

# **WCTU E-Issues 2008**

**An email activism group of WCTU Australia Ltd.**

**1<sup>st</sup> Floor 15 Collins Street Melbourne, Vic.**

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## **INDEX TO 2008 E-ISSUES**

| <b>Date</b> | <b>Issues Addressed</b>  | <b>Page No.</b> |
|-------------|--|-----------------|
| November 25 | Support Government legislation to close the alcopops tax loophole and also to vote in favour of the alcopops tax   | 2               |
| November 1  | Supporting UNIFEM Say NO to Violence against Women campaign,   | 3               |
| October 22  | 1. Disapproval of "Variety Australia's" Top Hat Lounge promoting alcohol and sexual advances to women<br>2. Letters to Government on the "Alco-pops Tax" bill  | 4               |
| August 23   | Government's increased tax on "alcopops" (Ready to Drink – RTD- spirits and soft drink mixes) to go before the Senate  | 5               |
| June 22     | This is a call to those who are concerned about alcohol policy in Australia to pray for God's will to be done in regard to up-coming legislation.<br>12 National inquiries into alcohol policy presently taking place. | 6               |
| May 15      | Votergrams to be sent to MP's on "alco-pops tax" legislation – one step in the right direction!  | 7               |
| April 3     | Support for the Poker Machine Harm Reduction Tax (Administration) Bill 2008 introduced into the Senate.  | 9               |
| March 25    | Support for measures that will help to reduce the "binge drinking" culture in Australia.   | 10              |

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Welcome to WCTU E-Issues.

Dear friends,

I don't know whether you are aware that Independent Distillers have come up with a way to get around the alcopops tax by making beer then taking out the beer flavour and adding sugar and sweet flavours - blueberry, raspberry and passionfruit like they use in alcopops. They are packaging it to look like alcopops as well as taste like them. The drink is called 'Bolt' and, because it is technically a beer it avoids the alcopops tax and is up to \$25 per carton cheaper than premixed spirits. Last week one retailer was selling two four-packs of Bolt for \$16 - \$2 per drink.

Diageo, makers of Smirnoff, Johnny Walker and Guinness will soon be importing a similar Smirnoff-branded drink. They call these drinks "malternatives".

The Federal Treasurer, Wayne Swan, and Health Minister, Nicola Roxon, are talking of tightening the definition of beer to close the loophole. We need to make sure that they do.

Stephen Riden, of the Distilled Spirits Industry Council of Australia, was quoted in the Sunday Age (23/11/08) as saying that "it was illogical that flavoured beers and cider were taxed at lower rates than ready-to-drink products. The 'malternative' loophole highlighted the need for a tax rate base on the amount of alcohol in the product."

This statement may have truth in it. Perhaps all the flavoured beers and ciders need to come under the higher tax rate applied to spirit-based alcopops.

There is no doubt that these drinks are aimed at younger women and are very insidious.

According to Nielsen Company research, the consumption of RTDs has declined by 7 million standard drinks per week since the introduction of the alcopops tax in April. Taking into account compensatory increases in the consumption of spirits and beer, this is an overall decline of 3 million standard drinks per week. It is a worthwhile decrease, indicating that the tax is working.

\*Please write a short email to your Federal MPs and also to Steve Fielding and Nick Xenophon (email addresses can be easily found by putting "Parliament of Australia" into Google). Emails can be quite short and the same one can go to each person.

Ask them to support Government legislation to close the alcopops tax loophole and also to vote in favour of the alcopops tax. Use some of the above information in your email. Ask for a reply.\*

Thank you for your support.

Anne Bergen  
E-Issues oordinator

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Welcome to WCTU E-Issues.

Friends,

More than 375,000 individuals have given their names to UNIFEM to be counted in the Say NO to Violence against Women campaign, helping to break the silence and give voice to women and girls who have experienced violence.

The 25 November challenge? To deliver one million names to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on 25 November.

Why is it so important? To demonstrate the broad-based international support for making ending violence against women a top priority.

You can add your support by putting your name in the widget on the WCTU website current issues page.

You have to give your name and email address. Take the time to browse the website while you are here.

Alternatively, if you are a Facebook fan, join the group Drug-free Lifestyles Australia (WCTU) and sign the Say No to Violence UNIFEM campaign by following the link shown on the wall post. You can also make it one of your causes.

Thanks for supporting women worldwide.

Anne Bergen  
E-Issues Director

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Welcome to WCTU E-Issues.

There are two issues on which you could take action. It will just take a few minutes of your time but it is important that we act.

