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Tuesday, February 26, 2013

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Two pot screamers not the average Aussie boozier

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Our drinking culture

Brian Vandenberg, executive officer at the National Alliance for Action on Alcohol, writes: [Re. "Bottoms up: the non-crisis of Australia's alcohol consumption"](#) (February 8). How many people punched to death by intoxicated thugs or killed by drink drivers is tolerable? What is an acceptable number of unborn children damaged for life by foetal alcohol spectrum disorder? Is there a rate of cancers caused by alcohol that we could view as "OK"?

The fact is all of these tragedies are preventable, and a civilised society does as much as it can to stop them from occurring. A flat trend in alcohol-related harm would be very welcome, and a downward trend even more encouraging. But when this time comes, neither will be a reason for us to reduce effort, let alone stop entirely from trying to prevent alcohol-related harm.

Bernard Keane has ignored the spiralling rates of alcohol-related harm in Australia, and attempted to obscure this major public health issue by arguing that flat trends in a few selectively-chosen alcohol consumption statistics are proof of a non-crisis. The truth is, several key trends in risky drinking are far from flat, and indicators of alcohol-related harm are on the rise. Even if Keane's analysis is correct, the argument that a flat trend equals a non-crisis would suggest that perhaps the people of Honduras — murder capital of the world — should rejoice when their homicide rate begins to plateau.

To properly assess the extent of alcohol-related harm in Australia, it's important to look at trends in the behaviour that can cause the harm. This means monitoring per capita alcohol consumption, as well as the patterns of drinking by individuals. And contrary to Keane's omissions, it's also very important, probably more so, to monitor the actual rates of alcohol-related harm, such as injuries, diseases, and deaths.

In doing so, it's critical that we interpret the relevant evidence properly and accurately to avoid misleading or erroneous conclusions. Failing to do so can lead to misplaced



criticism of evidence-based efforts to prevent alcohol-related harm in Australia. We welcome Keane's interest in this subject, but respectfully disagree with a number of his claims about the nature and extent of the alcohol problem in Australia.



Claim #1: *Per capita consumption in Australia is falling significantly.*

Incorrect.

According to official estimates of per capital alcohol consumption from the [Australian Bureau of Statistics](#), Australians aged 15+ years drink around 10 litres of pure alcohol per year (that is 10 litres of pure ethanol), and apart from some very small up-and-down movements from year-to-year, this hasn't changed significantly since 1990. As acknowledged by the [World Health Organisation](#), monitoring this trend is important because an increase in per-capita alcohol consumption in a given population is associated with increases in risky drinking patterns, and the prevalence of alcohol-related harm. ([Read the rest of this comment online](#)).

Margaret Walker writes: The problem with the National Health and Medical Research Council two drinks limit is that it is so far outside most social drinkers' current norm that it leaves us with nowhere to go. At a recent barbie at my house, my middle aged, middle class, double income, lots of kids, full-time jobs, golf, tennis and bush-walking friends all confessed to enjoying far more than two drinks a day "often". None of us dispute the fact that alcohol can and does cause damage on many levels. But the two drinks limit is so extreme for most social drinkers that we just ignore it. A bottle of wine shared with my husband over dinner and we have blown it!

I thought Bernard Keane brought some much needed balance back to this debate and I was astonished to read how the two drink limit was arrived at. If we viewed our lifetime risk of harm from driving the same way should we limit our "exposure" to 5000 kms/year?

Is the Liberal Party red or blue?

Peter Burnett writes: Re. "[Richard Farmer's chunky bits](#)" (yesterday) The charts used in Richard Farmer's Australian Elections Indicator show *Crikey* has adopted the atrocious American habit of colouring the conservatives/Republicans/Liberal Party as red and the progressives/Democrats/ALP as blue.

My old dad used to say the ALP was full of reds, and although that's not been true for a long time, I think it goes a bit far to be painting them blue.

Just have a look at any Liberal banner, pamphlet, propaganda booklet etc to see that blue is a particularly Menzian sort of colour.

Can't we go back to the good old days when the reds were the ones further to the Left (or are you really suggesting that the ALP's fascination with asylum seeker-bashing has

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AdChoices

moved them to the Right of Scott Morrison?)

We are one ...

Keith Binns writes: Re. “[I love pizza, but ...](#)”: anti-multicultural party’s Canberra launch” (yesterday). With *Advance Australia Fair* having been taken over by bigots — “A chorus of *Advance Australia Fair* reverberated through the room to kick off today’s launch” — the sooner we make *I Am Australian* — “We are one but we are many” — our national anthem, the better. That is a sentiment I can sing gusto.

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