

MINISTERIAL COUNCIL ON DRUG STRATEGY

Chaired by Neil Roberts, Queensland Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services,

COMMUNIQUE – 24th April 2009

National Binge Drinking Strategy

Australian ministers responsible for illicit and legal drug issues today put finishing touches to a range of tough measures to tackle binge drinking to be considered by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) as part of the Binge Drinking Strategy.

As part of the package agreed for submission to COAG, Ministers supported the need for strengthening alcohol advertising regulation, developing liquor licensing principles, including greater national consistency and for more brief interventions.

The Ministers, attending the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy (MCDS) in Brisbane today, agreed that the existing Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code (ABAC), which is meant to ensure that alcohol advertising is responsible and doesn't encourage underage drinking, had significant shortcomings and should be reformed as a mandatory co-regulatory scheme.

Ministers supported a series of proposals about alcohol advertising regulation to be presented to COAG including:

- Mandatory pre-vetting of all alcohol advertising
- Expanding the ABAC management committee to have a more balanced representation between industry, government and public health
- Expanding the adjudication panel to include a representative specialising in the impact of marketing on public health,
- Expanding the coverage of the scheme to include emerging media, point-of sale and naming and packaging, and
- Meaningful and effective sanctions for breaches of the Code.

Ministers also discussed concerns about ready to drink alcohol beverages and resolved to ask COAG to consider calling on industry to stop producing ready-to-drink beverages (RTDs) that combine alcohol with energy drinks, reduce alcohol content in RTDs and stop using alcohol masking agents such as sweeteners which has led to early introduction to alcohol by young people.

The MCDS endorsed the need for an early intervention program to support existing initiatives designed to get young people under the age of 18 back on track before more serious alcohol-related problems emerge. Ministers agreed to an Early Intervention Pilot Program (EIPP) that provides police with options for implementing the EIPP with underage drinkers within their core activities. The Framework allows for targeted health assessments and alcohol education sessions for young people with a focus on person responsibility. Commonwealth funding of \$19.1 million under the National Binge Drinking Strategy will support activities under the EIPP. More detail can be found at www.health.gov.au

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