



**Alcopops**  
**Adjournment**  
**House of Representatives**

19 March 2009

Sharon Grierson MP

**Ms GRIERSON** (Newcastle) (12.44 pm)—It is important for every member of parliament to put on the public record their position regarding our responsibility to give a very strong message to all communities across this country that we do not accept the pattern of binge drinking—a new sign of alcoholic dependence, particularly amongst our young people—that has emerged in this nation. The decision by the Liberal-National coalition and Senator Fielding not to support the legislation on alcohol that would see an impost on this drug of addiction that is so attractive in the form of alcopops and so affordable will cause huge harm and put our young people at risk.

I stand as the member for Newcastle, a city that has the second highest number of alcohol related assaults in the state of New South Wales, following on the heels of Wilcannia. That is how severe the problem is in my electorate. We have been assisted by this government. We have been assisted through the \$53 million program that is in place. Newcastle City Council put in an excellent submission and received \$250,000 to address this serious issue. I cannot believe that anyone would play politics with such an important message.

I also stand as the mother of two young adult daughters. Normal life experiences and observations would say to us that we have a responsibility to do all we can to undo the harm that is happening in our communities. For many years I watched my daughters' friends choose what was so well marketed and so available—alcopops. It is still occurring. My very good friends and neighbours, at the end of last year, hosted a party after their daughter's year 10 formal and were removing from other parents four-packs of alcopops. The parents were saying, 'Oh, I'll leave this with you.' The hosts' response was, 'There won't be any alcohol consumed by these 16-year-old girls tonight.' It is such a pervasive thing in our culture now.

I am not going into all of the different political arguments put forward in this debate. This was a chance to give a strong message, a united, bipartisan message, to the people of Australia that we care sufficiently about our youth to take any measure we can to protect them. There is no acceptance by the public that this government

is being duplicitous by just trying to raise revenue and not address the problem. With the COAG agreement of \$872 million worth of funding and a prevention agenda looking at alcohol, tobacco and obesity, these problems will be tackled in earnest. But the cultural problem that we all face is such a huge moral issue that I think the public will be very disappointed at the actions of those who opposed the alcopops legislation.

I cannot say enough about the risky situations that young girls face. Having been a school principal, I have seen kids given a four-pack for their birthday at 12, at 13. I have counselled young girls who have been put in situations where they were at risk of sexual abuse, physical abuse and harm to themselves. I have counselled young boys who have been the victims of violence at the end of alcohol binge drinking by young people. I am absolutely disappointed and I say democracy has let down the people of Australia. It has definitely let down the young people in my electorate.

I am very concerned as well, as the chair of the Joint Standing Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, at that revenue now missing in the budget. This is not the time to play with a budget. The Audit Office's role is important and I do not ever want to see it compromised—that is, the role of the National Audit Office and the Auditor-General—and I guess every member will stand up and say what has been compromised by this decision in the budget. But I want to see us always accountable for what we do here. But the accountability the public will be looking at now is the fact that we have let them down and we have seriously let down our youth of Australia by not passing the legislation.