

ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

29 July 2008

Adjourned debate on motion of Hon. D.G.E. Hood:

That the Social Development Committee inquire into and report on the adequacy and appropriateness of laws and practices relating to the sale and consumption of alcohol and, in particular, with respect to—

1. Whether those laws and practices need to be modified to better deal with criminal and other anti-social behaviour arising from the consumption of alcohol;
2. The health risks of excessive consumption of alcohol, including—
 - (a) 'binge drinking'; and
 - (b) foetal alcohol syndrome;
3. The economic cost to South Australia in dealing with the consequences of alcohol abuse; and
4. Any other relevant matters.

The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD: I thank all members for their contributions. I would particularly like to thank the Hon. Bob Such from the other place who, I must say, was instrumental in coming to me early on in preliminary discussions. In fact, it was largely his idea. I just want to put that on the record. He came to me with a number of thoughts and we worked on it together. He was not confident of getting the numbers in his house, so we agreed that I would move the motion here. It seems like the motion will have support, which I am thrilled about.

An honourable member interjecting:

The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD: I am disappointed about that, and I will get to that in a moment. I thank those members who spoke to the motion, and I particularly acknowledge the contribution of the Hon. Ms Lensink, who I thought made eminent sense. Essentially her point, as I understood it, was that the point of the inquiry will be to look at the real impact and the statistics, and that sums up exactly what I was trying to do in putting this motion forward. It was deliberately broad in the sense that it would catch all. I just want to state for the record that no-one is suggesting that we make alcohol illegal. That is ridiculous. I do not think anyone would support that. We certainly would not. I just want to put that firmly on the record in case anyone might have silly thoughts to that effect.

The way in which this motion came to mind was that earlier in the year I had to drop my wife and daughter off at the airport very early on a Sunday morning. Their flight to Brisbane left at 6am. Because my wife was travelling with an infant, she had to be there at 5am. So, I dropped her off at 5 o'clock and drove home. The way I get home is to go through the city to get to Prospect, where I live. I drove down Hindley Street, because I thought, 'Well, I haven't been down Hindley Street at this hour of the morning in a long, long time.' So, I thought I would take the scenic route.

An honourable member interjecting:

The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD: I can tell you, it was a sight for sore eyes. So, there would be no problems there.

An honourable member interjecting:

The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD: No, none of that, I can assure you. Anyway, I drove home via Hindley Street, and it really shocked me. What I saw in probably the two minutes it took me to drive the length of Hindley Street was two young girls literally lying in the gutter; this is at six in the morning. I am sure that those girls would have been under 20—it would not surprise me if they were under 18, and it would not shock me if they were under 16. They were literally lying in the gutter. One of them had her skirt up around her neck and the other

one was semiconscious, but barely moving at all. The girl with her skirt lifted appeared to me to be knocked out. She was being attended to, so I did not feel the need to stop and I kept driving.

A few moments later, a young guy (I guess is the best way to refer to him), probably in his very early 20s, or maybe late teens, banged on my windscreen quite violently and screamed abuse at me—someone I had never met, obviously, or seen in my life before. It really left quite an impression on me. As I said, it was only a two-minute journey down that street. I had not been on that street at that hour of the morning for many years—and I would be prepared to take an oath on that if there is any doubt about that fact.

It really struck a chord with me. I got home and it was on my mind and I thought, 'What can I do about it?' One of the things that I could do about it was to ask the Social Development Committee to inquire into the cause. Obviously, I saw many drunk people. There was a feeling of violence on the streets, really, and it was an untoward situation.

The purpose of this inquiry is to examine, essentially, what can be done, what cannot be done and what should be done. A number of the things, as alluded to by the Hon. Ms Kanck, which will be looked at by this inquiry will fall outside the jurisdiction of this parliament. Federal issues, such as advertising, for example, and those sorts of things, will lie outside the parameters of this parliament. However, they are still issues upon which recommendations can be made.

I would also like to sincerely thank members of the opposition for their support. As I said, I think that the contribution by the Hon. Ms Lensink, in particular, was eminently sensible. I would also like to thank the Hon. Ms Kanck for her indication of support. I am genuinely surprised that the government would not support this motion.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas interjecting:

The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD: Indeed. We have standing committees to inquire into just this sort of thing. The Social Development Committee is the appropriate body to hold such an inquiry. The motivation here is not to embarrass the government in any way. Frankly, I think that we would be facing the same issues whichever government was in power. When one considers that the Prime Minister at a federal level is obviously concerned about the impact that alcohol has on our society—

Members interjecting:

The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD: It is a multi-party approach, Mr President, as you can see.

Members interjecting:

The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD: Well, I did that, and after I put her on the plane I drove down Hindley Street. I am disappointed. I just do not see what harm could be done in having a genuine look at this. As I said, it is not an attempt to embarrass the government at all. I think this is just an attempt to try to have a proper look at a very serious problem in our community.

Let me outline that problem. I am conscious of the hour, so I will not take too much time, but I would like to take a few minutes to outline the seriousness of the problem. I want to highlight in chronological order things that have come to my attention since I raised this motion in this council on 19 April this year. I would like to present a list of issues that I think are relevant and give further cause, if you like, for the holding of this inquiry. Again, all these things I am about to mention have come to my attention since 19 April this year. As I said, they are in chronological order.

