

## **National Liquor News July 2014**

### **Container labelling decision is a win for common sense**

In late June, Australia and New Zealand food ministers decided to endorse the progress of the Australian alcohol industry in voluntarily adopting pregnancy advice labels on our products. DSICA considers this a win for common sense and rational decision-making.

Back in December 2011, the food ministers had given the alcohol industry two years to make satisfactory progress in putting pregnancy advice labels on alcohol containers.

The distilled spirits, wine and beer sectors had already been adopting pregnancy advice and other labels prior to that decision but the government's announcement focused industry's efforts solely on using DrinkWise's pregnancy advice labels.

While individual companies got on with adopting pregnancy labels, DSICA consistently made two main arguments against making the labels mandatory at the end of the two years: all the academic research is consistent that labelling does not change drinking behaviour but labelling does raise awareness. Awareness that not drinking while pregnant is the safest option was already rapidly increasing, even without pregnancy advice labels. Our second argument was closely related: that the numbers of women continuing to drink while pregnant was rapidly decreasing, so any impact the labels could have was rapidly declining as well.

There are lots of other arguments against making pregnancy advice labels mandatory. Parallel imports meant that registered brand owners in Australia could not guarantee all of their products would be compliant. The enforcement of labelling regulations is almost non-existent, and would have added a lot of extra costs to governments if it was to be made effective.

DSICA and the wine sector objected to the short two-year period granted to the industry because our products have such long shelf lives. The industry's efforts were also handed by the vagueness of what the food ministers were actually seeking the industry to do and how it would be measured.

But June's decision is not the end of the matter. The food ministers will re-evaluate industry's progress on voluntary labelling in two years' time (June 2016). The task for the supplier sectors is to further lift the overall percentage of stock lines and volume of product that carry the pregnancy label.