1. Did you watch Channel 9 A Current Affair on Monday 20th October? This program had an interview with Robyn Whittaker who had been on Variety Australia's Fourex Booze Bus, called the Top Hat Lounge. Robyn was appalled at the way in which she was forced to consume huge amounts of alcohol against her will, as well as the immoral treatment of the women on the bus. She had video evidence from her mobile phone to back up her concerns. An official from Variety Australia, Doug Christie, was interviewed by Amanda Patterson, but he refused to acknowledge the totally unacceptable behaviour and said it was just "People having fun."

You could Google "Variety Australia" and log on to their 'contact us' page. There is a space for a message at the bottom of the page. Tell them that, while Variety no doubt does good work for children's charity, using a booze bus such as this, where alcohol is constantly abused, is dangerous to the well-being of those involved and totally inappropriate as a method to raise funds.

You should fill in your name but give as little personal information as possible.

2. Alcopops tax.

We are pleased that Senator Steve Fielding has recently expressed his willingness to vote in favour of the Government's tax on "alcopops". However, Senator Nick Xenophon from South Australia is still threatening to vote against the tax. He has accepted the argument from those opposing it is that it isn't working and is just a tax grab - arguments put forward by the makers of the ready-to-drink alcopops. However, the Distillers have now admitted that the tax has reduced alcohol consumption.

Here are the facts:

The consumption of RTDs has declined by 7 million standard drinks per week, while spirits has increased by 2.9 million standard drinks per week and beer is up by 1.1 million standard drinks per week (Nielsen Company, Standard Drinks Consumption)

[http://www.caan.adf.org.au/downloads/Nielson\\_Standard\\_Drinks\\_Consumption\\_September\\_2008.pdf](http://www.caan.adf.org.au/downloads/Nielson_Standard_Drinks_Consumption_September_2008.pdf)

Overall it means net alcohol consumption has declined by three million standard drinks per week in Australia since April, and the spirits industry has taken the biggest hit, down by a net four million drinks per week (Nielsen Company, Standard Drinks Consumption)

[http://www.caan.adf.org.au/downloads/Nielson\\_Standard\\_Drinks\\_Consumption\\_September\\_2008.pdf](http://www.caan.adf.org.au/downloads/Nielson_Standard_Drinks_Consumption_September_2008.pdf)

This is good news that needs to be conveyed to Nick Xenophon with the request that he vote for the alcopops tax. You can Google "Parliament of Australia", then click on Senate and Nick Xenophon. He has a "contact me" box in which to write a brief email message.

Thank you for your support.

Anne Bergen  
E-Issues Director

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The Parliament of Australia resumes on 26<sup>th</sup> August and the Government's increased tax on "alcopops" (Ready to Drink – RTD- spirits and soft drink mixes) has to be passed by the Senate. This is one measure that the Government has taken to reduce harmful drinking, especially by young people. The Opposition has vowed to oppose this tax so it will require the support of the Greens and the 2 Independent Senators, Steve Fielding and Nick Xenophon if it is to be passed.

The recent report of the Senate Community Affairs Committee that investigated the effectiveness of the "alcopops" tax concluded:

- 4.76 Young people are particularly vulnerable to alcohol in terms of its effect on their development, their lack of experience of drinking and the increased likelihood to engage in risky behaviour which may result in their harm or the harm of others. The Committee recognises that the vast majority of submissions from researchers, health and medical professionals supported raising the excise as a significant step to address this public health issue.

Please email Senators Steve Fielding, Nick Xenophon, and the Greens Senators whose votes are necessary for the tax to be passed, asking them to support the government's tax rise on alcopops in the Senate. Even a brief email will be important. The same message can be sent to them all. Points you can make are:

- The Liquor Merchants Association of **Australia** (LMAA) and DISTILLERS (DSICA) are fighting hard to have this tax removed by saying that it is not a success and that people are just switching from Ready to Drink 'alcopops' to buy straight spirits and mixing their own drinks, thus endangering their health because they don't know what a standard drink of their spirits is. Why would they oppose a tax that is not effective and actually increasing their sales as they claim? Are they concerned with the health of young drinkers? I think not. They know that the tax is working and are desperate to maintain their profits from the RTD market that is targeted especially at young girls and women.

- According to the Australian Tax Office, sales of RTDs (ready-to-drinks) fell by 54 per cent in the three months, and - while full-strength spirit sales did rise by 7per cent (according to Nicola Roxon this is a seasonal increase that also occurred last year) - there was a fall of 23 per cent in overall alcohol sales.

- A 13-page document, headed "Impact of the Rudd Government's alcohol taxation policy", based on an analysis of packaged liquor sales data collected by leading market research firm ACNielsen for corporate clients, shows there is a considerable decline of over 1.1million litres of pure alcohol consumed since the tax changes. With approximately 10ml of pure alcohol per standard drink this figure translates to 110 million less drinks consumed during this period.

