

NEWSLETTER

November, 2012

PO Box 4736
HIGGINS ACT 2615
Tel: 02 62542961
Email: mcconnell@ffdlr.org.au
Web: www.ffdlr.org.au
ISSN 1444-200



Join us.

Next Meeting End of year BBQ and AGM @McConnell's

Thursday 22 November 2012 6:30pm BBQ—8pm AGM

Our last meeting for 2012 will be an end of year BBQ followed by our Annual General Meeting including election of office bearers and presentation of the President's and Treasurer's annual reports.

Marion and Brian will supply meat and salads etc but could members please bring a sweet and drink.

Members and their family are most welcome.

RSVP

For catering purposes please let Marion know if you are coming. If you don't know our address we will give it to you when you contact us. Looking forward to a pleasant evening together.

RSVP 6254 2961 or email mcconnell@ffdlr.org.au



Editorial

How to make a better world (and save money)

The dust is settling on the most recent elections. In the ACT the ALP has been returned with the help of the sole Greens member of the Assembly. The Greens member Shane Rattenbury, has been given a ministry in the new government which among other things includes responsibility for Corrections. This will give Katy Gallagher, who has retained the Health portfolio, support to proceed with the needle and syringe exchange in the ACT prison.

The opposition to such a move should now be minimal given that the proposal was on the agenda during the election campaign and an issue that was strongly supported by both the Greens and the ALP. It is an issue that would have featured in the minds of the ACT people as they voted. The syringe exchange system that has been proposed, although far from perfect, will be a step in a positive direction.

The other election has been that of the US President. The important aspect of that election, perhaps a side issue for some but not for those interested in drug law reform, is of the proposals to legalise cannabis.

Two additional states have voted to legalise recreational or medicinal marijuana (with strict controls such as no advertising and specified age limits and education on associates harms) bringing to a total of 18 out of 50 states that have some form of legalisation.

Of course opposition will remain, partly because of the health detriments. But if the drug is believed to be so dangerous (which Prof David Nutt, former chairman of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, noted that it was one of the least harmful drugs) then that alone is a good reason to take the drug out of the dealer's hand and to regulate and control it.

The citizens of those 18 US states should be pleased on two main counts: firstly that cannabis users would no longer be driven underground and users would no longer be so reluctant to seek help when needed; and secondly at this time of parlous US financial state, large sums of money can be saved out of the criminal justice system budget.

In Australia, the Drug Policy Modelling Program's Monograph 14 estimates crime costs related to cannabis users at almost \$M2,000 per year. Much of this would have been police, court and prison related costs for the arrests of the more than 60,000 users - a cost of over \$33,000 per arrest.

There is thus good economic sense for decriminalising and perhaps taxing cannabis use. The savings of almost all of that \$M2,000 would be one element. Another element would be the removal of sniffer dogs which masquerade as a practice of catching drug dealers, but which in fact subjects the innocent to embarrassing searches, and in which 4 out of 5 cases no drugs are found.

Some would argue that the numbers of cannabis users would increase as well as the associated health costs and quickly eat up the \$M2,000. The DPMP paper estimates a health cost per cannabis user at \$626 thus to use all these funds an additional 3 million people per year would have to take up using cannabis. A highly unlikely scenario!

There are others who would argue on moral grounds that any use of cannabis is simply wrong. This ignores reality. Approximately 2 million people use cannabis. The current laws, despite claims to the contrary have not stopped people from using cannabis. Even the chance of being caught by a sniffer dog would not. According to a survey of university students, deter them from using.

There are more compelling arguments as to why cannabis should be regulated and controlled. A regulated marketing of cannabis would ensure the quality of the product, limit access to those above a certain age, and provide the safeguards such as labelling, indications of purity, and safety warnings that we have come to expect and appreciate on almost everything else that we

purchase. And as in a number of American states, advertising of the product would not be allowed. Additionally the nature of the vendor of the product would change. He would no longer have a variety of other drugs to sell as one might see with a current dealer.

It makes far more sense to change the system to control this drug, transferring the savings made from reduced crime costs to the health budget, providing better service for those addicted and providing an objective information campaign aimed at reducing use or even managing that use.

Australia's pointless and deadly drugs crackdown

Greg Barns, The Drum, 10 Sept 2012

Australia's crackdown on drugs has been pointless and devastating, writes Greg Barns. What are we trying to achieve?

Every weekend, thousands of young Australians take drugs when they go partying, clubbing or sit around chilling with their friends.

And every weekend, police around Australia try to do the impossible - clamp down on that use of those drugs with sniffer dogs, bag searches and other time-consuming methods.

