



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ADJOURNMENT

Swan Electorate: Binge Drinking

SPEECH

Thursday, 12 March 2009

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Questioner
Speaker Irons, Steve, MP

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Mr IRONS (Swan) (4.45 pm)—Between 2002 and 2006 in the four main local council regions in my electorate of Swan, there were just short of 5,000 alcohol-related hospitalisations, costing the community over \$23 million. Binge drinking is clearly a major problem within my electorate and, unfortunately, these numbers are replicated across the country. Binge drinking costs families. Two of my sisters have died as a result of excessive alcohol consumption, one as a direct effect and one indirect. Binge drinking reduces life expectancy. According to the National Alcohol Strategy, alcohol related death accounts for four per cent of the total cost to life and longevity. Binge drinking costs society—it takes hospital beds from those who may need them, it causes crime, it creates road accidents, and it reduces productivity in the workplace. It affects families and communities Australia wide. I would also like to add that I have friends who are licensees and members of the AHA who I know support responsible drinking. This is the culture we need to promote: responsible drinking.

Both sides of the House have said that binge drinking is a problem, and I believe that all members would genuinely want to change this part of our culture and make binge drinking unAustralian. Given this, I was disappointed upon receiving a letter recently from a Mr Don Frayne of Swanbourne. Mr Frayne drew to my attention a recent insert in the *West Australian* newspaper from an organisation called Games World. This insert, which I hold in my hand today, contained adverts for all sorts of family and children's board games. However, it also contained an advertisement for two drinking games. The game I want to focus on in particular is a game called Pass-out, which costs \$29.99. The advertising says, 'Complete a tongue twister, a dare, or take a drink! Gallons of fun for your next party.' It is marketed as, 'The world's best selling adult drinking game.'

It defies belief how a game called Pass-out can be sold, let alone advertised, in this country. We had the Minister for Health and Ageing in this very place this afternoon railing at the opposition about its lack of efforts to reduce binge drinking, but the government and her department have made no effort to stop the sale of this product and others like it. I will argue today that the advertising of the game Pass-out should be stopped, and that we must consider whether this is a

game that is appropriate for sale in Australia. With the help of the Parliamentary Library, I have information into the mechanisms by which such a game can be screened and restricted from advertisement and sale. The Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995 would appear to be the relevant act in this instance. I will refer to it from this point forward as 'the act'. Under this act, a drinking game, or indeed any game, would meet the definition of a publication in section 5—written or pictorial matter that is not a film or computer game—and therefore may need to be classified before it can be advertised or otherwise offered for sale.

However, this act does not require all publications to be classified. Only those publications deemed to be submittable publications must be classified. The term 'submittable publication' is defined in section 5 of the act as follows:

... an unclassified publication that, having regard to section 9A—

the classification of publications, films and computer games that advocate terrorism—

or to the Code—

the National Classification Code—

and the classification guidelines to the extent that they relate to publications, contains depictions or descriptions that:

- (a) are likely to cause the publication to be classified RC; or
- (b) are likely to cause offence to a reasonable adult to the extent that the publication should not be sold or displayed as an unrestricted publication; or
- (c) are unsuitable for a minor to see or read.

I would argue that the drinking game Pass-out meets all three of these criteria and should be considered a submittable publication. As an absolute minimum, its advertising should be restricted. However, it appears that the Pass-out game has never been classified by the Classification Board as a submittable publication. There is no mention of any classification decision in relation to the product on the Classification Board's website. This game may have eluded the Classification Board up to now, probably through its packaging and

disclaimers such as, 'The Pass-out adult drinking game is not intended for use with alcoholic beverages and is only recommended for adults over 18 years of age,' which appears on their website. However, the intention of the game is clear and needs to be classified. I cannot think of any other legal fluids we can consume that would make a human being pass out. I repeat: the intention is clear.

I have written today to Donald McDonald, the Director of the Classification Board, to bring this matter to his attention under section 23 of the Classification Act, which deals with the calling in of submittable publications. I ask the Minister for Health, the member for Gellibrand, to make a real contribution by also writing a letter to the Director of the Classification Board asking for these games to be urgently considered as a submittable publication. I am sure all members would agree that we need to tackle binge drinking in Australia. Stopping games like this from being advertised and sold in Australia is an important part of this.