# Beware of big liquor spin, false conspiracies and ‘myths’ about alcohol-related harm

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### Big alcohol continues using tactics, well learnt from their tobacco industry mentors, that undermine community health and safety

In a recent commentary (Wilsmore [op ed](https://www.newcastleherald.com.au/story/6784902/prohibitionist-agenda-centred-on-a-myth/) NH 8 June 2020) the CEO of the Alcohol Beverages Australia (ABA) writes about the work of ‘prohibitionists’ in evaluating measures aimed at reducing harm in the community. The article reports that drinks consumption in the Northern Territory has increased in association with the introduction of a Minimum Unit Price (MUP).

Perhaps not surprisingly, this liquor industry puffery fails to mention the very large independent report which categorically shows the opposite.

This is classic big alcohol tactics, well learnt from their tobacco industry mentors.

ABA claims consumption in the NT has increased, but they won’t show government or the public the report, let alone the data behind it.

What the [independent (government-funded) analysis](https://www.newsroom.nt.gov.au/mediaRelease/33199) of the wholesale data showed was significant and substantial reductions in cask wine especially – the ONLY alcohol beverage that changed price because of the $1.30 per standard drink floor price (e.g. $1.82 for a standard 375ml stubby)– even after accounting for other interventions and the existing downward trends.

MUP – just like very late night sales restrictions – target problematic drinkers and the most harmful contexts.

Just for the record, the introduction of the floor price has been associated with substantial benefits for local communities – at virtually no cost – was associated with significant declines in:

* alcohol-related assault offences
* protective custody episodes
* alcohol-related ambulance attendances
* alcohol-related emergency department (ED) presentations
* alcohol-related road traffic crashes (resulting in injury or fatality)
* the number of child protection notifications, protection orders, and out-of-home care cases

As with all policy interventions, there are other factors involved too, but all of these are extensively documented in our [publicly available report](https://alcoholreform.nt.gov.au/publications).

## Big Liquor’s history of trying to fool Newcastle community

Industry has tried to pull the wool over the Newcastle community’s eyes before, with the importation of an English anthropologist (not one with an affiliation with a University) under the engagement of Lion Breweries, to try and create another narrative about the very successful and common-sense measures in Newcastle which only reduce sales of alcohol by four hours total in the whole week (5 to 3am Saturday and Sunday morning) when our police, ambulance and emergency department are under the greatest pressure.

The Fox report was discredited in a [journal article](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/add.13149), [Conversation piece](https://theconversation.com/factcheck-can-you-change-a-violent-drinking-culture-by-changing-how-people-drink-38426) and [blog](https://drinktank.org.au/2015/03/merchants-of-doubt/).

The Newcastle measures were found to reduce police-recorded assaults by 37 per cent in the first 18 months by independent University-based researchers, long before bail measures the alcohol industry keep trying to highlight (including the ABA op-ed). At five years, it was a 58 per cent reduction. They created a downward momentum in the culture of violence, but at the same time the number of licensed venues in Newcastle doubled.

In the recent ABA piece, it is claimed regarding the Newcastle laws that “Similar laws were introduced in Geelong and Melbourne but did not have the same impact and were scrapped.” The only measure introduced to around 2/3rds of venues in Melbourne was a 2am one-way door (also referred to as ‘lockout’ because the industry loves to make you think your liberty is being denied).

There was nothing else. No trading hours restrictions. No limits on shots after midnight.

I and many others have studied such measures around the world and found that reducing very late-night service of alcohol (at 3am as in Newcastle) by closing the venues is the most effective intervention available. As well as costing nothing, it saves hugely on police resources.

This measure reduces assaults, ambulance and hospital attendances. And it save lives and trauma, such as 20% reduction in sexual assaults reported by NSW police in Sydney.

Research into [Queensland’s adoption of measures](https://quantem.info/) like Newcastle also showed many reductions in harm, while business, live music and tourism actually improved.

## So, who are the Alcohol Beverages Association?

The ABA is an industry body for global alcohol producers and retailers, including Asahi Brewers from Japan, Diageo spirits from the UK, Pernod Ricard from France, Coca-Cola Amatil from the USA and others. The vast majority of their stakeholders are overseas investors.

Their behaviour is similar to previous efforts we’ve seen [before](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2879177/), particularly in the [tobacco industry](https://tobaccotactics.org), or “big tobacco”, which has previously [employed strategies](https://amj.net.au/index.php/AMJ/article/view/43) to downplay health and safety harms and delay effective legislation.

## Prohibition? Hardly…

Prohibition is defined as “A rule or law that forbids something”.

Ceasing alcohol service for two hours on Friday and Saturday nights when the burden on the community and its emergency services is at its highest, is hardly prohibition of alcohol.

Likewise, having a minor price increase that targets a specific beverage and container (specifically very cheap cask wine) because it causes so much devastation in vulnerable populations can hardly be called ‘prohibition’ when not even beer prices were affected. Yet both these measures see benefits for local communities.

It is worth asking why the big global alcohol producers, retailers and their public relations bodies feel the need to undermine community safety and attack research, deriding locals that are trying to reduce alcohol-related harm: is it just to protect the huge profits of their corporate shareholders from around the world?

### Metadata