



# FAMILY FIRST



Steve Fielding **Family First** Senator for Victoria

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**FAMILY FIRST Senator**  
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**Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill 2007**

**Second reading speech**

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Australia has a drinking problem. As a nation, we have a problem with booze, a major problem.

Alcohol kills **THREE TIMES** more Australians than all illicit drugs combined, yet no one in Government or Opposition is serious about tackling our alcohol toll.

You see, as a nation, we celebrate alcohol. We drink to celebrate success. We drink to celebrate achievements. We drink to be sociable and to be part of the crowd.

Family First is not anti-alcohol. We know alcohol is a part of life and social drinking is fine. But our culture is one that celebrates alcohol and binge drinking – it is way out of control and we simply must do something about it.

Just look at how alcohol is promoted and advertised. David Boon was a great cricketer, but he is as well remembered for knocking off 52 tinnies on a flight to London.

Doesn't that make him then the 'logical' choice to promote booze? 'Boonie' is held up to be a hero – gee a bloke who can down 52 tinnies in one plane trip – so of course Victoria Bitter are going to pay him handsomely to flog their amber fluid.

No one in the Federal Parliament is taking this issue seriously. No one is pushing for tough action to tackle Australia's alarming alcohol toll and bring it down.

**[www.stevefielding.com.au](http://www.stevefielding.com.au)**

That is why Family First is doing something about it. Because alcohol is a killer – it is killing young Australians and adult Australians – and we HAVE to do something about it.

Instead of waiting for the Government to act, Family First is today introducing new laws to reduce Australia's crippling alcohol toll and change our binge drinking culture.

Family First's *Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill 2007* will:

- Require health information labels on all alcohol products;
- Restrict TV and radio alcohol advertising to after 9pm and before 5am, to stop alcohol being marketed to young people;
- Require all alcohol ads to be pre-approved by a government body comprising an expert from the medical profession, alcohol and drug support sector, accident trauma support sector and the alcohol industry;
- Ban alcohol ads which are aimed at children or which link drinking to personal, business, social, sporting, sexual or other success.

Family First's Bill is supported by the Australian Drug Foundation and Arbias, which researches the link between alcohol and brain damage.

Geoff Munro, from the Australian Drug Foundation, has said of Family First's Bill:

*"Too many hospital beds are occupied by people who have drunk too much alcohol, and too many Australians are damaged and die. Much of the alcohol toll is preventable...(Family First's) proposals are moderate and reasonable, and should meet with extensive community support."*

Sonia Berton, the chief executive officer of Arbias, which recently ran a national campaign to highlight the fact that two million Australians risk alcohol-related brain damage because of their risky drinking behaviour, said:

*"There's no question that we're going to see a whole generation of brain damaged Australians emerging based on current drinking levels. Treatment providers will be literally swamped in the next 10 years because of this massive invisible issue. There are enough Australians at risk of alcohol-related brain damage right now to fill 4,800 jumbo jets. We have to get serious about tackling the massive impact alcohol is having on our society. This bill is a clear step forward. Alcohol is causing mammoth damage in our community. Why aren't we being told? Where are the ads and messages warning people?"*

Family First has met with the Prime Minister, the Health Minister Tony Abbott and the Opposition Leader to discuss the alcohol toll and our Bill.

They all say they are concerned about the issue and understand its seriousness, but still have not taken tough action.

And that is extremely disappointing – a national disgrace.

But perhaps it is not surprising when you look at the HUGE amount of revenue the Government raises through alcohol taxes, and when you consider the power of the alcohol lobby.

The Distilled Spirits Industry Council of Australia has given more than \$200,000 to the Coalition over the last nine years.

Family First's top concern is the health and welfare of Australia's families and Australia's families, and that is why we are taking action to reduce Australia's alcohol toll.

The welfare of Australia's alcohol – and for that matter sporting lobbies – is certainly not our top priority.