The first of those is that in Queensland Premier Anna Bligh announced on the sidelines of the 2020 summit that her government would charge parents who provided under-age children with cartons of alcohol for schoolies celebrations and impose fines of up to \$6,000. A couple of weeks after I moved this motion, we all read with shock the harrowing account in the *Sunday Mail* of

cab driver Avel Aretas and his encounters with 'thousands' of binge drinkers, and in particular his observations of young women binge drinking in Adelaide and the risk they place themselves at. On 8 May, just a few weeks later, the Cancer Institute of New South Wales released a study showing that two standard drinks a day increased the risk of breast cancer by 22 per cent; two standard drinks a day increased the risk of developing mouth cancer by 75 per cent; and four standard drinks a day increased a man's risk of developing bowel cancer by 64 per cent.

On 11 May, just three days later, the Ceduna council proposed new licensing conditions at Yalata and Oak Valley to limit alcohol sales to light beer only, to reduce binge drinking, with the Mayor, Alan Souter, saying the community's police and local hoteliers all supported the move but that the licensing commissioner was not interested.

The very day after that, *Dolly* magazine's Youth Monitor surveyed 600 teenagers between the ages of 10 and 17 in findings released on 12 May. The findings were compared with attitudes in 1992. Results showed that 80 per cent of 10 to 17 year olds think that regular drinking is acceptable, compared with 64 per cent in 1992—a significant increase in just a few years. However, 42 per cent think it is acceptable to smoke tobacco, compared with 56 per cent in 1992. So, clearly, the advertising campaign against tobacco has resulted in people of that age group thinking of tobacco as less acceptable. Why we are not doing the same with alcohol is a valid question.

On the question of government involvement, governments of both persuasions have been aware of this problem for some time. Over 20 years ago, in a media release, the former minister for health, Dr Cornwall, referred to a DASC (as DASSA was then called) survey—

The Hon. B.V. Finnigan interjecting:

The PRESIDENT: Order!

The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD: —of some 699 teenagers aged 12 to 17 and 472 adults aged 18 to 23. They found that over 40 per cent of 15 to 17 year olds had engaged in binge drinking (then defined as five or more drinks in a row) at least twice in the two weeks before the survey. Nearly 50 per cent of those aged 12 to 17 believed it should be harder for them to obtain alcohol. The report also shows that an alarming proportion of people aged 12 to 23 believe that drinking wine coolers (the drink of choice amongst young people in those days, or the RTDs of that generation) believe that 'drinking wine coolers or beer is safe if they do not want to get drunk'.

A few days later, a paper presented by the Royal Australasian College of Physicians at its annual congress (starting on 13 May) had the results of a telephone survey of 1,103 Australian women aged between 18 and 45, which showed that 34 per cent consumed alcohol during their last pregnancy; 32 per cent said they would drink if planning, or during, a future pregnancy; 93 per cent knew alcohol affects unborn children; and 81 per cent agreed that pregnant women should not drink alcohol during pregnancy, despite the fact that 34 per cent of them did.

Also, on 13 May (the very same day) the Northern Territory police pulled over a man near Alice Springs, who had a five-year old boy unrestrained in his vehicle but his slab of beer was buckled up alongside of him on the seat. On 15 May we heard that Queensland schoolgirls had formed an 'exclusive' club called Club 21, in which girls are ranked between one and 21 based on their thinness, good looks, binge drinking escapades, popularity with boys, etc. On 16 May the University of Tasmania released study of findings showing that 13 per cent of teenagers said they got 'blind drunk' regularly, while 43 per cent said they did so occasionally.

On 18 May we heard that, at its 61st assembly, which began on 19 May, the World Health Organisation was under pressure to take action against binge drinking. Also, on 18 May we heard that a young man admired by many of our young people—singer Shannon Noll—admitted that he had been engaged in rampant drug and alcohol abuse. On 23 May the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy decided to fast track the federal government's \$53.5 million national

binge drinking strategy in response to the community's concern about binge drinking.

On 28 May we heard, through the former consumer affairs minister, that the state government was taking legal action against the Shenanigans Hotel at the Marion Shopping Centre for encouraging women to drink heavily—as was alleged.

We saw an instant change in drinking behaviour after the federal government's introduction of its alcopops tax, which some observers say has driven young binge drinkers to drink spirits rather than RTDs. Shortly after that, Britain launched a campaign aimed at women, its slogan being, 'If you drink like a man, then you'll look like one', and it demonstrated how long-term excessive consumption can affect a woman's appearance.

Data revealed at Senate estimates in early June indicated that 9.1 per cent of young people aged 14 to 19 years of age drink at risky or high-risk levels at least once a week. Submissions to the Senate ready-to-drink tax inquiry found that 20,000 girls in Australia aged 12 to 15 have a weekly drinking habit.

As I said, all this data has come into the public arena since I moved this motion on 19 April this year. So, in just a few short months all those things have come to light. Clearly, we have a problem that needs investigation. I state for the record that this is not an attempt to introduce draconian laws under some veil of secrecy or anything of that nature. As members here know, I enjoy an occasional drink. There is nothing wrong with that, but we need to look at what impact this issue is having on our society in a proper and informed way.

The PRESIDENT: It seems a very good argument for 10 o'clock closing.

Motion carried.