

**Mr POLLAERS [Chairman, Distilled Spirits Industry Council of Australia; Managing Director, DIAGEO Australia Limited]:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Ladies and gentlemen: I start by congratulating the New South Wales Government on holding this Alcohol Summit. I need to comment on one point made by Professor Sally Caswell: if society does not recognise that business is starting to see new leadership that has interests beyond profit, then we are really moving backwards in time. I have never seen a definition of a vested interest as being profit only. Many businesses make a very valuable and profitable contribution to society beyond profit. We want to make progress in the very important and universally recognised area of alcohol misuse. It is only two years since the industry sat down with many of the groups present today, and the Federal and State governments; and all endorsed the National Alcohol Strategy. That strategy set out a series of solutions and action plans to tackle the issues we are debating this week.

As mentioned yesterday by David Crosbie, we need solutions that run for at least five years, and we need to stay the course if we want to be effective. That was the intention of the National Alcohol Strategy, but here we are again debating and rehashing the definition of the problem. We need to address the questions: Are we reviewing the progress we have made? Do we have enough resources in New South Wales set against the challenge? Are we building momentum behind the programs that work? This Government has a strong record in getting behind programs that work. Let us do that with the alcohol strategy as well.

Yesterday Commissioner Moroney said that he called for evidence-based solutions. The National Alcohol Strategy called for "development of the evidence base". Last Friday Professor McAllister of the Australian National University reported that much of our current research on alcohol consumption is flawed. He endorses the methodology outlined by the Commonwealth Government's Australian Alcohol Guidelines. Those guidelines set out a clear framework for developing the evidence base, describing low-risk, risky, and high-risk drinking behaviour for men and women and the short-term and long-term health risks. The guidelines emphasise that researchers need to use consistent language and structure. Phrases such as "binge-drinking", while becoming popular in the public domain, do not carry any scientific meaning and should not be used. A clear and shared understanding of the phrase "standard drink" needs to be developed. Changes over the past two years have been positive, but in the past two days we have not heard much about the progress. Professor McAllister of the Australian National University reported on a thorough analysis of the best research available to us. He said:

Age of initiation into alcohol shows no clear trend either in terms of younger or older initiation.

The surveys indicate no substantial increase in the lifetime prevalence of alcohol use in the last decade, despite claims to the contrary.

Last Friday an excellent and independent report was published by the Government's Department for Health and Ageing. It stated:

The number of under-age teenagers drinking alcohol has **decreased** over the past three years.

The amount they are consuming in high-risky drinking situations has **reduced**

In high-risk drinking consumption in males aged 15 to 17, 58 per cent of the volume of consumption is beer, 22 per cent is spirits and 13 per cent is pre-mixed. They are great results and we should be endorsing them. Referring to pre-mixed drinks, unfortunately Professor Caswell moved from fact to opinion. In the country she comes from, pre-mixed drinks may represent an issue, but here they are third in the list at only 13 per cent of consumption, behind beer at 58 per cent and spirits at 22 per cent. We have to work with the facts. A big problem is that the public does not know what a standard drink is, and I dare say that if I polled each delegate present many would be in the same position. It is confusing. Yesterday the member for Bankstown suggested that ready-to-drink [RTD] products contain twice the alcohol of beer. This morning we heard references from senior levels of government

suggesting that the new pre-mixed products had alcohol strengths significantly above beer.

That is simply not true; it is a misperception. Pre-mixed products are in the range of 4.5 to 5 per cent, the same as full-strength beer. Some drinks are equivalent to premium beer strength, which may range from 5 to 7 per cent, but they also exist in the mid-strength levels of between 2.5 and 3.5 per cent. The very reason that pre-mixed drinks were introduced—and I want all delegates to take note of this—was an innovation by the spirits industry to introduce low-alcohol options in spirits. This is the kind of initiative that you should be getting behind and encouraging, as opposed to blocking, because it is a change for the better.

I want to illustrate the difficulty in understanding standard drinks. Most males think that the standard drink of beer is a schooner. In fact, a schooner is 1½ standard drinks. Others think a standard drink of wine is "a pretty big glass", or the one that you are served. Given that wine varies between 11½ and 14½ per cent, and it is being topped up by your friends when you are having a meal, I challenge you to know when you have hit the standard drink. The police do not understand it. Bundaberg Mid-strength Rum and Cola, a 3½ per cent product, is not allowed to be sold in sporting arenas. It is the same strength as mid-strength beer. Why? Because the police believe that it will get people drunk quicker.

This is ridiculous, and it is the myth that we need to deal with. Alcohol is alcohol, whether it is brewed, fermented or distilled. Breathalysers measure the amount of alcohol in the blood, not the type of alcohol. An understanding of a standard drink is fundamental to all education about responsible consumption. Recognising this, DSICA financed a campaign to educate the public about standard drinks. My company, without the need for pressure and regulation, has developed a standard drinks logo that we are putting on our packaging to help consumers understand what a standard drink is. These are the types of things we need to do if we are to help consumers understand what they are drinking.

