



**Sharon Grierson MP
Federal Member for Newcastle**

**13 March 2008
PARLIAMENTARY MEMBER'S STATEMENT**

ALCOHOL ABUSE

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (9.51 a.m.) - After raising this issue in the last fortnight of parliamentary sittings, I am delighted to again speak on the same matter and be able to commend the Prime Minister for his announcement on Monday of a \$53 million national strategy to address the binge drinking epidemic that young Australians are experiencing. The need is dire. Our young people are too important to be left unassisted in the challenging years of their lives, when they experience an intensity of emotions and desires, when peer pressure has such influence upon them, but when they also lack the life experience and knowledge to always exercise sound judgement. An excellent package was announced: \$14.4 million to invest in community level initiatives, particularly in sporting organisations, to confront the culture of binge drinking; \$19.1 million to intervene earlier to assist young people and ensure that they assume some responsibility personally for their binge drinking; and \$20 million to fund advertising that confronts young people with the costs and consequences of binge drinking. It is an excellent package. It will have success. Certainly in Newcastle we hope it does.

As *The 7.30 Report* on Monday night reported, our city is in the middle of a debate on alcohol abuse and binge drinking and its impact. The Liquor Administration Board will soon hand down a decision about closing times in the city, after police requests for a 1 am lockdown and 3 am closure. Although this is not supported as widely, perhaps, by young people, the process is the correct one. The decision, whatever it is, has to be respected, supported and hopefully evaluated by everyone involved. Residents, hoteliers, young people, businesses and workers are all, rightly, having their say on this issue. It is being debated widely, and I thank the media in my city for encouraging that. The deliberations on closing times are happening. In Newcastle, hotels do close at various times through the morning, and movement throughout the city of revellers has become a major problem.

With the Prime Minister's announcement it is a good time to look closely at the causes of alcohol abuse and binge drinking, particularly among young people. Some of the issues young people have raised with me are the pressures of juggling study and work, boredom, lack of entertainment venues, peer pressure, lack of understanding and education about the risks of

excessive drinking, thinking it is okay, problematic family relationships, and exposure to family and community patterns of excessive alcohol consumption. I note that some of the Prime Minister's package—education, advertising and early intervention—will help to address some of those pressures that young people face. But we cannot become fun police. Young people do need to express themselves. They do need to have good times. But they need to do it in a way that is not harmful to themselves. They are clearly saying, though, that too few hotels offer live entertainment, that drink spiking happens and that drug selling happens. Those combinations, as we know, are lethal. I do commend the Prime Minister's announcement. Today I commit to Newcastle that I will do all I can to ensure that this \$53 million investment brings real benefits for our community. *(Time expired)*