

Professor Ian Harper
Competition Policy Review Secretariat
The Treasury
Langton Crescent
PARKES ACT 2600

14 November 2014

Dear Professor Harper,

RE: Submission on the Competition Policy Review Draft Report

Cancer Council NSW is the leading, not-for-profit cancer charity in NSW. Our mission is to lead, empower and mobilise the community to beat cancer. Our key priorities include funding and conducting world-class research that reduces the impact of cancer, and encouraging people to lead healthy, cancer-smart lifestyles. Cancer Council NSW is interested in simple, consumer-friendly messages to assist Australians to make healthier choices. Cancer Council NSW has a series of evidence-based recommendations aimed at preventing cancer at the population level, and one of these includes limiting alcohol consumption.

Alcohol increases cancer risk, and is responsible for between 2,182 and 6,620 new cases of cancer in Australia each year.¹ Cancer Council NSW supports evidence-based action to reshape Australian social attitudes towards drinking, and to reduce the burden of morbidity and mortality caused by alcohol use.

Cancer Council NSW is a member of the NSW/ACT Alcohol Policy Alliance (NAAPA), and as such supports the adoption of the three policy priorities – reducing alcohol availability; consistent alcohol pricing and reducing promotion of alcohol; and increasing community engagement in alcohol solutions. Alcohol is not an ordinary commodity and therefore regulation that restricts access, availability and marketing and supply of alcohol at the expense of competition and deregulation are warranted. Competition issues should not take precedence while alcohol remains a public health priority.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the Competition Policy Review Draft Report (Draft Report). We broadly support the recommendations in the submission prepared by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE). In this submission, Cancer Council NSW has focussed on the aspects of the inquiry in which we, as an organisation, are best placed to assess the likely impact; that is the availability of alcohol. While we recognise that the Draft Review considers competition policy more broadly as it relates in Australia, we are concerned that some recommendations made in the Draft Report will greatly increase the availability of alcohol in Australia and lead to significant increases in alcohol harms.

The National Preventive Health Taskforce recommended that redefining the cultural place of alcohol in Australian society was important when addressing the issue of alcohol consumption.² Cancer Council NSW believes that changing the public's alcohol use will require a significant shift in Australia's cultural beliefs around alcohol and drinking. People must be supported to make healthier drinking choices, and positively influencing the drinking culture can reduce alcohol consumption in the long term, and hence improve people's future health. Recommendations to remove or reduce regulation that governs the availability of alcohol to deliver greater competition is

contrary to this National Preventive Health Taskforce recommendation, and is likely to increase consumption and the harms related with alcohol, as alcohol becomes more widely available and freely accessible.³

The Draft Report states that the aim of Competition Policy is to “improve the welfare of Australians”, however Cancer Council NSW is concerned about three specific recommendations in the Draft Report that have the potential to have the opposite effect. These are:

1. Draft recommendation 10 - Removing restrictions related to planning and zoning for alcohol outlets;
2. Draft recommendation 11 - Reducing constraints on supermarkets being able to sell alcohol; and;
3. Draft recommendation 51 - Deregulating retail trading hours.

Removing restrictions related to planning and zoning for alcohol outlets

Currently, liquor licensing applications are first assessed by local governments responsible for local planning laws relating to land use planning, and specific requirements on density and impacts on amenity.⁴ Licensing applications are also assessed by state licensing authorities. Implementation of this recommendation would result in planning and zoning laws needing to consider the interests of Competition Policy above those of addressing or limiting the social harms caused by alcohol, and restricts local and state governments’ authority to introduce harm reduction measures appropriate to their own communities. Therefore Cancer Council NSW does not support the adoption of Draft recommendation 10.

Reducing constraints on supermarkets being able to sell alcohol

Australian studies show that increased numbers of liquor outlets either through supermarkets or other off-licenses are associated with increased rates of chronic disease, risky drinking by young people, assaults and domestic violence.^{5,6} Recent Australian research shows that more alcohol is purchased in New Zealand where alcohol is available on supermarket shelves than in Australia where it is not.⁷ Allowing alcohol to be stocked on supermarket shelves and fridges next to grocery items, including non-alcoholic beverages rather than in a separate but co-located store, normalises the consumption of alcohol, especially for children who may visit supermarkets with their parents.

Due to the potential detrimental effects to both alcohol-related harms, Cancer Council NSW does not support the adoption of Draft recommendation 11.

Deregulating retail trading hours

The adoption of this recommendation may limit the ability for state and local governments to introduce policies that restrict the hours and days when alcohol can be sold, currently covered by state and territory government liquor licensing legislation. Draft Recommendation 51 will result in trading hours for both on-licence and off-licence premises being extended. This is concerning as increases in trading hours have been shown to increase consumption and alcohol-related harms.¹⁰

Due to the clear link between increased trading hours, increased consumption of alcohol and increased alcohol-related harms, Cancer Council NSW does not support the adoption of Draft recommendation 51.

A comprehensive approach to alcohol policy is required to reduce the burden of both short- and long-term harms caused by alcohol consumption, including the risk of cancer. This includes maintaining provisions in Competition Policy that may restrict liquor retailers. Cancer Council NSW urges you to reject Draft recommendations 10, 11 and 51 in the interests of public health.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to raise these important issues with you. Should you require any further information about the matters raised in this submission, please contact Clare Hughes, Nutrition Program Manager on (02) 9334 1462 or at clareh@nswcc.org.au.

Yours sincerely,



Jim L'Estrange
Chief Executive Officer

References

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- (10) Popova S, Giesbrecht N, Bekmuradov D, Patra J. Hours and days of sale and density of alcohol outlets: Impacts on alcohol consumption and damage: A systematic review. *Alcohol and Alcoholism* 2009; 44:500-516.

