

Media Release

CALL FOR END TO ALCOHOL SHOPPER DOCKET PROMOTIONS AS WOOLWORTHS ACTIONS EXPOSED

4 May 2014: The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) has renewed calls for alcohol promotions shopper docket to be banned, following publication of documents exposing the influence and pressure Woolworths brought to bear on the Office of Liquor Gaming and Racing (OLGR).

Published today in the Sun Herald and online on www.drinktank.org.au, the documents reveal a six-month investigation into shopper docket alcohol promotions by OLGR concluded that the practice was likely to encourage the misuse and abuse of liquor, only to see the decision quashed by the NSW Department of Trade and Investment Director General Mark Paterson.

FARE Chief Executive Mr Thorn says whether Woolworths influence of the Department of Trade and Investment was undue or improper, should, in light of the documents now made public, be a matter for the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) to decide.

“The people of NSW deserve and demand that not only their politicians, but also their government bureaucracy is free of undue and improper industry influence. To that end, the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education has written to the NSW Attorney General calling on the NSW Government to refer the matter to ICAC for further investigation,” Mr Thorn said.

Michael Thorn is highly critical of the behaviour of Woolworths and says the documents show the retail giant in a very unflattering light.

“There is a fine line between protecting your own commercial interests and corporate bullying, and my concern is that by being so heavy handed, threatening and intimidating, Woolworths has well and truly crossed that line,” Mr Thorn said

Mr Thorn also renewed his call for OLGR to be relocated outside of the industry focussed Department of Trade and Investment.

“We have long argued that placing overall responsibility for liquor regulation in the hands of the Department of Trade and Investment is a recipe for disaster and now we have more proof. It creates a clear conflict of interest, and results in industry interests being placed ahead of the public good. We end up with this disturbing and highly questionable decision by the Director General to ignore and reverse OLGR’s emphatic recommendation which found that shopper docket present an unacceptable risk of encouraging the misuse or abuse of alcohol,” Mr Thorn said.

In addition to banning alcohol promotion shopper docket, Mr Thorn says the existing ineffective alcohol promotion guidelines should be replaced with more robust regulation.

“The NSW Government must ban alcohol promotion shopper docket immediately, and, as a matter of urgency, develop regulation to replace the failed alcohol promotion guidelines. We need robust regulation that governs both venues and retailers; regulation strong and flexible enough to keep up with industry’s innovative efforts to circumvent the rules, and strong enough to protect the community from the reckless promotions of big retailers,” Mr Thorn said.

Michael Thorn (@MichaelTThorn) is available for interview.

Media Enquiries: Jeremy Henderson 0425 559 710

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) FARE is an independent organisation working to prevent the harmful use from alcohol in Australia. Through its national grants program and commissioned research, FARE has established itself as a leading voice on alcohol and other drugs issues. FARE works with community groups, all levels of government, police, emergency workers, research institutions and the private sector to address alcohol-related problems. For further information visit FARE’s website: www.fare.org.au