

## **Drinks Trade - March 2011**

### **Blewett Labelling Review misses no opportunity**

The distilled spirits industry was very disappointed and a little surprised by the recommendations of the Blewett Labelling Review.

The disappointment was that the review's recommendations do not miss any opportunity to increase the labelling regulation of alcohol products.

The only exemption that alcohol products gained was from front-of-pack traffic light labelling (where foods get a red, amber or green light for sugar, salt, fat, calories, etc) – and that was because alcohol products would get mostly 'green lights' and that might encourage drinking. So the Review team said the alcohol industry should not use traffic lights.

The surprise was how far the Review went ahead of the available evidence and research. The report itself noted that the effect of labelling was very hard to research effectively, and that more and better research should be done. However, this lack of research and evidence of effectiveness did not stop the review's recommendations that alcohol products should carry health warning labels and pregnancy warning labels.

The Review was explicit – promoting preventative health should now be the second priority of labelling policy, after food safety. Taken all together, the recommendations show an enthusiasm for Government to appropriate the 'real estate' of the food and drink industry for its own purposes, such as promoting healthy diets. Pity the brand owners.

There were some good recommendations – such as a Trans-Tasman Labelling Bureau that would do research and help industry understand the regulations, and a greater emphasis on enforcing the labelling regulations so that not just the large and reputable companies comply.