

National Liquor News May 2014

### **Alcohol researcher discovers a 12-year-old trend**

Like most people in our industry, DSICA was very happy to see that a well-respected Australian alcohol researcher had written publicly about the long-standing decrease in underage drinking in Australia. That decline started in 2001 and it was very obvious for anyone who can read a data table. Unlike almost all Australians reading newspapers or listening to the news, DSICA wasn't surprised at the news, only that an Australian researcher had publicised it.

The research made for a great news story as it was a huge and pleasant surprise. After so many years of stories of alcohol-related doom and gloom, the revelation that more underage Australians were saying no thanks to alcohol was very welcome.

I doubt the widespread news coverage was so welcome in the anti-alcohol movement. The movement has worked very, very hard to convince journalists and the public that alcohol abuse and the alcohol industry are out of control. The movement made very few tweets about the news story. Only a single tweet from FARE, which had funded the research. I wish that alcohol researcher all the best for his future career. Good luck.

Coming shortly after the Australian Bureau of Statistics annual release on per capita alcohol consumption – declining again - the public are now going to be far harder to convince. Saying that it's all advertising's fault; that alcohol is too cheap; and we have too many outlets won't work so well.

Creating a sense of crisis is the essential step to getting politicians and the public to the point of deciding 'something or everything must be done'. Alcohol researchers and health bureaucracies know this. More and more, their research and enquiries are framed as a reaction to community concerns instead of the actual prevalence of harms, because the trends are going against them.

Besides highlighting the declining trend, the researcher made another very telling point: alcohol researchers have no idea why fewer underage Australians are not taking up alcohol. It's a pity the researchers have just noticed. If they had worked out the why earlier, Australia could have done more to encourage the very welcome shift.