



COMMENTS ON GLOBAL COMMISSION REPORT

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OVERVIEW

The report is an excellent document that effectively summarises the evidence on cannabis use, the consequences of cannabis use and the legal issues associated with cannabis. Strengths of the report include:

- i) Scholarly presentation and review**
- ii) Impartiality**
- iii) Balance between health and legal issues**

RELEVANT NEW ZEALAND RESEARCH: PREVALENCE

Findings from the Christchurch Health and Development Study (CHDS) and the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study (DMHDS) show that by age 25:

- i) Nearly 80% of young people have used cannabis**
- ii) In the region of 10% have met standardised DSM criteria for cannabis dependence**

RELEVANT NEW ZEALAND RESEARCH: HEALTH CONSEQUENCES

Findings from the CHDS and DMHDS have shown that increasing use of cannabis is associated with increasing risks of:

- i) Psychosis or psychotic symptoms**
- ii) Depression**
- iii) Other illicit drug use**
- iv) School drop out and educational under achievement**
- v) Motor Vehicle accidents**
- vi) Impaired respiratory function**

With the exception of illicit drug use, associations between cannabis use and adverse outcomes are modest.

RELEVANT NEW ZEALAND RESEARCH: CANNABIS AND THE LAW

Findings from the CHDS have suggested that the current cannabis laws in New Zealand are:

- i) Inefficient, since the great majority of users are not detected.**
- ii) Discriminating, since certain groups (male; Maori) are more likely to be arrested than others with the same level of use.**
- iii) Ineffective, since personal rates of use do not decline following arrest or conviction.**

SUMMARY OF NEW ZEALAND EVIDENCE

The New Zealand evidence is generally very consistent with the main findings and conclusions of the GCC report. They show that:

- i) Cannabis is widely used and abused.**
- ii) Cannabis has pervasive but generally quite weak effects on health and well being. (The exception to this is the very strong links between cannabis and progression to other illicit drug use.)**
- iii) The present cannabis laws are not effective and are discriminatory.**

THE REGULATION OF CANNABIS USE IN NEW ZEALAND

Given the accumulating evidence on cannabis use and consequences, there is a clear need to revisit existing legislation to provide an effective and rational approach to cannabis policy. This debate has unfortunately been stifled as a result of the adverse consequences of MMP.

The GCC report implies that there is a continuum of responses that range from complete legislation to complete prohibition.

THE NEED FOR A “GREY” SOLUTION

There are good reasons for arguing that both complete legislation and complete prohibition are likely to be ineffective or impractical solutions. It follows that solution to the regulation of cannabis will need to be situated in the middle ground between these extremes.

SOME SUGGESTED PRINCIPLES FOR MODIFYING CURRENT POLICY AND PRACTICE

- 1) Simple possession should be treated as a “misdemeanour” that attracts only minor penalty e.g. diversion, fines, expiation etc. The use of criminal conviction should be avoided.**
- 2) The production and supply of cannabis for profit should be treated as a criminal offence with penalties aligned to the extent of the operation.**
- 3) The supply of cannabis to minors (under 18) should be strongly discouraged and treated as a serious criminal offence.**

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- 4) Driving under the influence of cannabis should be treated as an offence of similar concern and gravity as drink driving.**
- 5) There is a need for public health messages on cannabis to describe the risks of the drug and the availability of services.**
- 6) At all points of the legal system, the primary focus in dealing with cannabis users should be upon harm minimisation and treatment (if needed) rather than with punitive responses.**