# Booze before babies: Analysis of alcohol industry submissions to the FASD Inquiry

## Researcher

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education

## Summary

The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) carried out an analysis of the submissions made by alcohol industry bodies to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs Inquiry into Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). Four alcohol industry bodies made submissions to the Inquiry: the Winemakers’ Federation of Australia (WFA), the Brewers Association of Australia and New Zealand Inc (Brewers), the Distilled Spirits Industry Council of Australia (DSICA) and the Australian Wine Research Institute (AWRI).

The analysis examined the veracity of claims made by the alcohol industry in their submissions to the Inquiry against the current evidence-base, and found that the industry bodies made unfounded claims about FASD and about the effectiveness of interventions to prevent FASD.

## Outcomes

The analysis found that the alcohol industry bodies made ten false or misleading claims in their submissions. One such claim is that a large number of women are already reducing their alcohol consumption during pregnancy, so the need for further action to raise awareness among the general population is unnecessary. Another claim is that warning labels recommending abstinence from alcohol during pregnancy may result in anxiety among pregnant women, and lead to termination. There is no empirical evidence to support either of these claims and they are not helpful in preventing cases of FASD and providing services to people who have FASD, their families and carers. Three themes were observed in the alcohol industry submissions:

* minimising FASD as an issue in Australia and ‘talking down’ the need for action
* suggesting that current industry activities are sufficient in preventing FASD, and
* making false or misleading claims about the possible effects of public health interventions to prevent FASD.

A particular focus of the alcohol industry’s submissions was on pregnancy alcohol health warning labels. This was a response to the Legislative and Governance Forum on Food Regulation’s (FoFR) decision to give “the industry the opportunity to introduce appropriate labelling on a voluntary basis for a period of two years before regulating for this change”. This decision by FoFR was in response to the recommendations from Labelling Logic, the most comprehensive review of food labelling in Australia. The alcohol industry bodies used their submissions as an opportunity to promote the DrinkWise labels, which have been criticised by the public health sector for being weak, ambiguous and insufficient.

The alcohol industry’s position on alcohol health warning labels is counter to the current evidence-base, which shows that labels are more effective when they:

* are mandatory, government regulated and applied consistently to all alcohol products
* comprise both a symbol and text
* are applied to the front of the product with specified sizing
* include a range of specific messages, which are rotated and updated regularly, and
* are implemented as part of a comprehensive public education campaign that elaborates on the messages.

The industry submissions to the Inquiry add nothing to FASD policy development and merely act as a vehicle to promote their own, vested interests and oppose or delay effective action. The use of these tactics is concerning because immediate action is needed to prevent further cases of FASD and to better support people with FASD and their families.

[view the report](/wp-content/uploads/FARE-Alcohol-Industry-Claims.pdf)