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Official minutes show expert committee split on party pills

The Expert Advisory Committee on Drugs is divided over whether party pills pose a low or moderate risk of harm and has significant reservations about the quality of much of the research on which it based its recommendation to ban BZP, according to official records.

The evidence comes from the minutes of the Committee's 3 May meeting which, consistent with Committee practice, are now available on the National Drug Policy website.

"We think that it is important that MPs are aware of this, especially given that the Misuse of Drugs Amendment Bill to ban BZP has now been introduced into Parliament," said Matt Bowden, Chair of the Social Tonics Association of New Zealand.

"The minutes show that the Committee is divided on the level of risk posed by BZP and also that, when the decision was taken last November to recommend that BZP be banned, at least some Committee members felt they were under pressure to make a decision based on incomplete data," Mr Bowden said.

The Committee was asked to review the new information which had come to light since its December advice to the Government as two key studies which informed that advice had since been peer reviewed and STANZ had commissioned a review by two leading Australian experts into the aborted study conducted by the Medical Research Institute of New Zealand (MRINZ).

Committee findings include:

- That the term "seizures" was used "to refer to anything from a small twitch to a grand seizure" and that this was "too broad". Further, there was a failure in some studies to explain if the seizures were due to withdrawal effects.
- That the MRINZ study was designed to look at driving performance "under an intoxicating dose of BZP with or without alcohol" rather than at the side effects of BZP and that the results should be used to inform the study's primary aim.
- That the side effects in the MRINZ study were "were most likely heightened as participants endured at least six hours of fasting and the

substance was taken when it is not normally taken". The Committee noted this might explain the discrepancy between the subjects' experience in the study and their prior experience with BZP.

- That one Committee member expressed the view that the Committee may have placed "too much emphasis" on the MRINZ study, in part because the aborting of the trial "may have created an emotional overtone that influenced the Committee's decision".
- That one of the peer reviewers of the SHORE study was "very critical" of the study, including of the small sample size of only 16 people in the intervention group.

"New Zealand prides itself on having an evidence-based drug policy but clearly much of the "evidence" behind the determination to ban BZP is shoddy and second-rate. This is too important a decision, affecting too many people, to proceed on such an inadequate basis," Mr Bowden said.

ENDS

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REFERENCES:

EACD Meeting Minutes for November, May, June:

<http://www.ndp.govt.nz/moh.nsf/indexcm/ndp-committees-eacd-minutes>

Latest EACD advice to Minister after reviewing STANZ submission:

[http://www.ndp.govt.nz/moh.nsf/pagescm/975/\\$File/bzpletterandertonmay07.pdf](http://www.ndp.govt.nz/moh.nsf/pagescm/975/$File/bzpletterandertonmay07.pdf)

Analysis of submissions on the proposed banning of BZP:

<http://www.ndp.govt.nz/moh.nsf/indexcm/ndp-publications-bzpanalysissubmissions>