While a handful of young people might be caught by police, the vast majority will not. For those who are caught, the consequences can be devastating.

If convicted of possession and even sale of drugs, their career choices diminish immediately. And for law enforcement, this weekend routine is a pointless exercise because it does nothing to reduce demand for drugs among young Australians.

In short, this is a policy mess which our political leaders need to address now.

Australia 21, a think tank headed by former Defence Department secretary Paul Barratt, yesterday released its second paper on drugs policy dealing with the issue of young people and drugs policy.

The subtitle of the paper Alternatives To Prohibition sums up the policy dilemma neatly: "Illicit drugs: How we can stop killing and criminalising young Australians."

As with Australia 21's first paper, which was released with much fanfare in April this year, this effort is the product of another roundtable of policy makers and experts in the area of drugs policy who came together on July 6 to look at how we as a community help young Australians when it comes to illicit drugs, rather than seeking to damn them.

The bottom line is, and it comes as no surprise to those of us who see drugs policy through rational and empirical eyes rather than via vision that is clouded by prejudice and fear, those countries which treat drugs usage as a health and social issue, rather than a criminal justice one, have more success in reducing drug overdoses, HIV and crime.

The Netherlands, Portugal and Switzerland are examples of the former approach; Sweden, the latter.

Dr João Goulão, a leading Portuguese drugs expert, says that a combined strategy of decriminalisation and a major investment in the health system have allowed Portugal to stem the growth of drugs in that country.

Fears that Portugal would become a drug trafficker's

playground have not been borne out. Importantly, there is 70 per cent community support for the Portuguese policy settings, a consequence of the reforms being driven by a bottom-up approach rather than imposed by government without consultation.

The way in which drugs are viewed by a community is important in reducing the appeal to young people, as the Netherlands shows. Since the 1970s and 1980s, it has run a decriminalised policy in relation to cannabis. As the Australia 21 paper notes:

[Since] the mid-1980s, the Netherlands has reported declines in the number of drug-related problems including dependent opiate use, injection drug user-related HIV Infections and drug-induced deaths. For all drugs with the exception of ecstasy, reported use by Netherlands youth is below the European average.

In Switzerland, while drug use and possession has not been decriminalised, there has been two decades of policy focussed on health and harm-minimisation strategies which are strongly supported by the community.

By contrast, in Sweden, where a tough on drugs policy remains in place, drug usage and deaths from overdoses remain worryingly high, but even the law enforcement and welfare agencies are now working together with young people in a therapeutic way, because throwing the statute book at a young person simply does not work.

Australian drugs policy is still focussed on law enforcement and zero tolerance. When Australia 21 released its first paper in April, Prime Minister Julia Gillard dismissed it with a patronising line about drugs killing people and so forget about policy change.

But as the Australia 21 paper observes:

[As] much as we may deplore it, we must learn to live in a world where some young people use drugs. All drug use is not inherently evil. We would be better off keeping the focus on reducing the harm caused by drugs and drug policy.

This means drug services and treatment facilities in our prisons and youth justice centres, targeted intervention strategies for young people, and more nuanced communication and education rather than the ineffective "drugs are evil" type propaganda.

It also means acknowledging that prohibition is a failed policy. We have spent billions of dollars in Australia on prohibiting drugs, and yet have some of the highest rates of drug usage in the world, including so-called party drugs used by young people.

The key to reform, which the European experience demonstrates, is political bipartisanship. In other words, as is the case now with climate change policy, we need recognition from the left and the right of the political spectrum that the current policy settings are failing.

It is not only the experts from the Australia 21 forums who are saying this, but the vast majority of doctors, welfare workers, lawyers and others who work at the coalface of drugs policy each day.

We are literally killing, injuring and hurting young Australians who use illicit drugs because of our irrational obsession with prohibition. It is time to stop and produce policies that actually work.

Greg Barns is a barrister and criminal law spokesman for the Australian Lawyers Alliance.

Dozens arrested in drugs blitz on Gold Coast ahead of annual Schoolies event

Greg Stolz, The Courier-Mail, November 12, 2012

A PRE-SCHOOLIES drug blitz on Saturday night has resulted in 48 people being arrested for a range of offences from drug possession through to drink-driving and public nuisance.

Uniform and plainclothes police were used in the operation that saw the seizure of cocaine, ecstasy and meth-amphetamine as police unleashed drug dogs on the Glitter Strip. "Drug dog, drug dog! Do not touch the dog or you may be arrested".

The no-nonsense command was barked out in the Surfers Paradise nightclub hub as the precinct braces itself for up to 50,000 teenagers to hit its streets for next weekend's Schoolies.

