to use that precinct are from the Tweed area.

It is about getting those people out of that area, and getting them out safely. So that bus was actually dedicated to just taking people south four times a night from midnight onwards—at 1 o'clock, 2 o'clock, 3 o'clock and 4 o'clock in the morning. There were drop-offs at certain stops along the way to hopefully get people safely back home. We had a maxi taxi meet that bus to take people further down to Pottsville, because our transport is woeful. Obviously it has not been funded to continue. We have had instead to rely on the clubs to be more vigilant in making sure that their buses are out there transporting people back home from the clubs at night time. We have a very high incidence of drink-driving—I think Tweed shire probably has the highest in the State.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: What was that program called?

Ms ROYLANCE: It is the CoolHeads program.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: You mentioned before a safety audit. Is that the first one that you have done?

Ms ROYLANCE: I have the officer for youth there for three years and that is the first one I am aware of that has been conducted since I have been there.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: And has the council had some sort of community safety plan, a crime prevention plan or anything like that previously?

Ms ROYLANCE: We have had plans drawn up. In the youth strategy we actually have an action to develop a shire-wide community safety plan—that is informed by the community safety audit.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: When was that developed?

Ms ROYLANCE: There was a draft one done a couple of years ago but it was never adopted. The Attorney General's office used to fund our cross-border community safety committee: the Tweed Coolangatta Community Safety Action Committee. That committee is run in partnership with the Gold Coast City Council. We were trying to get more funding and hoping to get a consultant to do a new plan because the guidelines from the Attorney General had changed and therefore the council could not adopt the plan that was done previously. We have not progressed that any further because we have not had any response back from the Attorney General about whether or not there is funding available.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: And is the circumstance the same for the Lismore City Council?

Ms TWISLETON: Yes, it is exactly the same. We had a plan in with the Department of Attorney General and Justice which has now lapsed so we have to go back and review our plan.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I think Byron shire experienced the same thing. What I was trying to find out, and I do know the experience of Byron shire, was whether the safety audits have been consistent on the issues of risk, harm, young people and violence. The solutions all come at a cost to councils. Ms Twisleton, you mentioned that Lismore City Council has a special levy that is paid by businesses.

Ms TWISLETON: Yes, that is our City Safe program. Businesses pay an additional levy to that program. The group meets once a month, and on it sits the chamber of commerce, the police and council officers. They look at what has been happening in the previous month. They review the camera footage. They talk about how they are going to work together to resolve any incidents or hotspots that have arisen. For

example, they have created a secure taxi rank. It has security guards instead of being in the nexus of the licensed premises.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: And does the council also make a contribution to that?

Ms TWISLETON: Yes.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: So it gets its funding from the money paid by the local businesses, and then the council makes a contribution as well; and is that dedicated to addressing these issues?

Ms TWISLETON: Yes. The feedback from that City Safe group is that the closed-circuit television is really an important component of that. The police are monitoring that from the station and there is also an independent monitor from a security firm, and they will pick up things before they are noticed on the streets or before someone calls us.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Who pays for the monitoring? Are you saying that the police are doing the monitoring?

Ms TWISLETON: There is a monitor at the police station and there is also an independent security firm monitoring the footage, and that is paid for out of the business levy.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: What is the situation of Byron shire with the community safety plan?

Mr IRONFIELD: We have revised and reviewed the safety plan under the new regulations of the Department of Attorney General and Justice. We have had the plan endorsed by the department and we have received funding to undertake some education and to fund the trial of a night bus for Byron Bay. We will be conducting that trial over a couple of weeks—or maybe even a month—over Friday and Saturday nights through the summer. So we have successfully had what we call our community safety compact adopted and endorsed by the Department of Attorney General and Justice.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Do you have an indication of the costs attributed to alcohol related impacts, such as damage to the town's public infrastructure and the need to maintain it?

Mr IRONFIELD: I am sorry, I do not have the figure with me; but I could take that question on notice and get back to you.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I know you have it for general tourism non-resident impacts. It might be useful to have at some stage. I know that the damage done to toilet blocks and things like that was assessed. How can this Committee support local government with some directive or recommendation around what government can do to empower local government and provide opportunities to deal with this issue at a local level?

Mr RICHARDSON: I think, as I said earlier, we need more planning power rather than less—and increasingly we are getting less. For example, there was a recent addition to our night-time landscape which did not even come to council for approval. I asked our staff whether they knew anything about it. They said, "No, it would not even have to come to us for approval."

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Can you explain what has happened? Are you saying that a former nightclub has now become a topless bar?

Mr RICHARDSON: It used to be a restaurant, but it is now a topless bar with viewing areas. We have lost all capacity to have a licence that reflects what is actually happening at the premises. The demographic is groups of lads celebrating bucks nights. That is obviously a very different demographic from that of the Spanish tapas bar and restaurant that was there previously. Clearly it has a far greater impact on the town. The venue has a 7.00 a.m. licence. Not many people would be eating tapas at 6.00 a.m., but there could be quite a few lads cruising the streets after getting full at the venue. We have less planning capacity to reflect our community's wishes. We would like licences to be periodic like drivers licences. It is absurd to expect that because a bar had a liquor licence 15 years ago it will go on forever. Licences should last for four or five years like drivers licences. People should have to prove they are worthy to retain a liquor licence in the same way that they must prove they can drive.

We would also like a traffic light system for venues so that they can be judged. There could be a three-strikes arrangement. We would also like liquor accords and fees to be mandatory, and the use of those fees should be determined independently. Everybody who has a liquor licence would be part of that and they would pay a fee nominated by an independent body. That independent body would determine how the funds should be used to get people home, to install lights or to assist police with extra security. There could even be things like venue dispersal plans for late nights. If four or five venues are open late at night, should they be obliged to ensure that their patrons get home safely? We would like State Government support for those measures.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Are all councils currently party to the accord?

Ms TWISLETON: Council has no power when it comes to liquor licensing—whether they are permanent or temporary licences for events. There is no consideration of local interest and community impact assessments are not required. That is very important.

Mr RICHARDSON: Byron is entering a great stage with our liquor accord and relationships with businesses, community groups and the council. There is a real dedication and commitment to arriving at some solutions. I applaud some of the significant measures that have been implemented. People say there is no evidence of a reduction in problems. I think a 25 per cent reduction in alcohol-fuelled assaults in six months is significant and it should be acknowledged and applauded. My bigger problem is that it should not be up to a self-regulating body. We do not let the porn and the tobacco industries self-regulate, but we let the gaming and alcohol industries self-regulate. It is not fair to require these proprietors to decide how potentially to stymie their own business. That is where the State and Federal governments must step up and take responsibility. They should regulate the situation according to the best interests of the wider community.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Does the council run programs for young people? Is it still supporting the Byron Youth Service or any other programs?

Mr RICHARDSON: We have a youth council, which has been fantastic. It is now about three or four years old. Within that we have various funding opportunities for young people to create their own programs. Again, they are quite small and are often relatively short-lived. It is about empowering our young people. We have Cringe the Binge, but it is not council supported. It is a wonderful program because rather than telling young people not to drink—and I think everybody in this room drank before they were 18—it reflects reality. The message is that if they drink, they should drink smarter and drink water. It reflects what young people think and they are responding to it. It just won a Queensland advertising award for creativity. We have a lot of great initiatives, but they are not necessarily under the auspices of the council.

Ms TWISLETON: Lismore City Council supports the risk program annually. That involves going to schools to educate young people about drinking and driving.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: What happens at Tweed?

Ms ROYLANCE: Tweed Shire Council also supports a juvenile service. The youth service goes to high schools and deals with drinking safely, mental health issues and safe relationships. As I said, we also subsidise the Cool Heads project. The staff spend two Friday nights a month in Murwillumbah in Knots Park. That is the critical time when young people are out and about. The project involves supervised youth activities. The youth strategy involves a number of recommendations and we are hoping to work with other services in our area to do other activities and to introduce alcohol education programs in primary and secondary schools.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I am interested in major events. Does any money come to councils from ticket sales that could be spent on responsible alcohol consumption programs, transport or anything like that?

