

Media Statement

AER Welcomes Alcohol Taxation, Urges Government Funding for Non Government Agencies working in Alcohol sector

15th May 2009: The Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation (AER), Australia's leading alcohol harm minimisation body, today welcomed the Senate's passing of the Excise Tariff bills, to retain the revenue collected from the alcopops tax hike so far, but stressed that a portion of this \$424 million should be given to not-for-profit alcohol education, treatment and prevention groups.

How the money raised from the alcopops tax is to be spent was not addressed by the Rudd Government after the measure passed in the Senate on Wednesday, but AER Chairman Scott Wilson says that financial support from the Federal Government is essential to sustain numerous alcohol programs throughout Australia.

"We commend the Government's proactive commitment to alcohol reform, however we hope to see some of this tax revenue dedicated to the prevention, treatment and education campaigns to reduce alcohol abuse; a pressing concern that costs the Australian economy \$15.3 billion each year. Foundations such as AER, and the hundreds of organisations they fund cannot survive without additional Government Funding. AER provides grants to more than 950 evidence-based health and social service programs nationally, 30% of which are Indigenous."

Wilson added that without this allocated money for alcohol education programs, the hundreds of people that AER funds through grassroots, community organisations will lose their jobs and there will be greater strain on the problems of alcohol misuse, and the budget deficit.

According to recent Galaxy research commissioned by AER, 85% of Australian's believe more needs to be done to reduce the harm caused by alcohol related illness, injury and death and 95% think that the organisation which receives the alcopops money must have a successful track record in helping people with alcohol related problems¹.

“The Senate’s validation of the alcopops bill is only one step towards long-lasting change in addressing the impact of alcohol abuse on Australia. The next stage is to address our drinking culture at the community level, where individuals can begin to understand the problem and take action in their own lives.” Wilson said.

Taxation is an important factor in addressing alcohol concerns, but should not be considered a “panacea”. Other measures include Government **regulation of the alcohol advertising industry**, mandatory **alcohol labelling**, a restricted number of licenses and reduced density of proprietor licenses. AER looks forward to working with the various stakeholder groups to address these issues.

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Alcohol Education & Rehabilitation Foundation (AER): AER is a not-for-profit company established in 2001 with a mandate to ‘change the way we drink’. AER was initially established with funding from a federal government grant and is now a perpetual trust. AER has built up a comprehensive understanding of the alcohol and other drugs (AOD) sector and is a leading grant giving body for community groups and programs within the alcohol sector. Through donations, grants and utilisation of the perpetual trust: AER seeks to prevent alcohol and licit substance abuse especially amongst disadvantaged, indigenous and young people; to support evidence-based treatment, research and prevention programs in the AOD sector; and to highlight the dangers of licit substance abuse and promote the responsible consumption of alcohol within the community. AER has funded more than 950 programs throughout Australia (30% of which are within the Indigenous community) including numerous programs which contribute to shifting community attitudes towards a responsible approach to alcohol consumption. For further information: <http://www.aerf.com.au>

(1) About the Galaxy Research: The Galaxy study was commissioned by AER. The online research was conducted between 15th to 17th April 2009. It was national survey (excluding NT) and was weighted by age, gender and location (based on ABS population estimates) to the national population. There were 1030 respondents aged 18 years and above.