Dubbed Operation Sentinel, it involved more than 30 police and the operation was planned outside Surfers to ensure the element of surprise. Senior officers did not want any leaks that might tip off nightclub operators and patrons.

About 10.30pm, as long queues formed outside nightclubs, police ordered them shut and the blitz began.

Officers moved swiftly but purposefully along Orchid Ave, stopping at every club to let the drug dogs do their stuff.

A suspicious sniff and the hapless clubber was shepherded away for searching and questioning.

Up and down Orchid and Cavill avenues, the sweep continued for several hours.

The blitz followed the arrest of 17 people on 19 charges on Friday night.

That brought to 109 the number of people arrested since the ongoing Operation Sentinel was launched in March last year to reduce drug and alcohol-fuelled violence in Surfers.

Surfers Paradise police Inspector Pat Swindells warned it would be a "taste of things to come" during Schoolies.

"Drug dogs will most definitely be in Surfers during Schoolies . . . there will be a lot of high-visibility policing," he said.

Anyone coming into Surfers Paradise will be subject to a search if they have drugs on them.

"Our message is simple - welcome to Surfers Paradise but behave yourself," Insp Swindells said.

Sniffer dogs get it wrong four out of five times

[Editor's note: This story is about 12 months old but it provides some useful background to previous articles in this Newsletter.]

Anna Patty, SMH, 12 Dec 2011

A RECORD 80 per cent of sniffer dog searches for drugs resulted in "false positives" this year, figures show.

The figures obtained from the state government in response to parliamentary questions on notice show 14,102 searches were conducted after a dog sat next to a person, indicating they might be carrying drugs. But, in 11,248 cases, no drugs were found.

Only 2854 searches - 20 per cent - in the first nine months of this year, resulted in drugs being found, the figures show.

Last year, of the 15,779 searches conducted after police-dog identification, no drugs were found in 11,694 cases. Drugs were found in 4085 cases, resulting in a "false positive" rate of 74

per cent, said the Greens MP David Shoebridge, who obtained the figures.

Matthew Pels, 22, of Erskineville, a hospitality student, said he was one of the thousands searched in a public place and found not to be carrying drugs.

Mr Pels said a police dog sat next to him at Redfern station before he underwent a search about six months ago. When his pockets were emptied, a packet of dog treats was found.

"The whole thing was unnecessary," he said. "I think it was a violation of my privacy."

Mr Shoebridge said the figures showed thousands of innocent people were being "ritually humiliated" publicly.

"No test which has an 80 per cent error rate could be considered a reasonable basis on which to conduct an intrusive public search of a citizen going about their daily business," Mr Shoebridge said.

"Now that we know the error rate is so high, the program needs to be halted. Because of where they operate, police sniffer dogs tend to target young people and Aborigines. If this was happening in the car parks of merchant banks, there would be outrage."

The secretary for the NSW Council for Civil Liberties, Stephen Blanks, argued the use of sniffer dogs infringed people's freedoms and could only be justified if it resulted in a high rate of detections.

But police strongly defend the use of the dogs, saying they are reliable and can detect remaining traces of drugs on people, even after they have been disposed of.

Inspector Chris Condon of the NSW Police dog unit said the detection dogs were extremely accurate, adding that more than "80 per cent of indications by the dogs result in either drugs being located or the person admitting recent contact with illegal drugs.

"Any suggestion otherwise is incorrect," Inspector Condon said. "Drug-detection dogs are an important facet of the overall harm-minimisation strategy of the NSW Police Force. Drug-detection dogs are an extremely effective deterrent to persons transporting drugs for the purpose of supply."

The NSW Police Association supports the dogs' use. Its president, Scott Weber, has said they have been valuable deterrents at events such as The Big Day Out.

A spokesman for the NSW Police Minister, Mike Gallacher, said the government fully supported the use of dogs because police had found them effective.

Don Weatherburn, the director of the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, has said the high number of searches relative to detections is not an indication of failure. "The question is how many people would carry drugs if not for sniffer dogs," Dr Weatherburn said.

A global campaign against the War on Drugs

An email received from the Beckley Foundation to which FFDLR has responded and agreed to participate.

Dear all,

I am writing to ask if you would be willing to participate in a global campaign this December against the War on Drugs, in partnership with The Global Commission on Drug Policy, Google, Avaaz, The Beckley Foundation, Sundog Pictures, and Virgin Unite.

