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### ► [Alcohol in our lives: curbing the harm.](#)

**New Zealand Law Commission.**

**New Zealand Law Commission, 2010.**

*Extensive policy report from New Zealand accepts evidence that alcohol-related harm is best reduced by population level measures, including raising prices, licensing reform with harm reduction as its prime objective, and restricting the availability of alcohol through reduced opening hours, age limits and curbs on promotion.*

The New Zealand Law Commission was asked to examine and evaluate the laws and policies relating to the sale, supply and consumption of alcohol in New Zealand. In this summary we provide an overview of the Law Commission's conclusions and recommendations on the sale, supply and consumption of alcohol in New Zealand.

Alcohol is a legalised drug with the potential to cause serious harm. We propose a new policy framework that amounts to a paradigm shift in the regulation of alcohol compared with the current system. We anticipate there will be considerable resistance to some of the proposed measures.

The proposals flow from our analysis of the level of alcohol-related harm being experienced in New Zealand. The New Zealand Police's conviction that alcohol misuse is a major contributor to rates of violent offending, including family violence, in this country, weighed heavily on this review.

New Zealanders have been too tolerant of the risks associated with drinking to excess. Unbridled commercialisation of alcohol as a commodity in the last 20 years has made the problem worse. New Zealanders now spend an estimated \$85 million a week on alcohol.

The changes we recommend are aimed at curbing alcohol-related harm. The recommendations amount to a retreat from the most permissive aspects of the current legal controls on alcohol in New Zealand but they do not amount to a return to puritanical wowsersism. Those who do not drink in a risky manner will be little impacted by the measures we recommend.

In the decade between 1998 and 2008 there was a 9% increase in per capita consumption of pure alcohol. This coincided with the lowering of the minimum purchase

age from 20 to 18 years, falling unemployment, sustained economic growth and yearly fiscal surpluses. The current economic recession, which has seen the unemployment rate increase to 7.3%, is likely to be contributing to the slight decline in consumption seen in the latest alcohol consumption data.

We believe our package of policy recommendations will help reduce the levels of criminal offending in New Zealand. We note that reducing the harm from alcohol is one of the four priority areas for cross-government action in addressing the drivers of crime. The policies will relieve the heavy burden carried by the New Zealand Police, and should also improve the nation's health.

An integrated package of policies is proposed in this report, the key elements of which are:

- a new Alcohol Harm Reduction Act to replace the Sale of Liquor Act 1989;
- increasing the price of alcohol through excise tax increases in order to reduce consumption;
- regulating promotions that encourage increased consumption or purchase of alcohol;
- moving, over time, to regulate alcohol advertising and sponsorship;
- increasing the purchase age for alcohol to 20 years;
- strengthening the responsibility of parents supplying alcohol to minors;
- increasing personal responsibility for unacceptable or harmful behaviours induced by alcohol;
- cutting back the hours licensed premises are open;
- introducing new grounds upon which licences to sell alcohol can be declined;
- allowing more local input into licensing decisions through local alcohol policies and District Licensing Committees (the bodies we are recommending replace District Licensing Agencies);
- streamlining the enforcement of the alcohol laws and placing the overall decision-making in a new Alcohol Regulatory Authority (building on the existing Liquor Licensing Authority) presided over by District Court judges especially selected for the task; and
- a substantially improved and reorganised system for the treatment of people with alcohol problems.

This report is structured in four parts. Part 1 reviews the case for reducing alcohol-related harm. Part 2 discusses recommendations for controlling the supply of alcohol. Part 3 addresses proposals for reducing the demand for alcohol and Part 4 examines recommendations for limiting alcohol-related problems.

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