Mr RICHARDSON: Often not because of myriad historical twists and turns with development applications. Festivals and events are wonderful for our community from cultural, economic and community points of view, but they certainly do not create financial windfalls. When all is said and done, they cost us. Last weekend we had two festivals in Byron and a third one in Ballina. All those cars are using our roads and our water, but none of that impact is covered by anyone other than the councils.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Why could a levy not be imposed on organisers to provide transport?

Mr RICHARDSON: Transport is probably a fractionally different thing because organisers of large-scale events must have transport plans. Some do it more successfully than others. If you threw a rock from here it would probably land on our railway line, which State governments have consistently refused to reopen. Clearly that would make a huge difference. I am working with a group that is trying to establish light rail. That line gets to about 50 metres from the Splendour in the Grass site. Everybody could travel there.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I am talking about money that could be spent on programs for young people to curb alcohol consumption.

Mr RICHARDSON: Cringe the Binge and youth groups are generally provided with free space. Byron Bay Bluesfest and Splendour in the Grass provide sites where groups can raise money by offering breathalyser and mobile phone charger services. They raise significant amounts doing that. Bluesfest provided free space to 35 community groups to promote their cause. They are quite good corporate citizens, but there is not a great deal of legislative power from a council point of view to reap a reward.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Do you not approve these events going ahead?

Mr RICHARDSON: Yes.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Temporary approvals do not attract developer contributions.

Mr RICHARDSON: Splendour in the Grass is in the middle of a five-year trial.

CHAIR: Will Byron Shire Council have representatives at the meeting tomorrow with the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing? Have you ticked all your boxes? The accord representatives said that they had ticked all their boxes in the plan. Have you met all your targets?

Mr IRONFIELD: We have certainly commenced the majority of the things in the plan. We are only six months into the process. I recently sent a report to the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing reporting on the council's response to the action plan.

CHAIR: Are there any areas where work still needs to be done to address the initiatives identified in the plan?

Mr IRONFIELD: Yes.

CHAIR: What are those areas?

Mr IRONFIELD: I can provide the Committee with a response.

Mr RICHARDSON: We are looking at things like lighting and environmental design. Again, we applied for a \$500,000 federal grant for lighting but it was rejected.

CHAIR: The report you provided would help the Committee to determine whether the issues the council has not addressed involve infrastructure and the bigger ticket items. That would help members to understand the situation. I imagine that some other councils are in the same position.

Mr RICHARDSON: Council was not necessarily a key player in that action plan; it came out of the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing. We have our community safety compact, which has different priorities. It does not have the same support of CCTV as does this action plan. There will probably be some areas where there are discrepancies.

CHAIR: Can the Committee have both of them?

Mr RICHARDSON: Yes.

CHAIR: The Committee has consistently heard that not one group is solely responsible and that there should be a key directive for everybody so that you are all heading in the same direction. If there are discrepancies between councils, the accord, the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing, the police and so on, it would be good for the Committee to see that. Byron Youth Service said that some of its funding had been redirected to a New Year's Eve strategy. How would you spend money taken from a frontline service?

Mr IRONFIELD: It is being spent on preparations and logistical requirements for New Year's Eve. We have changed focus and are looking at doing different activities and events on New Year's Eve, and they require funding. Unfortunately, we have limited funding and resources. Money was taken from the schoolies budget to supplement the New Year's Eve budget.

CHAIR: Is that done on a risk assessment basis? Is one a bigger problem than the other?

Mr RICHARDSON: I think that was the result of a few different points of view. We have traditionally supported schoolies and they do a great job. It is an ideological position. How much should council be paying for schoolies for what is ultimately a business? Given that many businesses make a motza out of schoolies surely they should cover it. We have traditionally provided support and created a safety hub to look after people rather than spent a great deal of money promoting it or providing extra.

I volunteered, particularly late at night, until I had young children to ensure that our young kids were safe. I was a teacher here and I could spot our kids. They were attracted like moths to a flame because the city kids were coming up to party. It was with a heavy heart that we removed the funds, but ultimately the damage to the town's reputation and potential violence and alcohol abuse on New Year's Eve dwarfed schoolies. I spent a week responding to media calls from across the country after last New Year's Eve. We clearly needed to do something. We are trying to reclaim our streets with family friendly entertainment and encouraging creativity. We are blocking the road and people will park their car and take a bus into town. That will stop illegal camping and drinking beside cars.

CHAIR: Do you have a special rate levy?

Mr RICHARDSON: No.

CHAIR: Would that not be one way to make businesses pay? You are saying that businesses are profiting and they should be paying for services such as the Byron Youth Service.

Mr RICHARDSON: That has been a position.

CHAIR: They are not paying for the Byron Youth Service. The Committee has heard that groups like Red Frogs and so on are at the coalface and are implementing preventative measures. How else will businesses be made to pay for services like that?

Mr RICHARDSON: The problem is that if it were a special rate it would need broad community support. Until now we would not have had business support for it. As I said earlier, we are experiencing a dawn of cooperation. You do not necessarily apply for something if you are not going to get it. We are interested in refocusing council's funds, which are limited, to get a bigger bang for our buck. We want a great New Year's Eve. Last year the police arrested only 17 people because they did not have enough resources. If they had had more police officers they would have arrested more people. As I said, I have done a lot of late night supervision of schoolies, and generally speaking they behave themselves pretty well.

CHAIR: Secondary supply has been mentioned at Tweed and Lismore. Do you think there is a clear understanding of rules within families? Is it fair to assume that people know they cannot supply liquor to a minor who will then drink it in a park? You said that some of the outlets are in housing community areas.

Ms TWISLETON: I think within families may be not so clear.

CHAIR: I am a former parks and recreation manager so I used to work for councils dealing with a lot of this infrastructure from the public consumption of alcohol. The issue of preloading is coming out again and again. We have heard that public drinking and preloading is a big issue.

Ms TWISLETON: Certainly anecdotally I can say that preloading is becoming a new culture within young people particularly, whether it is at home or in the park, and we certainly have a number of parks where broken glass and vandalism are clear indicators that there has been a lot of drinking happening there. Whether it is just them drinking there and then going home or going on to an event, whether it is a party or something else I cannot say.

Ms ROYLANCE: I would say the same. I know that up in our area a lot of the younger patrons—you are saying over-18 here are legal—they are still getting on the club buses and the clubs have said to us they are often getting on and they are already on the way to being intoxicated but they stop off at the clubs first because it is cheaper alcohol, then they walk over the border, and of course we have got the time change now which is to their advantage, so they go over and they gain an hour and they are drinking in Coolangatta as long as they can and then they walk back over the border.

There is a discrepancy: on the Queensland side you are not allowed to have open alcohol containers, but you only need to walk straight across the border and you are more than welcome to come here with an open container in certain areas. There is a real discrepancy on what is legal and what is not in these cross-border areas and I know the commissioner is coming to Murwillumbah in November and we have already tabled this issue with the cross-border commissioner several times around the whole difference in alcohol and how people are managed and are aware of what legally they should be doing and what they should not be doing.

CHAIR: Unfortunately we have run out of time. I know some questions were taken on notice. The Committee has resolved to have those returned within 21 days and the secretariat will liaise with you to facilitate that response. On behalf of the Committee thank you very much for your time today. That ends the public inquiry. When I said I was coming to Byron Bay my nine-year-old said I had to see some salty rain from Tommy Franklin. I saw lots of heavy rain instead. Thank you very much for your attendance and your interest today.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(The Committee adjourned at 4.30 p.m.)

