

## **DSICA Column – National Liquor News – May 2007**

**By Gordon Broderick**

### **Alcohol Industry responds to WHO Resolution**

In May 2005 the World Health Organisation (WHO) adopted a resolution on 'Public health problems caused by harmful use of alcohol'. This is the first WHO resolution specifically on alcohol for 22 years, and is significant because alcohol is being placed firmly on WHO's agenda. Since then there have been calls by some health advocates for an 'international public health treaty' on alcohol, which would be modelled on the highly prescriptive WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. This would clearly be a concern for our industry. So what is the industry doing?

To provide a clear and united voice to WHO, international alcohol producers have formed the Global Alcohol Producers (GAP) Group. GAP Group is a voluntary industry coalition with the major companies of beer, wine and spirits co-operating internationally to support public policy development to help alcohol misuse.

Members of GAP Group include Anheuser-Busch, Asahi, Bacardi-Martini, Beam Global Spirits and Wine, Brown-Forman, Constellation Brands, Diageo, Foster's, Heineken, InBev, Kirin, Pernod-Ricard, SABMiller, Molson Coors, Sapporo, Scottish & Newcastle and Suntory.

GAP Group has also set up a trade association liaison group in order to ensure they can contribute the value of their experience and expertise in tackling alcohol misuse at a regional level. This led to a Trade Association Conference, which GAP Group hosted in Miami to share information and exchange views.

In addition, GAP Group has attended two open stakeholder forums and put forward industry's views on relevant subjects identified by WHO. This included information on global consumption patterns and perspectives on effective harm reduction policies. GAP Group made it clear to WHO that the industry is seriously committed to helping reduce alcohol misuse.

Potentially, the findings of a WHO sponsored study into alcohol related harm and the emerging thinking of the WHO Secretariat will be presented to next month's World Health Assembly in Geneva (14 to 24 May). This is an important milestone in the WHO resolution process and will influence the future timetable of the resolution. Whatever WHO decides it will reasonably take 2-5 years for it to be implemented.

There is probably no single model or formula applicable to every country and every problem involving misuse of alcohol. But GAP Group believes that culturally appropriate evidence-based programmes that take into account drinking patterns, targeted interventions and public-private partnerships are the most effective solutions in curbing alcohol misuse.

On the other hand, blunt population-based measures, such as the Nordic model, that are designed to reduce a population's overall consumption, regardless of whether the consumption is moderate and responsible, have proved wholly ineffective. This is because they don't get to the root problem of why people are abusing alcohol. Population-based measures can also have serious unintended consequences, such as shifting consumption to unhealthy, low-quality substitutes, increasing crime and smuggling (which reduces tax revenues) and impeding consumer choice.

WHO resolutions and studies presented in Geneva may seem to have little bearing on the day to day operations of the Australian alcohol market. However, the potential impact of one-sided policy development can be significant. First, restrictive 'command and control' policies may be held up as 'international best practice' and some may argue for such restrictions in Australia. Second, and related to the first point, such policies would entrench old fashioned regulatory measures as the norm across the globe. Finally, adopting such policies by our trading partners could impinge upon Australian exports.

If you want to talk to the Australian GAP Group representatives, please call Mr Ron Ainsbury (Diageo Australia) on phone (02) 9931 9802 or Ms Natalie Toohey (Foster's Group) on phone (03) 9633 2056.