

National Liquor News – December 2012

FASD inquiry had a noble intent but wide of the mark.

The Australian Parliament's last sitting day included the reporting of the Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) inquiry. The FASD inquiry was very necessary and important because FASD is such an important health matter; it is a lifelong disability and is entirely preventable.

DSICA was supportive of the inquiry taking place. Australia lags very badly behind other nations in the level of its research into FASD, in recognising the impact of FASD, and putting in place the health systems to combat it, so I certainly hope many of the Committee's recommendations come to fruition.

However, as is fairly usual for Parliamentary inquiries into alcohol matters, the inquiry's recommendations broadened from its actual topic – how to reduce FASD – and went into advertising regulation, use of social media by alcohol marketers, how its retailed, its pricing and availability. All these areas have been or are already under review.

The final recommendation regarding the industry was the Australian Government to have a National Alcohol Sales Reform Plan to reduce "irresponsible alcohol consumption across Australia".

If the MPs on the committee had wanted to ask the alcohol industry about these matters, we would have been happy to answer any questions and put our side of the argument. But we weren't asked. But the ever-present anti-alcohol NGOs certainly got a good hearing if the report is any guide.

There was no surprise when the committee recommended that pregnancy warning labels be mandatory, and have specified sizes, colours and positions. One of the MPs was asked at the press conference why make labels mandatory, and they cheerily replied "Why not!"

Product warning labelling is always regarded as a really good idea by governments because it costs them nothing and the voters can see 'something is happening'. The costs ultimately hit the consumers, and it curtails our use of our containers when they are taken over by mandated warnings. When the warnings don't change behaviour – as all the research shows they won't - this is then a justification for increasing their size and location.

Heads they win, tails we lose.

Finally, I would like to wish everyone a happy and safe Christmas and a plentiful trading season.