DSICA supports the calls by ADCA, the medical groups, the alcohol strategy and others to base industry taxes on alcohol content. Professor Caswell briefly alluded to that a moment ago. Such a tax system would encourage the industry to develop lower-strength alcoholic beverages; it would encourage innovation in the right direction. It would be a very brave move for a State government to call for a uniform volumetric tax on all alcoholic beverages, but it would show real leadership and would set us in the right direction towards good public health policy.

Alcohol is a product where popular perceptions hold sway even in the face of evidence to the contrary. We need to remove alcohol as an excuse for violent and aggressive behaviour. Recently a prominent barrister boasted to one of my colleagues that alcohol was one of his best defences in criminal cases. Until we stamp out that kind of attitude, we will not make progress. The national strategy said, "There is the need to increase the knowledge of alcohol issues among law enforcement officers, judges and magistrates." What progress are we making? We need to have a zero tolerance view on alcohol when it comes to violence. The strategy set out several other recommendations, as follows:

... Review enforcement of relevant State and Territory laws and regulations ...

Examine and develop strategies to overcome barriers to effective enforcement.

Demonstrate the effectiveness and safety of well policed licensed premises and their surrounds.

Monitor liquor outlets to avoid the sale of alcohol to minors ...

Each of the programs that the professor recognised globally achieves results. Do we have enough resources in New South Wales to support police in this effort? Do we have sufficient police available to

police problem hot spots? Yesterday we certainly heard from Commissioner Moroney a very positive intent. He said we need active and visible policing. Police have been asked to add four questions about alcohol to their crime reports, in an effort to better target hot spots. We endorse this. However, the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research recently concluded:

There is no single factor or set of factors which causes an individual to become involved in crime ...

If we are to truly understand the causes of crime, we must include questions about work status, income, relationship issues, and dietary and health issues. The strategy says, "The community requires information about the potential negative effects of excessive alcohol consumption." The industry has responded. Both the beer and spirit industries have implemented successful ongoing educational campaigns. "Rethinking Drinking—You're in Control" is just one of them. John Brogden's comments yesterday echoed the words of the Prime Minister, who called for a greater assumption of parental responsibility.

We as an industry recognise that parents need help. We therefore work together with LIFE Education, which has developed a web site to help parents, called *Think-b4u-drink.com*, which is funded by DIAGEO. When we announced this initiative to help parents, the Australian Drug Foundation tried to persuade LIFE Education not to work with us. The strategy states that "measures should be taken to increase awareness of the provisions of the law relating to responsible serving in both licensed and private social settings". Last year the Australian Hoteliers Association and DSICA announced a national no-tolerance policy towards on-premises violence, and called on the police to help them stamp out on-premise violence. The strategy demands that "alcohol advertising is consistent with community standards".

Both DIAGEO and DSICA are committed to self-regulation, as witnessed by the DIAGEO marketing code, to which I referred yesterday. The Alcohol Beverage Advertising Code was introduced by the industry in 1978 and has been modified several times since. I agree with the Premier that the code needs to move with the times, and that is a commitment that we are prepared to make. Our system is already regarded around the world as a successful model. Let us get behind it and continue to improve it. The Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy has now agreed with the industry to several new improvements. The Parliamentary Secretary for Health, Trish Worth, congratulated the Alcohol Beverage Advertising Code Management Committee on showing industry leadership on this critically important issue.

DIAGEO recently launched a ground-breaking television advertisement. We used one of our brands, Smirnoff Ice, to promote a socially responsible message. We invested a year and a half of research to ensure that we were delivering a message which, in the words of the strategy, was relevant and meaningful. One headline was "The spirit of responsibility". Another headline was "DIAGEO puts up but is told to shut up". That was the position taken by the Australian Drug Foundation, the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre and the Australian National Council on Drugs.

I regret to say that there is a many-quango industry, supported by the public purse, that does not want to work with the industry. They publish dramatic research findings, but refuse to make public their unit record files to enable secondary research and peer group review. We know that they come from a place of good intent, but our challenge is for you to work with us and not against us. We cannot continue to fragment our efforts, because we must put alcohol issues into context. Alcohol is widely used and enjoyed by many Australians.

In addressing the problem of the small minority of people—and that is where I believe this Summit is heading—we must focus on targeted solutions to the misuse of alcohol. In summary, let us implement the National Alcohol Strategy, rather than reopen the debate. Current research methods can mislead. Researchers need a consistent and agreed framework. But the trends are positive. We must get

behind the momentum. Total per capita consumption of alcohol is flat, and there are signs that there is a reduction in high-risk consumption in 15- to 17-year-olds.

The public needs more education on standard drinks. We need to get behind the volumetric tax base; it is good social policy. Police have an important role to play, but they are not social scientists. We must resource them in line with the initiatives that the commissioner has outlined. The industry is prepared to engage in robust debate. We want to work with responsible community groups and government. We are part of the solution.

