

Rudd govt under pressure to regulate alcohol advertising

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By *Melissa Jenkins*

The federal government is under growing pressure to regulate alcohol advertising in sport, after a key industry player pledged to introduce a year-long ban on TV ads before 9pm.

Family First's Steve Fielding, doctors and health groups are calling on the government to legislate to ban alcohol advertising during daytime sports programs.

The Distilled Spirits Industry Council of Australia (DSICA), which represents about 80 per cent of the industry, has announced its members will begin phasing out advertising.

By July 1 this year, DSICA members, including Bacardi Breezer maker Bacardi Lion and Jim Beam Brands Australia, won't advertise on TV before 9pm. But the self-imposed ban is only for 12 months, when its impact on binge drinking will be assessed.

Australian Medical Association president Rosanna Capolingua says the government must convene an urgent summit on alcohol advertising.

She called on Health Minister Nicola Roxon to push for industry-wide agreement to stop alcohol advertising during times when children are watching.

"We've got to break this link between sporting heroes and alcohol," Dr Capolingua said. "We urge the minister to urgently press the entire industry for a solution."

A spokesman for Ms Roxon said the government welcomed any genuine attempt by the spirits industry to tackle binge drinking.

"We note, however, that the spirits industry contacted independent senators during the alcopops debate volunteering a year-long ban on all television advertising of alcohol products but only if the alcopops legislation was defeated," he said.

"So you really do have to question the industry's motives."

A spokeswoman for Senator Fielding said he never made any deal with distillers in exchange for his vote on the alcopops bill.

Senator Fielding sided with the opposition to vote down the alcopops bill, which would have validated the government's 70 per cent increase in the alcopops tax.

"The distillers' motivations are their own but Steve's motivation is to get the government to legislate on stopping alcohol ads running during sports programs in family viewing time," the spokeswoman said.

"The fact a large section of the industry is prepared to do so shows that it can be done, that it isn't too hard - and the Rudd government should move to enshrine it in law."

Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation chairman Scott Wilson said DSICA's move was an encouraging step but much more needed to be done to break the link between alcohol and sport.

"It is important to ensure that alcohol brands across the board adopt a more responsible advertising code, and we believe all alcohol promotion, advertising and sponsorship of sport at all levels should be government regulated," he said. "We hope DSICA's initiative provides leadership to the other alcohol industry groups and that they will follow suit."

Mr Wilson said once DSICA's 12-month ban on alcohol advertising ban before 9pm expired, its effectiveness should be independently assessed.

The government should set up a task force to review the effects of sponsorship, marketing and advertising of alcohol products in sport at all levels, he said.

The Winemakers' Federation of Australia chief executive Stephen Strachan said his industry did very little advertising during sports programs.

"You can look at all the wine advertising that is out there on the community and we are just not the problem," he said. "We're reluctant to make changes when those changes are being forced by the attitudes and the behaviour of other sectors in the industry."

The Brewers Association of Australia and New Zealand did not want to comment on the issue.