# Alcohol industry fingerprints: Analysis of modifications to the National Alcohol Strategy

## Researchers

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## Summary

The National Alcohol Strategy (NAS) provides Australia with a national framework to stop alcohol-related-harm, including identifying priority areas and committing to targets to reduce Australians’ consumption of alcohol.

Following an ABC Background Briefing investigation on pro-alcohol industry changes to the draft NAS, [*The Pub Test: why Australia can’t stop drinking*](https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/backgroundbriefing/the-pub-test/11346964), FARE undertook an analysis, comparing a publicly-available [consultation draft](https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/consultation-draft-national-alcohol-strategy-2018-2026) with a [revised draft strategy](https://fare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/NAS_REVISED_DRAFT.pdf) which was circulated to state/territory gover for approval in early 2019.

Analysis of the documents found four specific ways in which the strategy had been modified: significant deletions to the role of the alcohol industry in contributing to public health policy; language used to frame alcohol consumption shifted; the imperative for government(s) to act on the strategy was altered; and specific policy measures were modified or removed.

## Key findings

* Safeguards to manage conflict of interest with the alcohol industry, which were included in the draft strategy, were removed from the revised draft strategy. This facilitates the involvement of alcohol industry executives in the development of public health policy.
* Reframing of the ‘alcohol-related harm’ section of the strategy resulted in the insertion of key words and phrases that are used by the industry that were not in the draft strategy. The revised strategy focuses on ‘excessive consumption’ in contrast to the draft strategy which highlighted the importance of challenging perceptions of risk about safe drinking levels. Alcohol consumption was re-framed in the revised strategy to be a positive part of Australian culture
* The imperative for government action was watered down in the revised strategy with the identified ‘policy options’ being classified as examples only of initiatives that could be implemented by state and territory authorities, which do not have to be actively pursued or considered.
* Changes were made to the policy measures ‘managing availability, price and promotion’ proposed in the draft strategy, undermining their effectiveness as a policy intervention. This included the removal of ‘sport’ from the section on advertising to young people. Support for the commencement of reforms to regulate alcohol advertising was also removed with the revised strategy legitimising the current practice of self-regulation.

## Implications for Public Health

* Analysis of the changes to the NAS has found that the modifications, if adopted, would negatively impact on the health and wellbeing of Australians.
* The revised strategy is in conflict with the position of the World Health Organization and the United Nations, that the alcohol industry actively undermines the effectiveness of public health strategies and should not be involved in the development of alcohol policies.

[VIEW THE REPORT](https://fare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/NAS-Alcohol-industry-fingerprints.pdf)