It is one thing to SAY you are concerned about a problem, but it is truly another thing to actually DO something about it.

It is enlightening to take a look at the Government's National Drugs Campaign website.

Under a section entitled "Information about drugs", it outlines "examples of various drugs...and some of the potential consequences of using them."

It goes on to mention that "people can become dependent on (addicted to) drugs."

The list of drugs is long and includes ice, speed and base, ecstasy, marijuana, cocaine, inhalants and hallucinogens.

But there is NO mention of alcohol – no mention of the drug – the addictive drug – that kills THREE times more Australians than all illicit drugs combined.

That is startling, and begs the question: Why?

Why is there no mention of alcohol of the most dangerous drug of all?

Just look at some of the statistics on binge drinking in Australia; they are truly horrifying.

Alcohol causes almost 4,300 deaths each year, is responsible for 40 per cent of police work and is a factor in up to one in five road deaths.

- 450,000 Australian children under 12 are at risk of being exposed to binge drinking in their home by a parent or other adult, according to the Australian National Council on Drugs;
- 35 per cent of Australians drink at levels that risk short-term harm and 10 per cent at levels that risk long-term harm, according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare; and,
- Alcohol is at the top of the list of drugs Australians seek treatment for, according to the Institute.

As a nation, Australia has tackled our road toll, our drug toll and our tobacco toll. And we should be proud of the fact we have had success.

Surely it is time – well overdue – for Australia to tackle its alcohol toll. Its love of the booze, its binge drinking culture.

Advertisers are being allowed to link alcohol with success and achievement. TV ads encourage under-age drinking and associate sporting or sexual success with drinking.

Are these the messages we really want to be sending to our children? That to have a good time, to celebrate their achievements and to have a big night out, they have to get plastered, blind drunk, at the same time.

Another big problem is that the alcohol industry regulates itself, and is responsible for its own TV and radio advertising. What a joke!

Families are given the impression that the Advertising Standards Bureau - a body that sounds independent and impartial - regulates alcohol advertising.

But if you dig a bit deeper, you find that alcohol advertising is looked after by the Alcoholic Beverages Advertising Code (ABAC) Chief Adjudicator, who is not named.

So who actually administers the scheme?

The answer is found on the website of the Distilled Spirits Industry Council of Australia, which is part of the ABAC management committee.

The ABAC Management Committee also includes other major alcohol groups, the Australian Associated Brewers, the Liquor Merchants Association of Australia and the Winemakers' Federation of Australia Inc (WFA).

Family First's new laws will be an important first step in seeking to create a culture of responsible drinking in Australia.

As I stated at the beginning, it is important to stress that Family First is not anti-alcohol. Alcohol is a part of life and social drinking is fine. But we must change our culture which celebrates alcohol and accepts binge drinking.

Family First believes we must adopt a policy of zero tolerance to binge drinking and our escalating alcohol toll.

As well as the huge health bill, the massive social cost and damage to family life, there is the enormous drain on police and court and prison resources, as well as problems of crime and violence, child abuse, property damage and other drug use.

Binge drinking among young Australians is a particular concern. Teenagers go out to get blind and it is considered okay.

This is a worry for all parents. My wife Sue and I have three teenage children and understand that, as parents, we are responsible for our children and are important role models. Of course we cannot let adults off the hook.

But, as I mentioned earlier, this is a major social and health issue which, as a community, we must tackle.

There are obviously other measures which could also be adopted to tackle Australia's alcohol toll, and we should look at them all. A massive advertising campaign would be among them, as would investigating the boom in liquor licences to pubs and nightclubs.

But the key point is that we have to start somewhere. And Family First's new laws set us on the right path to seriously tackle a vital issue that has for too long been ignored – perhaps because our major parties pander to the influential alcohol and sporting lobbies.

Let's start saving lives ruined by alcohol and seriously tackle Australia's binge drinking culture and alcohol toll.

Let's stop being wusses when dealing with alcohol.