

**Newsletter No. 79 of Gala New Zealand Inc :: May/June 2011**

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## ALCOHOL LAW REFORM... THIS DECADE AND IN 50 YEARS

“If the Government does not get alcohol law right this time, it will prove very difficult to do so in the future.”

The “five plus solution” of increased excise tax, raising the purchase age, reducing accessibility, reducing marketing and advertising, lowering the blood alcohol level for drivers and increasing treatment opportunities, are the basics of sound alcohol law. It is inexcusable not to have these changes in place before the World Cup blowout.

The reason I am pressing the urgency of legislation is partly to prevent harm from excessive drinking, but mainly because of the impending Trans Pacific Partnership Trade Agreement (TPPA). This agreement which is being negotiated in secret by our Government, will inhibit or stop health promoting legislation. It will lock us in for the next 50 or more years. The pattern for these trade agreements is to include clauses allowing corporations which would lose profits as a result of legislation, to sue Governments. The cases are heard in private trade courts.

The government of Uruguay is currently being sued by Philip Morris Tobacco for loss of profit because they passed a law which requires 80% of the cigarette package to depict the harmful effects of smoking.

I doubt if our smoke free legislation could have been enacted if we had been party to the TPPA.

The New Zealand Government passed a law in 2005 for health and safety warnings on alcohol containers. Because of Closer Economic Relations it has been languishing with Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) since then. The earliest possible date for this to be agreed by FSANZ is December this year.

In 1997 the government of Canada passed a law to exclude MMT, a suspected neurotoxin, from petrol. The Ethyl Corporation, makers of MMT, threatened to sue the Canadian Government for US\$251 million, under the North American Free Trade Association. The Government backed down, paid Ethyl \$14 million for lost profits and declared MMT safe.

The ability for companies to sue the Government if laws impinge on their profits is an intolerable price to pay for a trade agreement. It will affect legislation on many fronts... health promotion, environmental, biosecurity, and pharmaceutical. We lose a large piece of our democracy for short term economic gain. It is a Faustian bargain. We should not go there.

Dr Viola Palmer

Past chairperson of GALA

## Does wine make you fat?

Relax. Wine does not make you fat – it makes you lean... against tables, chairs, floors, walls and ugly people.

...Seriously though, it can cause excess weight as drinkers do not know of the high calorie (energy) content of alcoholic drinks as there is no labelling, even though all other drinks are appropriately labelled.

## The future for GALA

Gala commenced in 1992 and was regarded as a fringe organisation, calling as it did for a ban of all alcohol advertising and sponsorship of social and sporting events by the alcohol industry. This was regarded by many as a non-viable position and for many years GALA was regarded as being extremist in its activities.

However, In 2003 GALA raised a petition asking the Government for a complete review of the liquor laws. This eventually resulted in the Palmer report and in the present Liquor Law Reform Bill, which has gone through the select committee stage and is due back for presentation to Parliament in July.

Over the years GALA has lobbied in all possible ways and its views on advertising and sponsorship, has now been largely adopted by many other organisations also trying to contain NZ's alcohol problems.

The question might be now asked "Is there still a need for an organisation like GALA to continue.?"

GALA has difficulty in recruiting enough experienced, enthusiastic, competent and motivated individuals to keep the organisation moving at full speed. A large workload has descended on a few voluntary GALA members, who serve the organisation well but all of whom are busy elsewhere.

Your comments on this matter are invited.

## WHO data

According to WHO: Morbidity attributable to alcohol in countries with an established market economy comes only second to that of tobacco. Liver disease is responsible for 70% of the directly recorded mortality from alcohol and perhaps a quarter of the total attributable mortality; the total is uncertain but is probably between 18000 and 30000 per year in England and Wales.

## Should New Zealand be doing this?

NZ officials through the World Trade Organisation have argued that for Thailand to place warning labels on alcoholic drinks "created unnecessary obstacles to trade" and "new requirements would impose significant and administrative burdens on exporters and result in a reluctance for exporters to service the Thai market".

What utter bosh. A good deal of exported alcohol from NZ already has warning labels. And why should NZ interfere with the sovereign right of a country to do what is best for its own population?

