

**ALCOHOL ACTION NZ
NEWSLETTER – DECEMBER 2016**

Dear Colleague

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1. What will John Key's legacy be for alcohol reform?

In retrospect the timing couldn't have been worse for alcohol reform when John Key won the November 2008 general election. He was too clever and probably strongly advised not to simply cancel the Law Commission review that had just been initiated by the previous Labour government at the time. Instead, with the assistance of the alcohol industry, he managed to pass an Alcohol Reform Bill that lacked any substantial reforms. He thus squandered an excellent opportunity to do something substantial about alcohol-related harm in New Zealand.

A cartoon in the New Zealand Herald in 2012 summarized the dynamics brilliantly:

http://www.nzherald.co.nz/brewing-and-liquor-industry/news/article.cfm?c_id=136&objectid=10830648

The cartoon depicts PM John Key held high by a group of smiling alcohol industry representatives giving a toast to a crowd of (heavy) drinkers.

It is pertinent to note that in an interview in November 2013, a year after the Alcohol NON-Reform Bill had been finally passed, John Key spoke candidly about how his Chief of Staff, Wayne Eagleson, formerly of DB Breweries, is at his side on all the big decisions - and said he is New Zealand's most "influential unelected" official.

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/9380847/Key-credits-team-for-Nationals-success>

2. Scotland's government wanting to introduce minimum price controls on alcohol

In contrast to the current NZ government, the Scottish government is serious about reducing alcohol-related harm. Increasing the price of alcohol is one of the most effective as well as easiest of measures a government can enact to reduce the damage that alcohol does in society, and there are two main mechanisms for doing this: increasing the tax on alcohol; and introducing a minimum price for alcohol. Alcohol Action NZ advocates for both measures to be used. John Key and Judith Collins have led the way for the NZ government to dismiss any possibility of either for the time being.

In contrast, the Scottish government passed legislation in 2012 to introduce a minimum price that alcohol could be sold in Scotland at 50p per standard unit of alcohol. A standard unit of alcohol in the UK is 10ml of pure alcohol (8g), whereas our standard drink is 10g or 12.7ml of pure alcohol. So a 50p minimum price in Scotland would translate into \$1.13 per NZ standard drink or about \$8.50 for a bottle of wine (7.5 standard drinks). This is not particularly expensive, but would get rid

of the dirt cheap alcohol in NZ (mainly wine) and bring about a reduction in drinking, particularly in high risk individuals – young people and heavy drinkers.

Following the Scottish government’s legislation, sure enough, the Scottish alcohol industry got to work in the courts to try and sink the legislation. Their main tactic was to argue the legislation violated European law. However, these appeals have not been upheld and the Scottish government are now able to proceed with the legislation. Two links if you’re interested in reading more are:

http://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/oct/21/scottish-court-rejects-appeal-against-minimum-alcohol-pricing?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

https://ncdalliance.org/news-events/blog/david-can-prevail-over-goliath-minimum-unit-pricing-for-alcohol-in-scotland?goal=0_1750ef6b4b-ddb39615de-59559393

3. Matt Claridge is the perfect CEO for the Tomorrow Project

What is the Tomorrow Project?

It is a registered charity funded by the alcohol industry. It describes itself as “a social change initiative of beer, wine and spirit producers designed to help create a moderate and sociable drinking culture in New Zealand” It states its goals are “to strengthen social norms in favour of responsible consumption and encourage safe and sociable drinking.”

There are a number of points which might seem a little strange. First, the Tomorrow Project is a New Zealand registered charity funded and therefore working for the alcohol industry. We know the alcohol industry is only interested in one thing and this isn’t reducing drinking in New Zealand; so we can be sure the Tomorrow Project isn’t going to be successful in reducing drinking in New Zealand either. In fact we can be pretty sure the Tomorrow Project is working to maintain or even increase drinking in New Zealand and therefore maintain or increase alcohol industry profits.

It surprises some people that Alcohol Action NZ doesn’t qualify as a New Zealand registered charity because it is considered too ‘political’, even though it works entirely for the public good. Such is the state of New Zealand’s growing corporatocracy – the dominance of the benefit and interests of corporations over the benefit and interests of the majority of ordinary people.