- Sales of RTD's took off after the tax on them was decreased by 20% in the 2000 budget. The new tax is just bringing the tax back in line with pre 2000 levels.

- While increasing taxes has long been shown to be one of the most effective methods to reduce alcohol consumption, other measures are also needed. These Senators should use their influence to **also** get the government to hasten to implement other measures such as a hard-hitting educational campaign regarding alcohol consumption, banning alcohol advertising and sponsorship, putting graphic health warnings on all alcohol containers, reducing liquor outlets and hours of opening, reviewing all alcohol taxation, and limiting the alcohol content of alcopops to 3%.

**Email addresses:** Greens:

[senator.bob.brown@aph.gov.au](mailto:senator.bob.brown@aph.gov.au)  
[senator.siewert@aph.gov.au](mailto:senator.siewert@aph.gov.au)

Independents:

[senator.fielding@aph.gov.au](mailto:senator.fielding@aph.gov.au)

Nick Xenophon and the other Greens Senators have online contact forms. Google "Parliament of Australia" and click on Senators' Home Pages.

Thank you for your support.

Anne Bergen  
National Corresponding Secretary, WCTU of Australia

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**This is a call to those who are concerned about alcohol policy in Australia to pray for God's will to be done in regard to up-coming legislation.**

**We can be thankful that:**

- there is now widespread public concern about binge drinking, especially as it affects young people
- Federal and State Governments and government agencies are moving to try to reduce the harm caused by alcohol consumption.

There are 12 national inquiries into alcohol policy at present including:

- National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) review of drinking guidelines. Their recommendations of "low risk" drinking of no more than 2 standard drinks per day for men and women and none for young people and pregnant women are a big step forward. The final report is due very soon.
- Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ) is finalising its report regarding health advisory labelling on alcohol drink containers.
- A Senate Committee is inquiring into the alcopop tax increase. Report is due next week.
- A Senate Committee is looking at Family First Senator, Steve Fielding's proposed "Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill" that would require health warning labels on alcoholic drinks and restrict the hours and type of alcohol advertising.

WCTU members have made submissions to all of these inquiries.

In addition,

- the Prime Minister has outlined plans to help to change the drinking culture in sporting clubs and to have an educational campaign to reduce alcohol consumption
- there is a wide-ranging inquiry on taxation levels and alcohol
- Council of Australian Governments (COAG) ministers will hold an alcohol policy forum shortly
- State Governments are looking at a number of measures to reduce alcohol problems, for example, the 2 am lock-out being trialled in Victoria.

Naturally, the promoters and producers of alcoholic drinks are not standing by idly and allowing measures that will limit their profits to be introduced without a fight.

**We need to pray that Governments, the NHMRC and FSANZ will stand firm on their policies that are based on solid research, and not be swayed by pressure from liquor interests.**

You may be interested to look at the new WCTU website: [www.wctu.com.au](http://www.wctu.com.au)

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Dear WCTU supporters,

The media today has reported that the Federal Liberal Party is planning to block the tax on alcopops in the Senate. While this tax alone will not solve the problem of youth binge drinking, it will be one step that will help as there is a proven link between price and consumption of alcohol. Alcopops (pre-mixed spirits plus soft drink or fruit juice to make them taste nice, often referred to as RTDs) are deliberately marketed to teenagers, especially girls, and the health consequences of the current binge drinking epidemic will be enormous.

Here are some facts:

## **The Age Education Supplement 14/3/08 “Booze nation”**

- 14 – 20 year-olds have the highest rates of alcohol consumption in Australia.
- 1 in 10 young people 14 – 19 drink at risky or high risk levels weekly.
- Among 12 – 15 year-olds who drink, the proportion what drink at risky levels doubled between 1984 and 2005.
- National Drug Research Institute estimates that one Australian teenager dies and more than 60 are hospitalised each week from alcohol-related causes.
- Drinking to excess increases your vulnerability to sexual risk taking, violence, serious injury and death.
- Alcohol cost the Australian community about \$15.3 billion in 2004-5 through crime, violence, treatment, loss of productivity and premature death. It is the second biggest contributor to chronic disease in Australia after smoking.

## **6/8/07 Jill Stark. “Alcopops target teen Drinkers”**

Mat Baxter, a marketing executive behind vodka-based drink ‘Absolute Cut’ said that the market was booming for high strength, pre-mixed spirits that “get young people drunk faster”

He said that the RTD market, described by some in the industry as the “Binge Drinker” category – was dominated by stronger, 7% alcohol drinks with appeal to young people on a budget.

