



SUBMISSION TO THE SELECT COMMITTEE
ON
SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN THE COMMUNITY

SUBMISSION NO. 17

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William Lewis Pointon

Registered Nurse

1/4 Winnecke Avenue

Alice Springs N.T. 0870

Submission to the Select Committee on Substance Abuse in the Community
Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory
5th June, 2002
W.L.P.

I am concerned that legislation which currently exists covering the use and abuse of licit and illicit substances tends to contribute greatly to any harm caused to individuals, families, communities and to society at large, to the extent of causing more harm than the substances themselves. It also greatly contributes to disrespect for our institutions of government by alienating people according to what substance they use or abuse and by meting out punishments which ignore rational thought. Instead, this prohibitive legislation creates enemies of our own citizenry by perpetuating stereotypes and misdirecting vast resources.

Enacting bills which regulated the currently illicit substances would render much of the harm caused by prohibitive legislation extinct.

In the first instance, an abusive substance user could be managed according to his health, social and cultural needs, without having to resort to punitive measures forthwith. Similarly, someone such as myself, who enjoys the recreational use of cannabis, could be contributing positively to society through the tax I paid, just as I do when I have a glass of Shiraz. Naturally, if I seriously misbehaved by being 'stoned and disorderly' for example, I would be punished accordingly, but not because I possess the cannabis - just as an alcohol drinker or paint sniffer is not punished for being in possession of those substances.

Much harm is caused, to society especially, by the need to deal with shadowy blackmarket suppliers. Secrecy, danger and conspiracy are involved with such dealings, and it is the underworld figures who benefit from prohibitive legislation. They seek to corrupt the very institutions which glue our society together; our legal system, our taxation system, our health system. Vast sums of money go untaxed and unregulated.

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This money instead perpetuates the mostly evil organisations that care not for anyone, least of all the Honourable Members comprising this Committee. They only hope that we are too timid to regulate these substances, thereby ensuring that the 600 billion dollars flowing around the planet each year continue to by-pass law abiding citizens attempting to build a better society, a better world, by legitimate means.

In the second instance, property and persons could become safer. Heroin users (especially), would resort far less to crime to fund their habits. Criminal gangs would have their home invasion plans almost totally thwarted by cannabis “kafes”, for most would not bother growing cannabis at home if one could purchase it for a similar cost to alcohol in a controlled environment. Of course, Consumers and Providers would be subject to laws associated with this privilege, and would be punished according to the severity of any infringement - just as a chronic drunk-driver receives a heavy sentence while those of us who are “under the limit” are able to keep our drivers licences because we pose less of a threat to society.

In the third instance, vast sums of money would almost immediately be freed and created to attend to the health and human issues caused by substance abuse, and to ensure people used substances safely. It is likely that insurance costs would stabilise, perhaps fall! Dry Communities could use their cut of the excises and freed money to increase their vigilance against illegal profiteers and extend education campaigns.

The tobacco experience is worth reflecting upon at this point. Some tobacco excises have been directed towards education, advertising was legislated against, and many individuals and organisations are in litigation against tobacco companies for what amounts to their failure to operate openly. All these legal avenues have led to a

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continually falling rate of tobacco consumption in recent years in mainstream Australia and similar societies. It is doubtful if a blanket prohibition of tobacco could have achieved as much, not least of all because it is a prolific plant.

In the fourth instance, it would utterly stop the greedy individuals who try to get rich quick by smuggling heroin into the country. These individuals are not often caught, and contribute greatly to a staggering five hundred heroin deaths annually by dumping their pure product on the market, thereby by-passing the usual pyramid of dilution. That such legislative avenues have never been tried in this country reflects very poorly on those of us with the power to do so. That it perpetuates said blackmarket verges on the conspiratorial.

In the fifth instance, it would make for a more cohesive society. Some, perhaps many, “abusers” would become substance “users”. Need I list prominent heroin “users”? prominent alcohol “users”?... Many of the youth subcultures which spring up around substance “abuse” could be diminished by being brought into the mainstream of society. Legality rendering the “abuse” less rebellious, less attractive, perhaps they would go and find an extreme sport instead, or a shocking artform!

Of those “abusers” who survive, which thankfully is most of them, the worst outcome of their “abuse” is imprisonment and other punitive measures. An unfortunate few do get cirrhosis of the liver or HIV, but the occurrence of such diseases is compounded by the substances’ legal status, the quality of the information available concerning the use of the substances and the poor lifestyle choices of individuals. Considering the vast amounts of licit and illicit substances consumed, there is very little morbidity because most “abusers” stop “abusing” given appropriate support from society. Jailing illicit substance

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5th June, 2002
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users has not proved to be useful. That there is 97% of drug related morbidity attributable to legal or prescribed drugs indicates strongly that the need for social and health approaches has become paramount over legal approaches.

I believe that as much good could come from a blanket ban on alcohol advertising as has come from the ban on cigarette advertising. I believe that as much good could come from such a ban on the promotion of cars as toys, which are there to be driven recklessly through any terrain. It seems that such saturation indoctrination plays as heavily on the citizenry as any substance use or abuse, if alcohol-related violence or the road morbidity amongst young men is any indication. Alcohol and car manufacturers both target young men heavily in their advertising campaigns, which rarely reflect the proper use of their products. I would hope that any relegalisation and subsequent regulation of currently illegal substances would not allow such abuses of public trust, but would indeed correct them. I would expect the care and education of alcohol users and motorists to continue, while the active promotion of unsafe alcohol and motor vehicle use would be legislated against. Indeed, I would hope there would be no active promotion of any currently licit or illicit substance, because there is concomitant cultural dissemination.

Use and abuse of licit and illicit substances does concern me greatly. It concerns me that so many are locked in prisons for a lifestyle choice, only to have these substances available to them in prison, most likely because this foolish prohibitionism perpetuates a deep-rooted corruption, which allows such a paradox to continue. It concerns me that there is so little funding directed towards caring and educating as opposed to punishment, especially given the huge tax excise on licit substances. It concerns me that stereotypes are perpetuated and an enemy established by attending the use and abuse of substances almost wholly by the legal system, promoting a political environment where alternative

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solutions are never able to emerge. I do not want a prison culture to develop in the Northern Territory and Australia, such as the United States of America, where 1% of it's citizenry is in gaol.

This war on the citizenry must stop. Prohibition must end.