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

**INQUIRY INTO STRATEGIES TO REDUCE ALCOHOL ABUSE
AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

At Byron Bay on Tuesday 8 October 2013

The Committee met at 4.30 p.m.

PRESENT

The Hon. N. Blair (Chair)

The Hon. J. Barham

The Hon. G. J. Donnelly

The Hon. N. Maclaren-Jones

The Hon. H. M. Westwood (Deputy Chair)

Mr Paul Phillips
Mr Dusty McOnie
Mr Steve Smith
Young person 1
Young person 2
Young person 3
Young person 4
Young person 5
Young person 6
Young person 7
Young person 8
Young person 9
Young person 10
Young person 11, before the Committee

CHAIR: We will get started. First of all, thanks everyone for coming along. My name is Niall. All of the members of the Committee are members of Parliament. We have come up to the North Coast to have a look at the issue of alcohol abuse. One of the most important things as members of Parliament is that if we are to look at ways of changing our laws or at how we do things we need to speak to the people who may be impacted by that. That is where you will come in. We need to hear first hand what you think about some of the issues. We will just have a discussion this afternoon on some issues and ask some questions. Please feel free to answer as freely and as honestly as you can.

The Hansard reporters record what we are saying so we can go back and review this later. Try to speak one at a time and clearly so when they are recording what we are saying we get the right words in the right order. Does anyone have any questions before we get started? It is pretty casual; we are just going to have a bit of a chat. I will kick off. One of the things that we are talking about is the impact of alcohol on young people. Does anyone want to have a chat and tell us why you think people drink? Are people up here drinking just to get drunk or does drinking make things better when you go out or with your friends? Does anyone want to have a stab at that one? Do not be shy.

YOUNG PERSON 2: I know people do not drink to get sober, that is for sure.

CHAIR: That is not a bad point.

YOUNG PERSON 2: Yeah.

CHAIR: When you go out, is it a case of just having a few drinks or are people going out to get smashed?

YOUNG PERSON 2: Depends on the day, really. I get home from work and sometimes I will have two beers and I will go to bed, but if I am going out with my friends, I will go out and we will drink to get drunk, and we will drink before we go out and not get drunk, but close to it, and then get drunk at the club.

CHAIR: Why do you do that before you go out?

YOUNG PERSON 2: It is cheaper.

CHAIR: It is cheaper?

YOUNG PERSON 2: Yeah.

CHAIR: A lot cheaper?

YOUNG PERSON 2: Yeah, you are not paying \$9 or \$10 a can, or whatever.

CHAIR: That is what they call preloading, yes?

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I do not think that is what they call it.

YOUNG PERSON 2: That is what you call it.

CHAIR: What do you call it?

YOUNG PERSON 2: Pre-drinks.

CHAIR: Okay. Who else does the pre-drinks?

YOUNG PERSON 9: I do. Particularly when I was younger, my friends and I would drink quite a bit before we went out. It was a confidence thing because when you walk into a nightclub you think that people are looking at you and things like that, but when you have those extra drinks under your belt, you are feeling more confident.

CHAIR: Does anyone else have anything to add to that?

YOUNG PERSON 1: It is just cheaper.

CHAIR: It is cheaper?

YOUNG PERSON 2: Yeah.

YOUNG PERSON 1: It is substantially cheaper to have a few drinks beforehand and then go out. It is also the social aspect. You can talk more when you are at home or at someone's house than when you are at a club. It is noisier, so you get a more social thing from drinking at home.

CHAIR: Okay. How do you get from home to being out? Do you walk and take a few roadies?

YOUNG PERSON 2: Catch a cab.

CHAIR: Catch a cab and take a few roadies?

YOUNG PERSON 1: Yes.

YOUNG PERSON 2: Usually.

CHAIR: Same thing?

YOUNG PERSON 1: Or you have a DD.

CHAIR: Or a DD—a designated driver?

YOUNG PERSON 1: Yes.

CHAIR: Very good. Does anyone else have questions?

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: One of the things we have heard a lot about today from people in the community, doctors and youth workers is alcohol and violence. I am wondering if any of you see your mates drink and then end up in a fight, or pick a fight, or become a victim of a fight?

MR PHILLIPS: show them your ribs.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: No. What happened?

YOUNG PERSON 2: I got two broken ribs because of a—I am pretty sure it was an alcohol plus other drug fuelled fight the other night and, yeah, I got cut.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Can you remember that?

YOUNG PERSON 2: Yes, I only had six beers and kind of got stomped on.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Someone set upon you?

YOUNG PERSON 2: Yes. But that is the area we live in more than the alcohol, I reckon.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: So that would happen when you are sober as well?

YOUNG PERSON 2: Oh, yes.

YOUNG PERSON 1: A lot of people try to avoid fights. I know a lot of people who will try to get out of the situation when a fight is going to happen or there is a bad situation. They will do their best to get out of that situation, but it is not always possible. It does not matter whether you have got alcohol in your system or not. There are fights in Woolworths and there is no alcohol involved. It is just with youth a lot of the time we get told that it has to be alcohol-related or drug-related if we do have a fight. That is not necessarily the case.

YOUNG PERSON 2: It is not always the majority of people doing it. It is quite often a minority of people who get drunk and start fights. I have always seen it that way. I have lived around Lismore and this area most of my life. The amount of people that I see go out and get drunk and have a great time and go home is seriously a lot larger than the people I know or have had contact with who go out, get drunk, start fights and go home.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: What about the visitors to Byron? We have heard a lot about schoolies, tourists, backpackers and people who come here to the festivals. Do you think they have a different attitude towards alcohol than you do as local people?

YOUNG PERSON 1: I tend to avoid Byron during those times.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Why is that?

YOUNG PERSON 1: Because it is too packed. You can wait in a queue for three hours and still not get in. It is not worth it, so you just avoid Byron during those times. I do not know about everyone else, but generally I know that all the locals will avoid Byron during those times.

YOUNG PERSON 2: You just do not go out.

YOUNG PERSON 1: Yeah, stay home. If you want to have a few drinks with friends, then you do it at your house instead.

MR MCONIE: I am curious about your question. Some of you are from here and the broader area, but how many of you would see Byron as a destination to have a night out and a party and might travel here to have a night out on the town? Would any of you have done that in the past?

YOUNG PERSON 2: Yes.

YOUNG PERSON 7: Yes.

YOUNG PERSON 9: Yes.

MR MCONIE: How far do you travel? Where have you come from?

YOUNG PERSON 7: From the northern rivers area around Gawley.

MR MCONIE: It is the social environment of this locale?

YOUNG PERSON 7: Yes.

MR MCONIE: You know you are going to get a good time?

YOUNG PERSON 2: Yes, you feed off the energy of everyone else who is here basically.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: On access to alcohol, I am not asking you to do yourself in, but we know the drinking age is 18 years—that is when you can legally drink in New South Wales and, in fact, all around Australia. Do quite a few people in this area who are below that age drink in your experience?

YOUNG PERSON 1: I do not know a person who has not had a drink before that age.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: When we say "drink", are we talking about pretty serious drinking, going out and getting drunk?

YOUNG PERSON 1: Yes, like personally 13. I remember my thirteenth birthday as half the day spent with my head over the toilet bowl.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Do young people have any problems with getting access to alcohol?

YOUNG PERSON 2: Not at all. I have always thought it is going to be the same if you raise the legal age. You stand at the front of the bottle-oh and ask the first person who comes along. If they say no, you ask the next person. Within 10 minutes someone will have said yes, gone in and bought you the grog you want.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: What would work to stop people from causing themselves harm? Is there a style of education to make them understand that it is okay to drink sometimes? We are interested in abuse. We have heard a lot about violence, sexual assaults and unacceptable impacts like people losing their lives. How would that be best communicated to young people?