“It’s one of the few drinks where you don’t necessarily know you’re drinking alcohol and that’s a conscious effort to make those drinks more appealing to young people,” he said. “The drinks are very much about masking the alcohol taste.”

“Young people could buy 3 drinks with 7% alcohol and get the same effect for less outlay than if they bought five 5.5% drinks,” he said.

2005 national survey of alcohol use by secondary school students showed that 47% of girls aged 12 – 17 and 14% of boys that age had drunk pre-mixed spirits in the previous week.

I have sent a votergram message through Fairgo (Greg Bloomfield: [greg@fairgo.org](mailto:greg@fairgo.org)) that will be sent to every Federal Coalition MP. WCTU has paid a subscription to Fairgo so if you let Greg know that you are doing this through WCTU he will send it for free. Otherwise you could Google "Parliament of Australia" and get the email addresses of your Federal Liberal MPs, especially the Senators, and email them with a short message in your own words.

My votergram said:

I was appalled to read in The Age today that the Liberal Part is planning to block the tax on alcopops in the Senate. The link between price and consumption of alcohol has long been established and, even if it just slows the increase in consumption as suggested by the Government, the taxes would be one step towards curbing binge drinking by young people, especially among girls to whom alcopops are marketed. This is a huge problem that will impact seriously on the health of young people and lead to a great increase in babies being born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. The future health costs will be great. This is a matter that is too serious to be the subject of party politics and I am very surprised and saddened by the Liberal Party's attitude. On their own, taxes will not solve the problem, but they will help. Another very effective step would be to limit the allowable alcohol content of alcopops to 3% or, at the most, 5%. Suggestions that young people will just move to spirits are red herrings. They are hooked on alcopops because of their flavour and packaging.

(Give your name and address or email address)

Thank you for acting on this. I would welcome any feedback.

Anne Bergen  
National WCTU Secretary

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Dear WCTU supporter,

Poker machines in pubs and clubs are a source of great harm in the Australian community. It is good to see that Senator Steve Fielding has introduced the Poker Machine Harm Reduction Tax (Administration) Bill 2008 into the Senate. I have attached a copy of his Second Reading Speech on this Bill which sets out what the Bill is designed to do and some of the arguments in favour of it.

It would be helpful if you were able to take just a few minutes to send a brief email to your Federal Members in the House of Representatives and the Senate asking them to support this Bill. You can use some of the facts in Senator Fielding's speech in your email. You can get the email addresses of your MPs by typing "Parliament of Australia" into Google and following the prompts.

Thank you for your involvement.

Anne Bergen  
WCTU E-Issues coordinator.

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Dear WCTU supporters,

The item below is a copy of a votergram that I had sent yesterday via "Fairgo" to nearly every MP in all the Australian Parliaments. It is important that we seize the moment when there is real concern among our Members of Parliament about the problems of binge drinking. I have received replies from 17 MPs today and almost all were essentially supportive of the ideas in the votergram. I sent back replies with more information to 14 of them. Greg Bloomfield, who runs "Fairgo" will send your votergram to the MPs, suggests that **it would be really good if as many people as possible sent a short message about this issue to Federal MPs and your State MPs**. You can use my votergram as a guide but use your own words. There have been many articles in the newspapers lately to give you ideas about what needs to be done. For Victorian MPs you could include the need to reduce the number of liquor outlets and reduce the trading hours for clubs and bars that are currently open all through the night. The suggestion to raise the drinking age to 21 has not been well received. The other suggestions I made were mostly supported.

**Send your votergram to Greg Bloomfield at: Greg Bloomfield [vmail@fairgo.org]. Let him know that you are doing it because of WCTU and it will be done free on WCTUs subscription, but just sign your name and address. Do it as an individual. Ask for a reply: e.g. I would appreciate your feedback.**

Thanks, Anne Bergen for WCTU E-Issues.

My votergram:

In view of the evidence of the Australia-wide problem of binge drinking, especially among people under 25, we urge you to support measures that will help to reduce this problem. Such measures would include graphic health warning labels (including the danger of drinking while pregnant); bringing the rest of Australia into line with the NSW legislation that makes it illegal for anyone other than the young person's parents to give alcohol to someone under 18; banning or seriously dealing with the problem of "alcopops" by putting up their price through taxation and reducing the alcohol content to no more than 3%; a hard-hitting and continually changing educational advertisements about the dangers of drinking more than the new draft NHMRC guidelines specify; and even considering raising the drinking age to 21.

It is good to see the lead that is being taken by the Prime Minister regarding this problem. It will have serious health repercussions in coming years unless strong action is taken to change Australia's binge drinking culture now. We urge you, regardless of Party lines, to get behind any legislation and ensure it is as effective as possible.

I look forward to your response.

Anne Bergen  
National WCTU Secretary