The campaign will be accompanied by the release of a documentary called Breaking the Taboo, narrated by Morgan Freeman, and featuring some of the most notable figures in world politics speaking out about the subject: e.g. Bill Clinton, Jimmy Carter, President Juan Manuel Santos of Colombia, Fernando

Cardoso (ex-President of Brazil), Cesar Gaviria (ex-President of Colombia), Ruth Dreifuss (ex-President of Switzerland), and Ernesto Zedillo (ex-President of Mexico). In a bid to get as many people watching as possible, the film is to be released on YouTube before it goes to TV, with Google as a partner in the release.

In addition to the film we are planning a massive online campaign with an Avaaz petition going out to their 16 million members and a celebrity-endorsed viral and social media campaign to break the taboo on drug policy.

A site for this campaign is currently under construction, within which we plan to house a coalition of NGOs united by their interests in this issue. The War on Drugs affects so many areas of society - from human rights, to drug rehabilitation and treatment, to crime prevention and incarceration, to AIDS and other diseases, to scientific research, to economics (and countless more). We hope to bring all these noble but disparate causes together under one roof, because we could have so much more influence by acting together than we do when acting alone.

If you are interested in joining this campaign please let us know. We will put up a description of your organisation and a link to your website so that visitors to the campaign site can find out more about you. In return we will ask you to publicise our campaign as much as possible e.g. by posting on Facebook and sending out the petition and film to your mailing lists etc.

Thank you for your time,

Amanda

Amanda Feilding, Director, The Beckley Foundation

Beckley Park, Oxford, OX3 9SY, United Kingdom

+44 (0)1865 351209

+44 (0)1865 351019

www.beckleyfoundation.org

www.reformdrugpolicy.org

Parents use test kits to screen kids for drugs

SALES of do-it-yourself home drug tests have risen with concerned parents using the kits to bust their children.

Distributors of Drug Alert, urine and saliva tests available in pharmacies, have reported an 80 per cent surge in sales from 28,000 in 2010 to more than 83,000 last financial year.

Local distributor Frostbland's Craig Stewart attributed the spike to parents wanting proof their children were using drugs, employees in the corporate, transport and mining industries who undergo regular drug screening, and children in anticipation of their parents testing them.

"Parents I speak to are at the end of their tether, they don't know what to do because they know something is wrong at home. Money is going missing, the child is secretive and not coming home at night," Mr Stewart said. He said the most popular Drug Alert products used by parents were urine test kits for marijuana and street drugs.

It costs \$9.95 and takes parents five minutes to test their children for cannabis using the urine test kit, and \$19.95 for the street drug test kit that identifies illicit drugs in the system, including methamphetamine, marijuana, cocaine, opium, heroin, speed, amphetamines, ice and ecstasy.

But federal AMA president Dr Steve Hambleton said the tests could do more harm than good. Parents needed to consider the tests' false-positive and false-negative rates and what impact this sensitivity would have on the child.

Drug and Alcohol Research and Training Australia director Paul Dillon said drug testing companies were preying on parents' fear.

"Evidence indicates less school-based young people use drugs than in the past. If your child is using illicit drugs and catching them and punishment doesn't make a difference, the next step would be to seek professional help," he said.

"But where a parent has discovered their child has used drugs and there is a need to gain the trust back, testing kits may have some sort of place."

Child psychologist Dani Klein said testing a child for drugs could backfire on parents, leading to a breakdown of trust and communication.

"You are becoming less of a parent and more of a policeman by becoming more intrusive, and it is not going to enable a more open relationship," she said. "Your child could become more clever and sneaky about hiding their drug use."

Please sign the Global Declaration

As mentioned in the last Newsletter the Global Declaration on drug policy by Families and Family Organisations is a call for parents, family members and their friends all over the world to come together to insist on better laws and policies to deal with illicit drug issues based on research and evidence. Parents' voices can make a powerful statement on this issue in an effort to make a better world for their children.

It calls for governments of each country to re-align their drug laws and policies so that human rights are protected, problematic drug use is treated as a health and not a criminal issue, and that policies strengthen the capacity of families struggling with drug issues.

The Declaration also calls on the Secretary-General of the United Nations to evaluate existing treaties and to promote an international drug control regime that causes the least possible harm.

Show your concern by signing the Declaration and encouraging other family members and friends to also sign it.

The Declaration can be found at <http://ffdlr.org.au/Declaration>.

When sufficient signatures have been collected it will be presented to governments and to the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Next Newsletter & meeting

This is the last Newsletter for the year. The next newsletter will be the February 2013 issue.

Likewise the AGM will be the last FFDLR meeting for 2012. Meetings will recommence on 28 February 2013

Christmas Greetings to all

We wish you all a happy Christmas and New Year and we thank you for all your support.

We hope to see you again next year.