YOUNG PERSON 2: The biggest thing is a lot of people focus on binge drinking in young people. I have grown up in an alcoholic family, a family always fuelled by alcohol. Every couple of nights they get on the piss again and I have to take the kids out. People do not focus on binge drinking in adults. It is always youth binge drinking and youth doing all those wrong things. That is not the way I see it. We did what we did because that is what we grew up with and that is the norm for us.

YOUNG PERSON 1: That is how we cope. A lot of people end up drinking because of that. For my thirteenth birthday, it was a friend of mum's who bought us the alcohol. We were sat down with a catalogue, "There you go; pick what you want." She had always drunk, since when she was a child. She never knew any other way. It was not that she was an alcoholic or anything like that. When we had reached the age when she started drinking, she did not see it as a problem to buy us alcohol. That was the norm, and that is the norm in a lot of areas around here. Everyone would know someone whose parents would buy them alcohol from a young age. I think parents need to be targeted more, because if you have messages saying, "Hey, don't buy alcohol for minors and this is why," then parents are going to stop doing that. We have accessibility to alcohol, because parents say, "Yeah, whatever, here you go."

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Do you think there should be more education for parents about the risks they are imposing on young people?

YOUNG PERSON 1: Yes, it should be targeted more at parents, guardians and random people on the streets who will buy you alcohol if you stand out the front of the bottle-oh. I could stand out the front of the bottle-oh now, even though I am old enough to buy alcohol, and get someone to buy me alcohol without knowing my age. It needs to be targeted at those people that say, "Yeah, okay, here you go."

CHAIR: Do you think drinking alcohol is bad for you? What is bad? Is it better to drink three beers every day or to drink 20 beers on Saturday, because the next day it is out of your system and you can get back to work on Monday? Does anyone have a view on that? Is it doing any damage to your health to drink like that?

YOUNG PERSON 1: Of course it is. We all know it is; it does not mean it is going to stop us. We all know the side effects of smoking, but half the people in this room smoke. We all know the risks, but it is not going to stop us. Advertising the risks is not going to stop you. There is no point.

YOUNG PERSON 2: Does it have any effect?

YOUNG PERSON 1: I do not see it. I look at warnings on the front of cigarette packets and I do not even notice them. I just ignore them, because they are always there and saying this is bad, bad, bad, bad. I do not think anyone really cares or notices.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Violence has become really prevalent. There is a level of violence attributed to alcohol, particularly in young people, that did not seem to be there before. The immediate thing is to get into a fight or to go out for the night, get loaded and the event of the night is a fight. I have been in Byron for years and have seen that people are out looking for a biff. They will start it with anyone and very often local kids are picked on by someone from somewhere else. People from different areas will descend on the Byron, like the southern Queensland mob or people from down south. Sometimes a Lismore mob comes to Byron and, although I do not like the word "gang", when there was no transport between the areas there was a real thing developing about postcodes.

YOUNG PERSON 2: There still is.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: You went onto someone else's turf and fights seemed to arise from that. And there is alcohol. We lost those boys on the road at Broken Head.

YOUNG PERSON 2: I have to disagree with you there. From my experience with those gangs, if you will, having grown up in Lismore you tend to meet one or two of them. Growing up in Byron, I know almost all the kids here, and moving there I am seen as an outsider there and I am also seen as an outsider here. I want to try to keep my nose out of it as much as possible, but you do end up meeting a few of them. It is more than just alcohol, although that is the biggest problem; there is also a lot of drug use. People blame it on just alcohol, but for a lot of people the use of alcohol is quite minor compared to the use of drugs.

YOUNG PERSON 1: In this area.

YOUNG PERSON 2: Yes, in the northern rivers predominantly, I reckon.

YOUNG PERSON 1: The other thing that I have found is that in my brother's year, a lot of those guys are the ones starting the fights apparently. When my brother was in school, he was in year 5 when he had five guys come after him with a baseball bat because he had just moved to the area. He was in year 5; they were not drinking. They came after him with a baseball bat in school. Then he changed schools and the same thing happened. It is not just alcohol related, and it is not now that we are old enough to drink. This has been going on since we were in kindergarten in this area.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Are you saying that there is a culture of violence with or without alcohol or drugs?

YOUNG PERSON 1: Yes.

YOUNG PERSON 2: I do not think everyone has a culture of violence. There is a minority of people who have either grown up with it and think it is the normal thing, or are that angry in themselves or with others that they are going to let it out no matter what. Either they get a couple of drinks under them or they get on other drugs and they flip out and end up hurting someone or themselves.

MR PHILLIPS: I am a bit older than these guys and I work with the youth. Being a bit older, I think a bit more deeply about the issue. Beside it being extremely complex, violence is always going to happen. Society on one hand promotes violence through nearly every movie and video game where it is promoted and it is also suppressed. There is an inherent need, particularly by young men, to want to fight. There is nothing particularly unhealthy about it, except for the suppression: "Do this, but don't do that." Alcohol is often the trigger that allows them to do it. If you were really looking at harm reduction you would have a fighting octagon in every town centre on the weekends and have referees. You are never going to stop it; that is the reality. Whatever happens, there is going to be leakage, because you are pushing down something that is being promoted and there is an inherent urge to do. What we do with young people is give them an opportunity to express their fighting warrior spirit in martial arts. A lot of us in this room do martial arts together and we learn how to walk away from fights on the street. If more of that was going on in every town, every community, across the country there would be less leakage from the suppression in our society.

CHAIR: How is that working with everyone?

MR PHILLIPS: Ask these guys. Most of these guys are in the group.

YOUNG PERSON 10: It is good.

CHAIR: Are you able to walk away when someone baits you?

YOUNG PERSON 2: Yes, you are able to defuse the situation more easily. If I go back about two-and-a-half months, I had just done about six weeks of this and I got into a bit of a scuffle with someone. I had never met this bloke before, and I said, "Buddy, I'm not going to fight you." It got to the point of saying, "Dude, I will fight you if I have to and I will put you on your arse. I am not going to but I want to." It got to that situation, so I had to do what I did but to the point where I walked away and did not hurt him any further than I needed to.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: So you have limits.

YOUNG PERSON 2: Yes, limitations.

CHAIR: you said that it works.

YOUNG PERSON 10: Yes, if someone tries to ask you for a fight, you say, "No, I do not want to fight you." If they keep asking you to fight you say, "No, stop. I do not want to fight you." If he fights you, you say, "You offered to fight me" and you smack him. It is as simple as that: you warned him more than five times that you did not want to fight and he did not listen—simple as that.

YOUNG PERSON 1: Where I used to live, we used to ride motorbikes. We had an ability to release ourselves from a really young age. When we moved here there was none of that; you cannot go out and ride a motorbike. When they cracked down and closed down a lot of the motorbike parks were we used to go violence came after that. That was a relief and a lot of things that kids used to do, 10 years or 15 years ago—a lot of the things you guys would have been able to do as kids—we cannot do any more. They were releases, like riding motorbikes or playing tackle football. You cannot do that anymore, because people think others are going to get hurt. I enjoy getting hurt. I rolled a quad bike a year and a half ago and it was amazing. I loved it.

But unless you know someone with a property that you can ride on, you cannot. There is nowhere to do a lot of those things and enjoy life, so we end up being stuck with the only fun thing that we can do, and that is go out and drink. The only way we can express ourselves and release ourselves is to go out and have a fight. We do not have those easy outlets, which are probably dangerous but not as dangerous. I find a lot of those things that you guys would have done as kids are missing now. They are banned and there is nowhere to do them anymore, or if there is—like riding a quad bike in most of the areas around here—and you do it in any of the forests you will be arrested. It is having fun, enjoying yourself, but you can get arrested for it.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Do you think other types of risk-taking without alcohol, at another level, provide an outlet that would stop you from needing to or wanting to drink?

YOUNG PERSON 1: Yes.

