

MINISTERIAL COUNCIL ON DRUG STRATEGY

JOINT COMMUNIQUE

16th May 2007

The Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy (MCDS), the peak national policy and decision-making body for licit and illicit drugs, met in Adelaide today to consider national drug issues. The Council comprises the Australian Government and State and Territory Health and Law Enforcement Ministers, including Justice and Police Ministers and the Australian Government Minister for Education. The New Zealand Government is also represented on the MCDS.

Today's meeting was chaired by the Hon Gail Gago, South Australian Minister for Mental Health and Substance Abuse.

Issues discussed by the Ministers included:

National Leadership Forum on ICE - Compendium of jurisdictional achievements

In December 2006 NSW hosted the National Leadership Forum on Ice which made urgent recommendations on a range of issues relating to methamphetamine use, production and trafficking. During the Forum Ministers agreed that a compendium of jurisdictional achievements be developed and at today's MCDS meeting, Ministers endorsed and agreed to publicly release the compendium. MCDS also agreed that the actions arising from the Ice Forum will help inform development of the National Amphetamine-Type Stimulants Strategy.

Consideration of banning of cannabis smoking equipment

The MCDS agreed that the Commonwealth prepare a discussion paper on banning or regulating the importation, sale and advertisement of equipment for the use of cannabis for consideration by the MCDS at its next meeting.

Mutual Recognition Acts for Tobacco Product Prohibition

MCDS agreed that young people should be protected from marketing of fruit and confectionary flavoured cigarettes and split packets. It agreed to a South Australian initiative to impose a permanent exemption under Mutual Recognition Acts for these products. The MCDS also agreed to consider further options out of session including banning the importation of both fruit and confectionary flavoured cigarettes. States and Territories agreed to consider passing complementary legislation to ban the sale of these cigarettes.

Tobacco Advertising and Sales over the Internet

Council members again discussed the complex issues involved in stopping the advertising and sale of tobacco products over the internet and supported a move by the Australian government to seek to amend the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Act 1992 to broaden the current definition of "to publish an advertisement" to include "transmitting" the advertisement in electronic form. The government is investigating the inclusion of elements such as:

- Display listings of tobacco products for sale in a text-only format
- Display prescribed graphic health warnings on the site
- Require an age restricted access system so that minors are discouraged from visiting the site and viewing the advertisements within, and

- Quantify any and all taxes and other charges that may be payable over and above the advertised price on the product.

The MCDS agreed to work collaboratively towards a ban on the sale and advertising of tobacco products over the internet in the longer term¹.

Tobacco Control

MCDS expressed its preference that tobacco companies be required to formally disclose the ingredients in tobacco products. It requested a study be undertaken on the feasibility of such disclosure and the analysis of this information. The study will also identify the potential costs and benefits of a regulatory role for government based on this analysis.

Standard Drinks logos

Arising from the 2003 NSW Summit on Alcohol Abuse, the NSW and Commonwealth government have been working under the MCDS with the alcohol industry to develop a voluntary, national standard drinks logo for display on all beer, wine and spirits products to promote responsible alcohol consumption. At the meeting today Council members reviewed the latest report of the alcohol industry toward the standard drinks logo initiative which showed that the majority of large wine, beer and spirits distributors had or were moving towards, the use of the logo.

Neuroscience of Addiction

The Ministerial Council agreed to fund on a cost shared basis a project, *Neuroscience of Addiction*, developed by NSW, which will involve an examination of neuroscience to better understand the processes of addiction. MCDS members had agreed previously to monitor neuroscience advancements, noting also the field of genetics and mapping of the human genome may enable identification of individuals at risk of addiction and assist in the development of preventive measure to stop the uptake and use of drugs. Ministers acknowledged the potential for neuroscience to provide new insight into the drivers of substance abuse and addiction and to possibly inform more effective prevention, education and treatment responses. The new project will investigate how to:

- better understand the processes of addiction
- contribute to the knowledge base on drug and alcohol addiction
- contribute to innovative treatments for better client outcomes,
- inform future planning and policy development in relation to addiction, and to
- understand relevant ethical issues.

The MCDS noted that neuroscience was not a magic bullet that will provide a quick fix to this social problem and that continued government action will still be required to deal with the non-biological drivers of addiction.

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¹ This statement, as released in the Communiqué, does not accurately reflect the decision of the MCDS on the day. The MCDS actually agreed to work collaboratively towards restricting the retail sale and advertising of tobacco products over the internet and banning sales to people under 18 years.