The Tomorrow Project/alcohol industry uses the well-worn weasel words we have become very accustomed to seeing - “moderate drinking”, “responsible consumption”, “safe drinking”. No mention that alcohol is a psychoactive drug, no mention of risk, and no mention of the most important term “low risk drinking”.

Several months ago the Tomorrow Project advertised for a new Executive Director with a salary in the range \$120,000 - \$150,000. The Tomorrow Project isn’t short of a dollar.

Last week Matt Claridge, formerly CEO of Water Safety New Zealand, was appointed to the position:

<http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/BU1612/S00103/matt-claridge-heads-up-tomorrow-project.htm>

The lack of assertive comment from WSNZ about the relationship between alcohol and drowning over the past few years now makes a lot more sense. For example in 2014 the best Matt Claridge could say in a pre-Christmas warning about the dangers of drowning over the Christmas/New Year period was “personal responsibility is key”, while Surf Life Saving NZ CEO Paul Dalton *did* mention alcohol as a risk factor for drowning in the same article.

<http://www.watersafety.org.nz/media/media-releases/water-safety-leaders-call-for-caution-this-christmas/>

Matt is a perfect CEO for the Tomorrow Project.

One of his key tasks is:

Media and stakeholder engagement to bring balance to the debate on alcohol harm and drinking culture, and the health effects of alcohol consumption.

Let's have a go at translating this into what is actually intended, focusing on that word "balance".
"Whenever there is any public comment about the harms of alcohol make sure this is countered and obfuscated through public comment and lobbying work behind the scenes; don't reinforce any message about alcohol-related harm, just emphasize the health benefits of alcohol".

Also included in the job description is:

The development of relationships with key stakeholders with an interest in alcohol related issues; including relevant government agencies such as the Health Promotion Agency, Ministries of Health and Justice, FSANZ, and SUPERU; public health and community advocacy groups; academic and research institutions, and so forth.

It is interesting that the Health Promotion Agency is top of the list of relevant government agencies identified by the Tomorrow Project to influence. Does the Tomorrow Project Board see the HPA as easy pickings, or perhaps even already on board with the key mantras: "moderate drinking" "health benefits of alcohol" and "personal responsibility".

AANZ is not holding its breath waiting for a phone call from Matt Claridge, and we're not expecting an order from the Tomorrow Project for a bundle of pamphlets about the strong link between alcohol and cancer (see below) either.

4. ALCOHOL CAUSES CANCER – pamphlets for distribution

If you would like to disseminate some valid information about health effects of alcohol we have a good supply of pamphlets on the link between alcohol and cancer, which we plan to continue to distribute over the course of 2016 and 2017. Many New Zealanders are still not aware of the strong association between alcohol use and a variety of cancers, of particularly note two of New Zealand's most prevalent cancers – bowel cancer in both sexes and breast cancer in women. In fact many New Zealanders continue to think that alcohol, particularly red wine, is good for health. The evidence for this is at best weak and getting weaker, while the evidence for cancer aetiology is strong and getting stronger.

The pamphlets can be distributed anywhere you would like – doctors' and other health professionals' rooms, schools, universities and other training institutions, churches and other social organisations, and of course directly to the public at street corners if you're brave enough or delivered into their letter boxes, as well as handed or sent to politicians both on your local council as well as government MPs.

Order a supply today through John Hurrell, AANZ Administrator: coordinator@alcoholaction.ac.nz
John will send you a supply for free (bundles of 100 pamphlets). Just tell him how many bundles you would like.

5. Katherine Rich and the Food and Grocery Council joined to defamation case

Doug Sellman (alcohol), Boyd Swinburn (food) and Shane Bradbrook (tobacco) are plaintiffs in a defamation case against Cameron Slater (Whale Oil blog), Carrick Graham (public relations consultant), and now Katherine Rich (Food and Grocery Council). No date has been set for the trial yet. Here is a link if you would like to read more:

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/85305578/Health-experts-name-Food-and-Grocery-Council-and-CEO-Katherine-Rich-in-defamation-suit>

2017 is going to be the eighth year of Alcohol Action NZ and likely to be a cracker.

Sincerely
Doug, Jennie, Sam, and Geoff
Medical Spokespeople
Alcohol Action NZ
We need more than just tinkering

“Alcohol Action NZ is a national organisation promoting the 5+ Solution, an evidence-based set of strategies that will significantly reduce the enormous social, medical and personal damage alcohol misuse is inflicting on our society”