YOUNG PERSON 2: Yes, and it is also something to fill your time. If you are not drinking and you are doing something else then you are not drinking.

YOUNG PERSON 1: You are doing something with friends as well. It is another social activity that you can do with friends. All we can do in this area is drink or go to coffee shops. I really do not want to sit in a coffee shop and speak to a friend. That is boring, so drinking is the only other thing that we can do socially that is acceptable.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: On the coast a lot of people surf. Surfing is a cultural thing, and there are some other sports. Do you think inland there are fewer options? Is sport not a big option?

YOUNG PERSON 1: My brother surfed and swam and did all that but I have never been into that; I am not a sports fanatic. I would ride a motorbike but I would not go and play sport.

MR PHILLIPS: No matter where young people live they say the same thing. They could live in the inner city; it is often a zoo.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: A lot of people say that.

Mr YOUNG PERSON 10: If you go back to the country tell your neighbours there is nothing in the country for you. There is no beach and all that stuff for you.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: In relation to the hard drinking that some of you commented on, do you feel this is just a phase that you are going through and you will stop doing this at some point in time, or do you see it as a habit that will see you through into adulthood? Is it just a passing phase that you are growing up with but that your older friends have grown out of?

YOUNG PERSON 1: How many of you guys have a glass of wine with dinner or something like that?

CHAIR: Just one.

YOUNG PERSON 1: Or two, or a bottle, or whatever with dinner. With your partner you have a glass of wine.

MR PHILLIPS: You cannot go out and judge people. You cannot walk up to a drunk in the street and say, "Stop drinking." It is his decision to pick. He chose to drink and it is his decision to choose whether to drink or not to drink.

YOUNG PERSON 1: Yes, you will have a glass of wine with dinner. We kind of do the same thing, like it is a social thing. Yes, okay we might drink less or more. No matter how old you are, like my grandparents, they have scotch every night at the same time—just one. They got told it was a form of alcoholism so they turned to non-alcoholic scotch and they said, "You know what, we are old. We are allowed."

YOUNG PERSON 2: Non-alcoholic scotch?

YOUNG PERSON 1: Yes. If we did that we would be binge drinking. If we had two scotches at night with dinner or if we had scotch later at night we would be alcoholics. How is that appropriate?

CHAIR: We are not judging you guys because we have all been young. After I played football I would have a few beers. But there are some things that we struggle with. I hate to admit this now that I am getting older but I do not understand what is happening out there. We did not have Red Bull and Vodka. We did not have the mentality that is currently occurring: when someone gets into a punch-up all of a sudden five guys are jumping on him. We are trying to find out what is so different now from the way things were 20 years ago when I went to a pub and mainly drank beer. In those days when there was a problem it was usually one on one. You guys said that you were learning to walk away and that you did only what you needed to do.

YOUNG PERSON 2: Yes, I put him on his arse and walked away.

CHAIR: But that is not happening in a lot of other areas. What we are seeing now is that when a guy is on the ground people are jumping on his head or on his ribs. Does anyone know what it is that is causing these guys to do that?

YOUNG PERSON 1: It is pack mentality; it is protect your mate.

YOUNG PERSON 10: It is probably because of the way that people look in their eyes. People do not know how to look or to react and they strike out. It is a question of who wins.

YOUNG PERSON 2: Some people have that mentality.

MR PHILLIPS: The excessively shallow nature of society could have something to do with it.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Earlier you mentioned all the influences. However, you said that you were older and that you could reflect upon it. But what does everyone else think about the high level of violence that we see every day? When I was growing up there was not the same level of violence. You did not see violence everywhere and it was not on the screen. We did not have all this stuff but we can see it everywhere all day if

we want. The images are a lot more violent than they used to be. They are associated with fun, like video clips, and games.

YOUNG PERSON 5: Just go on the internet and have a look at it.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Yes, that is what I mean. I was shocked by a game a part of which was to stalk women. The gamers received extra points when they raped a woman.

YOUNG PERSON 2: What?

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: That is a game that was on the internet. It is scary to think that young people are winning games by scoring points from beating someone or raping a woman. It is a scary thought for older people who think that they are trying to protect you and keep you safe.

YOUNG PERSON 2: I do not think anyone sees that as a normal or a sane thing to do. I have never heard of that game.

MR PHILLIPS: Even mainstream games like Grand Theft Auto are similar.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Some of the violent games such as Grand Theft Auto.

YOUNG PERSON 2: Yes, the new Grand Theft Auto fire thing that has come out.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: There is a lot of violence.

YOUNG PERSON 2: It is a mass murder game thing. Then it is all good, it is all okay and you do it again sort of thing. It is just as was saying: We do not have motorbike riding, or places where we can go out and do other masculine things.

CHAIR: How many of you play sport in a team? Six of you raised your hands. How many live in the Byron Bay area? You are all from Lismore or Casino.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Is it okay not to drink? Are you an outsider if you do not drink? Have you got mates that do not drink and they are still cool?

YOUNG PERSON 5: He does not drink. does not drink but he still comes out with us.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Is that still okay? He is not shunned because he does not drink?

YOUNG PERSON 5: No, that is all right. He gets out the home.

CHAIR: Is he the designated driver?

YOUNG PERSON 10: If we get in trouble he can maybe stop us because he much more sober than the rest of us and he puts us in line.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Are you worried about your own safety when you are out? Is it something that you think about before you go out?

YOUNG PERSON 2: No.

YOUNG PERSON 9: I do, particularly in Lismore. I will not walk around Lismore at night by myself,

But here I do not feel safe walking along the street. Ultimately it is better if you can walk with someone anyway. One of my friends was raped because she was really drunk. I believe it is a really important issue that we should address. Another one of my friends was date raped. So for women it is a huge concern. It is really not okay what is happening. Sorry, I did not know I was going to cry; it just came out.

YOUNG PERSON 10: Especially in Lismore too. Lismore is a bad city and it is pretty big. There are nerds and weirdos out there and all that sort of stuff.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: We have heard that Lismore council has been doing lots of stuff with street lighting and CCTV to try to make it safer. Is that working?

YOUNG PERSON 2: That does not deter people. It has got to the point where people do not care.

YOUNG PERSON 1: It just means that you hide from the cameras.

YOUNG PERSON 7: The cameras do not work. I was brought up in Lismore. I walk on the streets on my own. Fights in streets and cameras do not really matter to people. If you get hit you jump up, you find a weapon or you hit them back and it turns into a brawl.

MR MCONIE: One question has been formulating in my mind after listening to a lot of you. Is drinking the number one fun that you have in your community? What are some of the other fun things that you do in a week that are right up there?

YOUNG PERSON 5: We go and play basketball every day. That is great.

YOUNG PERSON 10: You can go and play touch football with your mates and that, or sign into a rugby league club, soccer, or netball for girls and all that sort of stuff. There are extra sports out there.

YOUNG PERSON 1: But someone like me does not really like sport. I used to do drama but then my brother started doing it and we had a huge clash and we fell out and I stopped.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: We are talking about what to do at night.

YOUNG PERSON 1: There is nothing to do at night. Realistically you can go and play sport but I find that in female sport you are separated from everyone. You cannot sit and have a conversation with the people you are playing with. It is not like that. Women have fewer opportunities. There are fewer opportunities in the area. I know that Byron Bay has quite a few drama academies, art and stuff like that, but Ballina does not. Lismore has less. They still have more than Ballina has. Casino, where I am living now, has nothing really. Other than drinking there is really no social thing to do. I think that is the big thing. You drink because of the social aspect of it. There are not many social things that you can go and do.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: I understand about the risk of sexual assault. Have you or your mates heard about that? Do you have fears about that?

