# No message on the bottle - industry fails to adopt own labels

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An independent audit of the alcohol industry’s DrinkWise warning labels has found that a full year after the voluntary initiative was launched, fewer than one in six (16%) alcohol products carry the consumer information messages.

The evaluation conducted by IPSOS Social Research Institute also found most DrinkWise messages are largely hidden, with 98 per cent of the messages taking up less than 5 per cent of the label or face of the packaging.

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) Chief Executive, Michael Thorn, says the IPSOS audit demonstrates the abject failure of the voluntary industry regime and shows the industry isn’t serious about labelling.

“It’s impossible to see the audit results as anything but a complete failure on industry’s part. Twelve months on, and for the most part the DrinkWise messages have simply not been adopted. In the case of the few products that do carry the messages, they are so inconspicuous as to be worthless,” Mr Thorn said.

The audit also highlighted a total lack of uniformity and consistency on labelling. When used, industry’s Drinkwise messages were applied selectively. Confusingly, many products were found to have consumer messages from overseas jurisdictions such as the alcohol industry’s United Kingdom’s ‘Drinkaware’ campaign.

The audit also found that messages on alcohol products such as the vodka brand that suggests ‘Enjoy with Absolut Responsibility’, were little more than glib advertising tag lines that do nothing to educate and inform consumers about responsible drinking.

“The IPSOS audit brings into sharp relief the fundamental weaknesses of industry’s voluntary scheme. What we need are evidence-based warning labels that are applied consistently across all alcohol products. That’s something industry’s half-baked voluntary scheme can clearly never deliver,” Mr Thorn said.

In December 2011, Australian and New Zealand Food and Health Ministers recommended that the alcohol industry would be given two years to voluntarily implement alcohol warning labels, after which time the government would move to mandate pregnancy alcohol warning labels.

In the eight months since, Government has shown no interest in evaluating the progress of the alcohol industry’s voluntary efforts, entrusting industry to set its own targets and assess its own progress.

“Delaying the introduction of mandatory labels for two years was a mistake, but the government’s current hands-off approach borders on negligence. Industry might wish to set the bar low, fail to clear it, and still award itself a passing grade, but this audit puts paid to that industry spin,” Mr Thorn said.

Rather than correct the mistake, Mr Thorn says the Commonwealth now plans on rewarding the alcohol industry further with a tax-payer-funded handout, with the Department of Health and Ageing set to provide DrinkWise with funding to promote its flawed labelling regime.

“What is surprising is that in the face of industry failure, the Government seems content to not only let industry continue to take the lead in such an important national health initiative, but now is prepared to throw public funds at industry to promote a largely non-existent labelling initiative,” Mr Thorn said.

[view the report](https://www.fare.org.au/alcohol-label-audit-august-2012/)

### Metadata