And still we have no warning labels in NZ. The alcohol industry has made sure of that. The government is surely in the hands of the alcohol industry as our Parliament sidesteps any movement on this issue. But our officials do not seem reluctant to interfere with policies in another country. Shameful. GALA has written to Parliamentarians about this matter. Sue Kedgley has had the courage to speak about this issue so we wish her luck as she tries to influence this policy.

## Even moderate drinking increases the risk for cancer

"A considerable proportion of the most common and most lethal cancers is attributable to former and current alcohol consumption," concludes a large European study published online April 8 in the British Medical Journal. BMJ.

The researchers attribute about 10% of all cancers in men and about 3% of all cancers in women to previous and current alcohol consumption.

“This research supports existing evidence that alcohol causes cancer and that the risk increases even with drinking moderate amounts,” co-author Naomi Allen, DPhil, an epidemiologist at Oxford University, United Kingdom, said in a statement

The researchers assumed a causal association between alcohol and cancer of the upper aero-digestive tract (which includes the oral cavity, pharynx, larynx, and oesophagus), liver cancer, female breast cancer, and colorectal cancer (as decreed by the WHO’s International Agency for Research on Cancer).

The team then calculated the proportion of these specific cancers that could be attributable to previous and current alcohol consumption. They estimated that, in 2008, alcohol was responsible for 44% of the upper aero-digestive tract cancers in men and 25% in women, 33% of liver cancer in men and 18% in women, 17% of colorectal cancer in men and 4% in women, and 5% of breast cancer in women.

A substantial portion of these cancers attributable to alcohol consumption was linked to drinking more than the currently recommended upper limit, the researchers note.

At that time, editorialists Michael Lauer, MD, and Paul Sorlie, PhD, from the division of prevention and population sciences at the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute in Bethesda, Maryland, wrote: “From a standpoint of cancer risk, the message of this report could not be clearer. There is no level of alcohol that can be considered safe.”

In the European Union, there has been a major call for the need of clarity of information on labels of alcoholic beverages that specify not only the alcohol content but also the number of calories and specific health warnings. But NZ still drags its feet in the light of all overseas evidence.

**Anybody got any doubts now that alcoholic drinks should have warning labels?**

## Alcohol Action New Zealand

GALA members are encouraged to support their widespread activities, and the 5+ solution for alcohol they have been advocating. See [www.alcoholaction.co.nz](http://www.alcoholaction.co.nz) or email [coordinator@alcoholaction.co.nz](mailto:coordinator@alcoholaction.co.nz) or phone 04 385 6125.

They have postcards available that can be sent to MP’s and other useful data. Please utilize these and encourage your friends, family and colleagues to send in this form of message to our MP’s.

## New Zealand Drug Foundation

They have produced some excellent information booklets that clearly advocate similar policies to GALA regarding advertising and sponsorship. Really worth reading. Obtainable from [www.drugfoundation.org.nz](http://www.drugfoundation.org.nz) or [membership@drugfoundation.org.nz](mailto:membership@drugfoundation.org.nz) or phone 04 801 6303.

### A reporter from Australia reports her experience of sobriety

The Age, 10 April 2011. See it at <http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/lifematters/high-sobriety-20110409-1d8gz.html>

Jill Stark was the binge drinking reporter who decided to give up booze for 3 months. She writes about her experiences during this time and it is a revealing personal story as she realises how influenced she has been by prevalent attitudes in Australian Society “...all our major sports events are awash with booze...”

“...the absurdity of alcohol propping up practically every social pastime we value...” But read it for yourself as the same could be written about NZ attitudes to alcohol, which is fuelled by alcohol saturation advertising and sponsorship.



## GALA administration

We are still looking for persons who can help with our membership lists and who is computer literate. Contact us at [gala2@xtra.co.nz](mailto:gala2@xtra.co.nz) to find out more about this interesting and important role in the organisation.

We hate talking about finance, but we still need this to keep GALA going. Thanks to all who have sent in donations since our last appeal and if you would like to help in this way, please don't hesitate. If we received a minimum of \$20 from everybody on our lists, we would be able to cover our administrative costs. As you all know, all costs seem to have gone up but at least your donation is able to obtain a tax rebate.

Notice of...

### Annual General Meeting

This is scheduled for 1.00pm June 16th 2011 at the Friends Centre, Mt Eden Road. All Welcome.

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