YOUNG PERSON 1: Yes, we have all heard about it. From my personal experience a lot of it is younger girls who are still in school who are not actually drinking and stuff like that. It is not the girls who are going out because a lot of them have their friends with them and stuff like that. That is from what I know but I am sure that there are girls who are going out drinking that have that happen but I make sure that I always take a male friend. You are always safer with a male friend.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Has anyone else heard about the risk?

YOUNG PERSON 1: It is a hush-hush subject.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Who has sisters or mates? You have to worry about them if it is going on. We read about it in the paper or we hear about it. A lot of it does not get reported because women do not report those offences. Women go through real hassles as they have to tell everyone and so much shame is attached to it. We do not know how much of this occurs. People talk about it in the network.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: We heard today from the doctors and the youth workers about it. We just wondered whether you knew about it?

YOUNG PERSON 9: Yes, it is hard. My friend went to the police and told them what had happened but she came out of the police office in a panic attack. She was in a huge state of panic because she was interrogated. They do not realise how painful something like that is. It is just ridiculous even to get an AVO in place. There was all this, "You know that this person you are putting an AVO on will not be able to apply for a government job for five years." That was not it but there was something that could have a negative impact on

them. She had just disclosed this information and they were asking about him and saying, "He will not be able to do this or that." Who cares? Where is the justice in all of this? A lot of it is related to alcohol. The woman might be drunk and the guy is drunk so he is not thinking straight. But mainly women are vulnerable and uninhibited when they are blind drunk. That is it. It is not okay.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Have there been any programs or advertisements to which you have been exposed at school that have made you think about the need to be careful in relation to alcohol consumption? said earlier that nothing really influenced people; that they just go out and do it. Is there any hope that society can do something better by trying to get young people to think more about it? The alternative is for us to put up our hands and to say, "We cannot do much about it; that is just the way it is." This Committee is charged with trying to be a bit more optimistic. Can society do something better to influence young people?

YOUNG PERSON 2: I do not think there is to be honest with you. It is exactly like said; it is the same thing with cigarette packets. I look at a cigarette pack with a picture of a tooth or a mouldy mouth or whatever and I am like—

YOUNG PERSON 1: My mouth does not look like that.

YOUNG PERSON 2: Yes, I do not look like that. I am not 50 years old and, frankly, I will probably stop by then. That is the way I look at it. It is the same thing with alcohol. You see the alcohol-related things on the television and I am like, "Well, you know what? I don't really care. I'm still going to do it because I like doing it. I like getting drunk, I like having fun with my friends and I do not honestly think there is much that anyone can say to me personally that I shouldn't do because of X, Y and Z." I look at them and say, "Well, I can. I'm 18. I enjoy doing it and I'm usually in a really stable frame of mind when I do it." It is my choice. I do it to have fun, and I do not do it on a permanent basis either.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: What do you like about getting drunk?

YOUNG PERSON 2: Courage, freedom, having fun. I have always heard the term "liquid courage"—that is for sure. Me and the boys just have heaps of fun when we get drunk together. We are complete muppets together and it is very interesting.

CHAIR: You mean you are not a muppet without it?

YOUNG PERSON 2: No, of course.

YOUNG PERSON 1: It is freedom. Everything else that you do is watched and you are told, "No, you can't do that. No, you can't do that. This is wrong. This is bad." Drinking is the one thing that we get a yes on. Even when it comes to drugs it is like no, no, no. There is such a negative thing about it. Drinking we get a yes and it gives us a little bit of freedom.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: The yes is because it is legal, it is advertised, you get all these images that say it is great and these people do it. Is that what you are saying?

YOUNG PERSON 1: I have not seen alcohol advertising in probably—

YOUNG PERSON 2: I have not seen any advertisements. The only advertisement I have seen for alcohol is some gnome or something sitting on the side of a riverbank, fishing. That is for Bundaberg Rum. That does not make me think of rum at all.

CHAIR: You guys do not see the alcohol advertising?

YOUNG PERSON 2: No.

YOUNG PERSON 1: We do not have billboards, do we?

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: We do not have billboards up here, but what about when you go to the football?

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Can you guys afford alcohol?

CHAIR: We will come to the cost in a moment. Let us just stay on the advertising for one minute. You say you do not normally see the advertisements. Did anyone watch the grand final on Sunday?

YOUNG PERSON 2: You see those sorts of things.

YOUNG PERSON 1: But you ignore it.

YOUNG PERSON 2: If you are going to drink you are going to drink no matter whether there is an advertisement there.

CHAIR: It does not have an impact when the State of Origin team is sponsored by Victoria Bitter [VB] or when there is a Bundaberg Rum advertisement on the television?

YOUNG PERSON 2: I personally cannot stand VB. I cannot stand XXXX Gold or most of those beers. I am a Tooheys Extra Dry drinker.

YOUNG PERSON 9: Me too.

YOUNG PERSON 2: When I see an advertisement for another beer I do not go, "Oh, sick, I'll try that or I'll try this." It is like whatever.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: You said you drink Tooheys. Do you know who Tooheys sponsors at any games?

YOUNG PERSON 1: No.

YOUNG PERSON 2: No.

YOUNG PERSON 1: My partner and I went into the shop to buy alcohol and there was a guy there with all the beers set up and all these drinks and you could sample a drink. We were just like, "No, we know what we're here to get." It does not matter. Yes, okay, you might try it when you are 13 and you are having your first drinks or whatever, which is how young a lot of people are. I was smoking at 11. You do not really see it and change your ways. If you do, you walk in there and you go up to a salesperson and you say, "I like this, this, this, this and this. What am I going to like?"

CHAIR: What about if you got two cases for the price of one case of Tooheys or if you got a set of glasses or a T-shirt? Would you change or would you buy more if it is was cheaper at the time you were there? One thing they keep telling us is that two for one deals and things like that—

YOUNG PERSON 1: Two for one when you get your free whatever it is, if that is what you are buying. You will not buy something different because you want two, but if it is a two for one deal then you will get the next bit and you will just chuck it in your cupboard or you will put it in your fridge and you might have free beers for the next two weeks or whatever.

YOUNG PERSON 2: Or a really good weekend.

YOUNG PERSON 1: Yes, or a big weekend.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Do you do that because you can afford it? Did you do that when you were younger?

YOUNG PERSON 2: Yes. I could always afford it though. That is the thing.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Even when you were younger you still drank the same?

YOUNG PERSON 1: Yes. I probably drank more when I was younger.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: How did you afford it?

YOUNG PERSON 1: I never paid for any of it.

YOUNG PERSON 2: It had always been the parents buying it for you or you and all your friends chucking in \$10 each. There are eight of you and then there is \$80 and then you go out and buy two bottles of whatever you are drinking and there is your alcohol. The actual financial thing has got nothing to do with the whole thing because people can come up with money like that. Say something just happened and you need \$300, I am flat broke at the moment but if I had to I could come up with \$300.

YOUNG PERSON 1: We have just had to come up with \$350 for a new fridge and we managed to come up with that. It was for our fridge to get fixed. We managed to do that. You manage. You pull money out of your arse if you have to. You just make it happen. I know some people that would rather drink than eat.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Is it the same for all of you?

YOUNG PERSON 1: All you are doing by raising prices is just sitting there and making it so young people eat less or eat crappier food.

MR MCONIE: Can I interrupt there? I think we really need to narrow the questions a little bit sometimes. One of the narrower questions I am interested in is who here receives money from a job or a payment? Maybe we can have a show of hands. In that vein, who else here has a television and watches television every day?

YOUNG PERSON 5: Everyone put your hand up.

MR MCONIE: From my perspective, I do not pay any attention to advertising but I am subjected to it. I am aware that it is there. I do not know any of the local teams. I am a Kiwi and I do not know what you guys like to drink.

YOUNG PERSON 1: You mute the television during advertisements.

MR MCONIE: I heard saying that everything is getting more and more complicated. Do you guys feel that life is getting busier and more complicated and there is more advertising?

YOUNG PERSON 1: You just want it to go away.

