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COMMISSION OF AUDIT IS A REAL OPPORTUNITY

The new Coalition government has started governing in earnest and introduced its keystone legislation abolishing the carbon and mining taxes. It has tried to introduce a calmer and more measured approach to making policy and media statements. Most Australians would welcome a less frenetic Australian government taking longer to make decisions and then concentrating on bringing the new policies into effect. The change will also be appreciated by everyone in every industry.

Nobody in the alcohol industry needs to be reminded that consumer spending and business confidence is very subdued. The private sector's economic performance flows through to the government's tax take, and deficits are certain for the next two or three years. Sensible governments in these circumstances look at all areas of spending and then ask if it is strictly necessary. A very large part of what the Coalition is doing to trim expenditure is focusing on the quality of spending through the Commission of Audit.

The Commission of Audit is a very real opportunity for industry collectively and for individual businesses to have a voice about what should be the role of government and what should governments fund.

For example, should governments fund a social engineering movement that demands new legislation and policy changes while being paid for as academic enquiry? Should peak non-governmental organisations be funded to ensure that alcohol and drug treatment providers have a political voice and can lobby for policy change?

The Queensland government has a very good law that no organisation which receives more than 50% of its funding from the Queensland government can conduct lobbying activities. In the UK, the practice of Government funding organisations who then publicly advocate for policy changes and lobby the government is called 'sock puppetry'. The NGOs lobby for policy that government departments dare not raise without risking a public backlash. The Commission is an opportunity to ask those questions.

To conclude the final column in 2013, DSICA and its members want to wish everyone in the Australian alcohol industry a highly prosperous and safe Christmas.