

Report into party pills misses the point

Wednesday, 20 December 2006, 11:25 am

Press Release: Social Tonics Association

19 December 2006

Report into party pills misses the point

The Social Tonics Association of New Zealand (STANZ) today said that any move to ban party pills would simply lead to tens of thousands of New Zealanders instead taking dangerous illegal drugs.

The Expert Advisory Committee on Drugs has released a report into party pills and recommends they be prohibited.

“The report misses the point,” said STANZ Chair, Matt Bowden. “Party pills in New Zealand are achieving their purpose in providing safer, legal alternatives to illegal drugs.

“While the EACD report has focused on potential risks, nobody is doing the analysis to show the benefits of having safer, regulated alternatives on the market.”

Mr Bowden said around 10 million party pills have been sold in New Zealand over the last six years.

“Every time somebody chooses to take a party pill is a time when they choose not to come into contact with gangs, buying dangerous and highly addictive illegal drugs and putting their lives on the line.”

Mr Bowden said the availability of party pills is directly behind the plummeting demand for methamphetamine. Senior police officers have stated publicly that demand for ecstasy is also down as a direct result of the availability of party pills.

“Independent research just this year has shown that party pills are working as a ‘gateway off’ illegal drugs, and I firmly believe they are helping to save lives,” he said.

“It’s important we get this issue in perspective – 26 million party pills have been sold in New Zealand, most of which were sold in a completely unregulated market.

“While there have been some headaches, there has not been a single case of anybody suffering lasting negative effects from them and the evidence is clear that they are keeping people away from P.

“If we ban party pills, we have to be prepared to see people go back to methamphetamine, with all the death and destruction that goes with it.”

Mr Bowden called on the Minister for Drug Policy, Jim Anderton, to also undertake research into the risks associated with removing party pills from the market.

“It’s only fair when looking at risk to compare that risk to the alternative. In this case that risk is young people heading back to the street and the gangs for deadly illegal drugs, and that’s in nobody’s interests.

“A lot of funding has been made available to look into potential harms of BZP, but was the same effort put into looking at the possible benefits? The research is out of balance and that doesn’t make for good policy making.”

Mr Bowden said prohibiting BZP would simply hand the party pill industry back

to criminals. “Making things illegal doesn't stop people taking them, it just makes the whole behavior that much more dangerous,” he said.

“A number of countries including Australia and America are struggling with methamphetamine just like we were. They are not getting grip on it. Party pills have been a partial solution that was working here and other countries were taking note.”

Mr Bowden said thousands of jobs and small businesses would be lost if party pills were banned.

New Zealand's social tonics industry will discuss what our next steps will be over the coming weeks.

“While today's report is disappointing, we remain convinced that having legal access to safer, regulated alternatives to illegal drugs is critical to minimizing drug related harm. We are particularly disappointed that the EACD report doesn't seem to address the risks inherent in prohibition,” said Mr Bowden.

_ENDS