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ALCOHOL EDUCATION HYPOCRISY

The new education program about teenage drinking launched today by *DrinkWise* highlights the hypocrisy of the drinks industry. *DrinkWise* is an organisation established by the drinks industry, whose representatives comprise no less than half its Board membership, yet the companies spend several hundred million dollars each year on advertising and promotion, and oppose measures that could have a real impact on alcohol problems, according to the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) President, Professor Mike Daube.

Professor Daube said, "Nobody doubts that we face major problems with alcohol, or that many young people and others drink inappropriately. Indeed, underage drinkers spend hundreds of millions of dollars on alcohol each year. That is hardly surprising when the drinks industry pours money into marketing its products through glamorous advertising, sports sponsorship and other forms of promotion, and then opposes measures such as price increases, advertising controls or curbs on access."

"Over the past weekend we have seen alcohol heavily promoted in association with sports including cricket, AFL, NRL and motor racing, and members of the Australian Test team are all but walking billboards for beer."

"There is no doubt that young people are exposed to and influenced by alcohol promotion. A report commissioned by *DrinkWise* itself concludes that 'Alcohol marketing and advertising, which is well-funded by large global companies, uses sophisticated techniques that impact on young adults and adolescents, including those who have not yet started drinking' and 'Marketing alcohol products defines alcohol as a normal, accepted feature of youth culture'."

"Organisations such as *DrinkWise* may help to bring the industry some credibility, but the claim that it is 'independent' is hard to understand, given that the organisation was set up by the drinks industry, and six of its twelve Board members are senior figures in the industry. Sadly, this 'independent' organisation appears to be silent on many measures that might be opposed by its industry funders, and has criticised action on tax as 'old thinking'".

"*DrinkWise* can only expect to be seen as credible when all industry controls have been removed from its Board. Representatives of the drinks industry are the last people who should be involved in alcohol education programs. Their job is to sell the product."

"The first thing the industry should do is curb its advertising and promotion, and accept truly independent controls, especially on marketing associated with sport. That might give any form of public education a chance."

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