YOUNG PERSON 2: The advertising is more of a hindrance than anything else. It is like when an advertisement comes on television for McDonalds or something you are not going to sit there and watch and go, "I really want McDonalds; that would be awesome." On the occasion when you are a bit hungry and then an advertisement for pizza comes on you are already going, "All right, I'm going to get takeaway and pizza will work." But 95 per cent of the time you will sit there and mute the television or I will walk out of the room, go do what I wanted to do and come back when my show is on. The advertisements are something you do not pay as much attention to as whatever you are watching.

CHAIR: People are telling us that to stop this we just need to jack the price up. You are telling us that people will find the money even if it is more expensive.

YOUNG PERSON 1: You will find the money anywhere.

CHAIR: You also said that it does not matter if we increase the drinking age because people will just get it anyway. They are also telling us that we need to shut the pubs or stop serving drinks at midnight. What do you guys think about that?

YOUNG PERSON 2: I reckon that will be the biggest problem.

CHAIR: Tell me why.

YOUNG PERSON 2: People get out of the clubs at 12 o'clock, what is the first thing they are going to do? They are going to start walking the street. About 12 o'clock is when everyone starts getting really, really pissed. If you have got a bunch of really, really pissed people on the street together I can guarantee you that there are going to be more fights than there was beforehand.

CHAIR: They are saying that when they close at 3.00 a.m. people have had three more hours of drinking and they are even more pissed.

YOUNG PERSON 1: You do not, because you get to the point where you are stumbling around the place so you stop drinking. You get to the point where you are so drunk. At my eighteenth birthday I vomited in the gutter in Byron Bay and that was it; I stopped drinking then. I went and I bought a kebab and I stopped drinking.

CHAIR: With responsible service of alcohol and all the restrictions on drinks, how do you get to a point in a pub or a club these days where you are staggering around?

YOUNG PERSON 1: Because it is one drink. The only reason I was that drunk was because I was drinking something and Red Bull and I turned around and I asked for something else with Red Bull. I was just kind of tipsy and had forgotten what I had drunk. I asked for something else and skolloed it because we were leaving the club. It was just the mixing of drinks. That was just, "Oops, I got the wrong drink. Damn it, now I am really pissed." It is just that one drink. That one drink will push you over the edge. You have that one drink, you get to the point where you are just like okay and it is time to stop.

By 3 o'clock in the morning everyone is tired; they just want to go home and go to bed. They have been pissed and sobered up. They just want to go home and go to bed. A lot of the people that are going to start fights and the testosterone fuelled people, for example, have all found someone to go home with so they have left and they are gone at that time. It is not when the pubs and stuff are closing that the fights and stuff like that happen; it is earlier on in the night.

YOUNG PERSON 2: There may still be fights then.

YOUNG PERSON 1: Yes, but it is generally earlier on in the night when people are really drunk or at the beginning of the night when people have just started to get drunk, because a lot of the people have left by the time they are closing at 3 o'clock because you are just exhausted and you just want to go home.

YOUNG PERSON 2: And it is cold too.

YOUNG PERSON 10: It can happen even if you mix your spirits. If I was drinking Bundaberg and I went straight over to Smirnoff or something I would just spew it all back up because it was different.

CHAIR: You cannot mix them?

YOUNG PERSON 10: You cannot mix your drinks.

YOUNG PERSON 2: You can—it just all comes straight back up.

YOUNG PERSON 10: It is too strong for your mind and you cannot handle it.

CHAIR: Why do you not drink, ?

YOUNG PERSON 11: I just do not like it.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: You do not like the taste or you do not like being pissed?

YOUNG PERSON 11: You do not know what you are doing when you are drunk.

MR SMITH: You are saying you do not like it?

YOUNG PERSON 11: I do not like drinking. It is bad for everybody and anybody. I do not know.

CHAIR: But you still go out with these guys, do you not?

YOUNG PERSON 11: Yes.

YOUNG PERSON 10: You come out with us boys and have a good time.

MR PHILLIPS: On Friday nights.

CHAIR: said that you end up looking after a lot of these guys because you tell them when—

YOUNG PERSON 11: When they are too pissed. They will say, "Yeah, lads, I want to go home."

YOUNG PERSON 10: If someone is lying down on the grass he will just come along and say, "Come on, we're going to the next stop," or wherever we are going.

CHAIR: It sounds like everyone needs a to look after them.

MR PHILLIPS: I think and his state needs to be promoted. If I go to a party is the most interesting person at the party to me, to be honest, because every other person is doing exactly the same as each other. They are just doing the same thing. They look like a walking, talking cliché and then is there not drinking. He is the person that I am interested in automatically. That could be promoted, you know what I mean? The interest, the difference. I probably should have come to the meeting before but, to be honest, everything else is just putting bandaids on something that is running through a prickly bush. It is almost ridiculous.

The way I see it is like Greg, who asked the question before about whether anything can be done. I think absolutely it can be done. says no, but I do not think he is thinking on a big enough level. It is where society places its priorities. We want to educate kids in history, mathematics, algebra, science and stuff. We are quite happy to do this kind of education but at no point do we make human relationships, empathy, communication, esteem and emotional understanding equally important. Why is that not a compulsory topic at every school all the time?

If humans were growing up with this kind of understanding then it would be a completely different set of circumstances. Instead we are just completely reactive, we are never proactive and we stick little bandaids when blood starts coming instead of walking the other way. There are always going to be problems, of course, but I remember Labor said a few years ago that we were going to have an education revolution. My ears pricked up and I thought what are they going to do? Give everyone a computer? Big deal.

YOUNG PERSON 1: And they are dreadful.

MR PHILLIPS: I thought maybe there would actually be an education revolution where we changed the framework about what we see as important in society, and nothing has changed, but they do have Personal Development, Health and Physical Education [PDHPE] and stuff, and I am one of the people that goes into schools and talks to young people about this issue, but it is tacked on at the end and it is an afterthought. It is very much just a little tokenistic effort. I think it is more important than mathematics, to be honest, like learning human empathy, relationships and communication. Maybe I am just unique like that, but if that was equally important in our education system these issues would be way different, I am telling you.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: But do you not get the choice to do that with PDHPE training?

MR PHILLIPS: Tokenistic.

YOUNG PERSON 1: You do not.

YOUNG PERSON 2: No, you do not.

YOUNG PERSON 1: You do not have those options. All you have is your subjects, and they may be in Sydney schools or whatever where there are heaps more subjects to choose from, but up here we have our basic subjects that are like design and technology, food tech, things like that.

YOUNG PERSON 2: Drama, art—this and that.

MR PHILLIPS: And it is not qualified people teaching, like it is very much tokenistic and tacked on. Quite often the Physical Education [PE] teacher is teaching young people about human relationships and complex issues—

YOUNG PERSON 1: You have DVD.

MR PHILLIPS: —with one eye out on the field, like "When are we going out to kick the football?" Until that changes, it is always going to be—

YOUNG PERSON 1: There is a subject that is like a religion subject—it is DVD or something like that—but most of the kids that I know that were meant to be in our class for that have a letter from home saying that no, they are not learning religion in school, so they are not going to do it because it is classified as religion. It is a religion subject.

YOUNG PERSON 2: Yes, that was probably the most human empathy I learned at high school, in religion, and that was *The Simpsons* episode.

MR MCONIE: What I am hearing is that it is about values and how we educate young people to create values around things that are important to them, and advocacy and promoting things, like young people being ambassadors for youth issues, young people issues, and the opportunity to create that education themselves and educate each other. is a first responder; he is the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. What are we doing to educate more and retain more in education?

MR SMITH: Nothing.

MR MCONIE: That is what I am thinking.

