



Comment by Rob Stokes, MP Pittwater

Why the Liquor Act fails to protect children from alcohol

During October, I was forced to live on nothing but food and water.

It was part of the "Ocober" challenge run by Life Education Australia, raising money for health education programs in our schools – giving children the skills and the knowledge to say "no" to drugs and alcohol.

Like many people, I enjoy the odd glass of wine, and assumed that foregoing this pleasure for a little while would make no difference. But after a month, I have really noticed how easy it is to lose weight and save money. Such is the wrath of grapes!

And if giving up the odd drink by a 35 year old can make such a difference – what must alcohol do to someone half my age, who drinks twice as much?

The facts on teenage drinking are stark and shocking. By age 15, almost one third of teenagers are binge drinking. Teenagers who start drinking before age 15 are

five times more likely to become alcohol dependant than those who don't start until age 21, and are less likely to finish their education, get married, and get a job.

Teenage drinkers have a poorer memory, vocabulary and general knowledge than non-drinkers. They face permanent brain damage to areas including the hippocampus – influencing memory, and the frontal lobe – affecting personality.

That is why I find it shocking that it is legal in NSW to supply a minor with alcohol, provided they have the consent, actual or implied, of their parents or guardians.

Section 117 of the Liquor Act 2007 permits a person to supply liquor to a minor with the 'authorisation' of the minor's parent or guardian on private or unlicensed premises.

There is no legislative guidance as to what form this 'authorisation' must take. In other words, the law allows service of alcohol to children at local parties provided that their

parents are okay with it. Frankly, that's not okay with me.

Nor it is okay in Queensland, where recent changes made it illegal for adults to supply alcohol to minors when their parent or guardian is not supervising. Similar changes are currently being considered in Tasmania.

The laws of service of alcohol to minors need to be clear, tough and simple. If someone is under 18 then the only person who should be able to serve them alcohol is a parent.

Such a rule would send a clear message that it is unsafe for children to drink alcohol, and would provide parents with a legal reason to refuse pressure to provide alcohol at teenage parties.

Amending the Liquor Act to prohibit any person other than a minor's parent or guardian from supplying liquor would help strengthen the Act's objectives, reduce the level of access minors have to liquor and simplify the



duties placed on people supervising minors.

We know that too much alcohol results in more than just a hangover. And while water can dissolve aspirin, alcohol can dissolve human dignity.

We need to protect children from alcohol, and parents from pressure to give alcohol to other people's children on the spurious excuse of "implied parental consent".

And even when providing their own children with alcohol at home, parents need to know the terrible consequences that liquor can have on the development of growing minds and bodies.

Updating our laws to prohibit service of alcohol to children by anyone other than their parent or guardian is long overdue.