



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

INTERNATIONAL EXPERTS LABEL NEW ALCOHOL PROVISIONS AN UNACCEPTABLE TRADE-OFF

5 October 2017: Aussie consumers could be left exposed to greater alcohol harms as a result of soon-to-be ratified regional trade agreements.

Supplementary labelling rules intended to reduce the burden on alcohol manufacturers now threaten to deter the Commonwealth Government from introducing effective and mandatory health warning labels.

Australian and International alcohol policy experts meeting in Melbourne this week for the Global Alcohol Policy Conference (GAPC2017) have labelled the new alcohol provisions unacceptable and warn that once incorporated into regional agreements, the provisions are likely to become the global standard.

The new rules would mean wine and spirits suppliers would be allowed to place country-specific information on a supplementary label rather than the main label.

The provisions first appeared in the final text of the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP). There are risks that this may still proceed in its current form despite the withdrawal of the United States. The provisions have also begun to appear in bilateral trade agreements, including the Agreement to Amend the Singapore Australia Free Trade Agreement.

They are also likely to be proposed for the 16-country Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

While extremely favourable to the alcohol industry, research indicates that supplementary labels are not the most effective way to promote health warnings.

GAPC keynote speaker Jane Kelsey, a professor of law, policy and international economic regulation at the School of Law at the University of Auckland, specialises in the implications of international trade and investment agreements, such as the TPP, and argues for the rights of governments to decide their own domestic regulations in the national interest.

“By prioritising the convenience and bottom line of the international alcohol producers in new regional and international trade deals, Australia is relinquishing its sovereignty over a critically important issue, the Government’s ability to provide its citizens with effective alcohol warning labels that can reduce the harms from alcohol,” Professor Kelsey said.

Health experts in Australia have long recommended the introduction of government-mandated health warning labels on alcohol products, with all the evidence showing warning labels would be most effective when they are visible, evidence-based, and applied consistently across all alcohol products.

In contrast, the current voluntary industry scheme has resulted in too few products carrying weak consumer messages that are hard to find and even harder to read.

Michael Moore, President of the World Federation of Public Health and Chief Executive of the Public Health Association of Australia says the new alcohol labelling provisions put forth in up-coming regional trade deals threaten to undermine the introduction of a more robust compulsory labelling regime.

“If alcohol warning labels are to be most effective they need to be applied in a consistent fashion. Unfortunately, by allowing international wine and spirits suppliers to place country-specific information on a supplementary label rather than the main label you significantly impact their effectiveness, Mr Moore said.

Of equal concern, Mr Moore says the new supplementary labelling rules present a further obstacle: the very real threat that the alcohol industry uses the new rules to legally challenge government-mandated health warnings if introduced.

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) Chief Executive Michael Thorn says recent history makes clear that the alcohol industry cannot be trusted to develop and implement alcohol-warning labels.

“At a time when the Commonwealth Government should be moving to a government-mandated labelling regime that would ensure Australian consumers would be are provided with information they require to minimise the harms from what is a highly toxic drug, the Australian Government is instead agreeing to international trade provisions that will effectively ties its hands and put the interests of Big Alcohol ahead of the health and wellbeing of Australians,” Mr Thorn said.

Professor Kelsey, Mr Moore and Mr Thorn are available for interview

Media contact:

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<https://www.gapc2017.org.au/>

Media Notes:

GAPC 2017 Conference

WHAT: From 4-6 October 2017, world-leading alcohol policy makers, researchers and practitioners will arrive in Melbourne for the Global Alcohol Policy Conference (GAPC) 2017.

The first of its kind to be held in in Australia, GAPC 2017 will build on earlier conferences’ translation of evidence into action, and contribute to the increasing momentum around the world to stop harm caused by alcohol.

GAPC is co-hosted by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE), Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA), National Alliance for Action on Alcohol (NAAA) and Global Alcohol Policy Alliance (GAPA). The 2017 conference theme is *Mobilising for Change – Alcohol policy and the evidence for action.*



GAPC 2017 will maintain the tradition of focusing on advocacy, overcoming vested interests in alcohol policy development, and the need for international collaboration.

Each day of the GAPC 2017 will be distinct. Through eight plenary sessions, workshops and presentations, a diverse range of national and international experts will provide opportunities for discussion about their research and experience and how these can be applied to alcohol policy environments and reinvigorate efforts to reduce alcohol-related harm worldwide.

WHO: A range of international and national speakers will be available for interview

Please see program for more details.

WHEN: 8:30am to 5:00pm, Wednesday – Friday 4-6 October 2017 ([see full event program here](#)). Advance embargoed copies of GAPC media releases are available on request.

WHERE: Pullman Melbourne Albert Park, 65 Queens Road, Albert Park, Melbourne.

Media can collect passes from the conference registration desk onsite and can pre-register via email to events@phaa.net.au.

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The **Global Alcohol Policy Alliance (GAPA)** is a network of non-governmental organisations and people working in public health agencies who share information on alcohol issues and advocate evidence-based alcohol policies, "free from commercial interests."

Resource centres affiliated to GAPA operate in Africa, European Union, South America, South East Asia, USA and Western Pacific regions. <http://globalgapa.org/>

The **Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE)** is an independent, not-for-profit organisation working to stop the harm caused by alcohol. Alcohol harm in Australia is significant. Over 5,500 lives are lost every year and more than 157,000 people are hospitalised making alcohol one of our nation's greatest preventive health challenges.

For over a decade, FARE has been working with communities, governments, health professionals and police across the country to stop alcohol harms by supporting world-leading research, raising public awareness and advocating for changes to alcohol policy. <http://fare.org.au/>

The **Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA)** provides forums for the discussion of public health in Australia and a voice of a wide variety of professional public health workers.

Via the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health (ANZJPH), PHAA provides Australia's basic public health infrastructure that links those undertaking research in public health and those undertaking policy and program development and implementation. <https://www.phaa.net.au/>

The **National Alliance for Action on Alcohol (NAAA)** is a national coalition of health and community organisations from across Australia that has been formed with the goal of reducing alcohol-related harm.

Currently comprising major organisations with an interest in alcohol and public health, the formation of the National Alliance for Action on Alcohol represents the first time such a broad-based alliance has come together to pool their collective expertise around what needs to be done to address Australia's drinking problems. <http://actiononalcohol.org.au/>