CHAIR: must be full of courage and freedom. He does not need to have a can of liquid courage—he is full of it. I am serious about that, and I am glad that you guys recognise how important it is that he has got your back when you are out there, because I think it is important and it shows that you do not always need to get a skinful to have a good time. We have about 10 minutes left. Is there anything you want to tell us about what we should be doing? Some of the messages have been coming through, saying that you need to have more outlets to be able to have fun and maybe even take the place of alcohol nights. At the moment advertising, price and those things are not working. What do you want to tell us? We might go around the table and give you all an opportunity to say something to wrap up, starting with .

YOUNG PERSON 1: The one thing that I got out of all of this is the sexual assault issue. There are some things on television that you sit and watch the advertising of. They are very rare, few and far between, but there are some things that you will go, "Oh, that's interesting." The sexual assault issue should be advertised. It should be advertised in schools, it should be advertised everywhere. For a lot of people, it is a hush-hush issue, no-one talks about it, it is swept under the rug like it does not happen. That means that it does happen. If you start to make people aware, if you hear someone screaming behind a building up an alleyway, you ring the police. People do not do that because they go, "They are just laughing and having a good time." Those things people need to be made a lot more aware of. People need to know what to do in those situations and need to know how to deal with those situations, like if someone is chasing you, what to do—basically what to do in those situations. I think that needs to be really strongly advertised and thrown out there.

CHAIR: do you have anything to add?

YOUNG PERSON 3: One issue I have seen a lot in the four years that I have been going out is that there is just a huge lack of police presence around this area. A lot of my old mates that I used to be friends with would go out and not see a cop or see maybe one patrol car going around and they think they can do whatever the hell they want. I have come up here clubbing when there have been riot police and they would not dare do a single thing out of line because they do not tolerate it.

YOUNG PERSON 2: I guess it is also the fear of getting bashed by them too.

YOUNG PERSON 1: Them using force is a really good thing. If they are just sitting there being pansies and not doing anything—

YOUNG PERSON 3: More power needs to be given to them because back when I was young you would not dare cross a police officer. Nowadays kids do not care. Cops have no power whatsoever.

YOUNG PERSON 1: Yes, kids will sit there and scream and yell, do whatever they want to a police officer.

YOUNG PERSON 3: They cannot do anything.

YOUNG PERSON 1: Arrest you, if you are lucky.

YOUNG PERSON 3: Yes, and then what? You are out in 12 hours and back on the street.

CHAIR: What about you, ? Do you have anything to add?

YOUNG PERSON 4: No.

CHAIR:

YOUNG PERSON 5: No, I am right.

CHAIR: Paul?

MR PHILLIPS: You know this campaign with the speeding? I reckon this for street fighting, or something similar. I am actually into martial arts fighting and I think if you had proper fighters that fight on equal terms as sport doing this for guys that just king hit people on the street and stuff, I think that could be effective—because that is what it is.

CHAIR: A couple of street fighters?

MR PHILLIPS: Yes, why not? There is nothing wrong with that kind of sport.

YOUNG PERSON 1: This campaign did work.

MR PHILLIPS: I see it as exactly the same stuff, it is just in a car or on the street. It is the same.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: You are saying that did work?

YOUNG PERSON 1: Yes. When you attack someone's sexuality, it works, because the whole purpose of it is that they are trying to be men and as soon as you go, "You're not a man", as soon as you are doing that, it does work.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Does it still carry on?

YOUNG PERSON 1: Yes, you can see people being dickheads in a car and you sit there and you do this—you just do it.

CHAIR: all good?

YOUNG PERSON 6: Yes.

CHAIR: happy?

YOUNG PERSON 7: Happy.

CHAIR: good? Steve? What about you guys? All good, ? When I was younger, we had a mate that we called the fly, because you would be talking the day after you had been out and someone would ring up and he would say, "Yes, I saw that, I saw that". He was like the fly on the wall that saw everything. That was because half the time he was not drinking, so he got to see all the things that we either did not see or had forgotten. You are the super fly .

MR SMITH: I agree with Paul and, like you were saying, fellows like need to be applauded and held up as really honourable fellows and really great assets to their community. Also I used to be a student counsellor and we used to bring programs into the school, like the risk program where you highlight the dangers of driving at speed or alcohol-related and so on, and some very high-impact dramatic things where you would have kids in years 11 or 12 as actors, as drama students, playing out the part of someone who has been drinking and driving and smashed into a car, and you have the police and the ambulance and the fires come, and it is quite high impact and I think it had an impact in the school that I was working in, seeing young people really see face-to-face what the impacts can be. I think there is definitely room for more educational promotion—every little bit helps.

CHAIR: What about you ?

YOUNG PERSON 9: I basically just want to say that one thing that has helped me a lot is I have been seeing youth workers since I was 16. I got caught basically doing naughty things and the cops said, "You've got to go to juvenile diversion", like it was basically go to court or get juvenile diversion, so I chose juvenile diversion. I had to see a youth worker once a week for six months or something, and then I actually saw the benefits of it and kept doing it even though I was no longer legally required to, and now I am finally getting the issues surrounding drugs and alcohol, because it affects you, it affects your brain, and I am just getting that, so yes, I do not drink anywhere near as much as I used to, if at all, and I do not take drugs anymore, so that works. I just wish there were more youth workers and it was more available to everyone. That, I guess, would be my solution.

CHAIR: , thank you for your time today. What you have said to this Committee probably has made the biggest impact of any of the evidence we have heard over the last three days. You are very brave to have brought it here today and we thank you for telling us. I hope that you are better for the experience of coming here today as well.

YOUNG PERSON 9: And thank you so much for hearing all of us out—it means a lot.

CHAIR:

YOUNG PERSON 2: I honestly reckon that some of the ideas that Paul put forward, like the idea with the fighters is a really good idea because it gives us another way of expressing ourselves rather than getting out, getting drunk, having fights, and the whole "I'm better than you because I belted the shit out of you", sort of thing, which is I reckon what people see it as.

CHAIR: In Perth they have a midnight basketball competition on the streets, which is huge.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Redfern too.

CHAIR: Sydney as well.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Is there a Police Citizens Youth Club [PCYC] in Lismore?

YOUNG PERSON 2: Yes.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Do you not do the fights there?

YOUNG PERSON 10: I do not go to PCYC.

YOUNG PERSON 2: No, I do not go to PCYC.

YOUNG PERSON 10: But they do run courses there, like on Friday nights and that.

CHAIR: They need them at midnight when they are coming home from the pub. Do you have anything to add, ?

YOUNG PERSON 10: No, I have nothing to say.

CHAIR: Dusty, do you want to wrap it up?

MR MCONIE: Yes, I will wrap it up. I am here to support young people as a youth worker, Youth Connections with the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], and I took the boys to the Boomerang Festival on Sunday. The promoters gave them free tickets to come and have an experience they would never otherwise have, and it is about experiences that you would never otherwise have. I am proud of all the boys today for being here because they stepped up and represented that yes, it is important, because this may never happen again. It is about opportunities that you never otherwise have, if that makes sense, and youth workers are really key. Government funding is key. We need more youth workers. We have more complex issues. Alcohol is the thing that stops a kid coming to my program in the morning. It is the thing that keeps me going in loops around the community to try again, and I am talking about here. We have unmet demand that is not represented here today. How do we capture that? Youth workers can tell you about it and these young people can tell you about it. At the moment, through education, the majority or almost all of them are doing two days a week distance education, highly successful outreach programs; they have left school, some as early as year 6, and never been back. They have the opportunity today to work with youth workers, education and partnerships with community stakeholders to rustle that funding together and have teams that are reliable, and now we can seize the opportunity together to really promote ourselves, and you cannot do that when there is not enough funding or opportunity, enough paid workers. That is what I would like to leave with. This is a really strong mob because they have all taken the opportunity today and I am really proud of them.

CHAIR: Thank you all for coming today. We really do appreciate it.

(The Committee adjourned at 6 p.m.)
