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Blaming alcohol and only alcohol the easiest thing

Last month, the New South Wales media and the anti-alcohol groups marked the one-year anniversary of the unfortunate Thomas Kelly's death in Kings Cross. Amid the reviews of progress, accusations towards the industry, and soul-searching I noticed some very perceptive remarks by NSW Police Commissioner Scipione discussing the Thomas Kelly Foundation.

He wrote "My views and rhetoric on social impacts of drunken violence are widely known and reported. We have to acknowledge we have a problem and parents need to start parenting again. As a parent, the best thing you can do to help your teenage become a happy healthy adult is to discourage underage drinking."

Not only were Commissioner Scipione's thoughts perceptive about one of the underlying causes of the alcohol-related violence that blights our entertainment precincts, he also re-enforced the role parents must take on. It was refreshing that his comments didn't beat the usual drum about clamping down on alcohol in all circumstances for everyone and he mentioned the foundations' aim was to "stop the minority spoiling it for the rest of the community".

At DSICA we take the view that you can't understand alcohol use and abuse unless you understand the society and culture it's taking place in. Different cultures use and abuse alcohol in very different ways.

So rather than simply asking how to increase restrictions on all drinkers in the hope of deterring the very bad few, or planning faster justice for violent drunks and anti-social behaviour, perhaps our leaders need to ask some hard questions about what has changed in our wider society that leads to king-hits and unprovoked random thug attacks. The alcohol consumed hasn't changed. We have had distilled spirits for centuries – so why are we now having glassings and king hits?

The role of alcohol in the violence is inescapable. But the alcohol is a constant. What else has changed that makes the violence now so random, so vicious and so unprovoked?

That our media –savvy alcohol experts never ask these broader and uncomfortable questions – at least never in public – seems to be a dereliction of duty.