

NEWSLETTER



August 2014

PO Box 4736
HIGGINS ACT 2615
Tel: 02 62542961
Email: mcconnell@ffdlr.org.au
Web: www.ffdlr.org.au
ISSN 1444-200

NEXT MEETING

Thursday 28 August 2014, 7.30pm
St Ninian's Uniting Church hall,
cnr Mouat and Brigalow Sts, LYNEHAM

Meetings are followed by refreshments and time for a chat.

Contents

- ▶ Editorial
False hopes in the drug war
- ▶ Police chiefs admit drugs they seize are just the tip of the iceberg
- ▶ The level of control doesn't match the associated harm.
- ▶ The war on drugs is lost – legalise the heroin trade
- ▶ 'Fair trade' cocaine and 'conflict-free' opium: the future of online drug marketing
- ▶ Annual ACT ATODA Sector Conference Sept 2014

Editorial

False hopes in the drug war

In the past few months something of a miracle has happened.

It happened in April this year in the context of the release of the report by the Australian Crime Commission. The media release from the ACC said this:

"New evidence released today in the Australian Crime Commission's Illicit Drug Data Report 2012-13 reveals seizures and arrests of nearly all drug types across the country were at record highs."

Minister for Justice, Michael Keenan, at Melbourne's Alfred Hospital released the report saying:

"The information released today is as encouraging as it is challenging. Law enforcement is making significant inroads in the fight against illicit drugs. We're detecting more criminals and disrupting more illicit drugs before they hit the streets," Mr Keenan said.

"But there is much more work to be done and this report also provides critical evidence so that decision makers and law enforcement officers can develop further strategies to undermine the business models of organised crime and combat the threat of illicit drugs."

...drug seizures for 2010 was a miniscule 2.9 percent of that consumed

since the release of the ACC data. We can discount the Minister for Justice because he is just reading from a prepared speech about which he has little knowledge or understanding.

Well, we have heard that or something similar many times before. It is not new. Seizures and arrests are up so we must be making a difference. We haven't won yet but there is much more to do. We are spending \$X millions and promise more in this fight.

This year's report is accompanied with colourful info graphics to emphasise that the almost 102,000 arrests are the highest on record and that the drug seizure numbers of almost 87,000 are also the highest on record.

While the data may look dramatic and have some marginal use it does not show whether progress is actually being made in this war on drugs. It essentially shows increased drug availability/use and/or increased police activity. It does not show the impact the arrests or seizures might have made on the drug market.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated total consumption of the major drug group in 2010 at 247,092kg and drug seizures according to the ACC amounted to 7,131kg. Therefore drug seizures for 2010 was a miniscule 2.9 percent of that consumed. This is a more realistic measure of progress in this war on drugs. A result that would not trouble any supplier but if publicised by the ACC would be an embarrassment to it and all those promoting the war on drugs.

One could also argue that increased arrests are taking the manufacturers and dealers off the streets and thus are having a significant impact. Well, no. The vast majority of arrests are of users - 81.4 percent in fact, while only 16.8 percent of arrests are of dealers.

But will the arrests of those 83,000 users make a difference? This arrest rate of users is only about 3 percent of the millions of people who use drugs in Australia. How many people need to be arrested to make a real difference? And do we measure the collateral damage and cost of bringing these people in contact with the criminal justice system?

Has there been any realistic comments by anyone of importance since the release of the ACC data. We can discount the Minister for Justice because he is just reading from a prepared speech about which he has little knowledge or understanding.

Well yes there has, and this is the miracle. The Melbourne Herald Sun carried this as a headline: Police chiefs admit drugs they seize are just the tip of the iceberg. In the newspaper article AFP Commissioner Tony Negus admitted "This isn't a problem law enforcement can arrest its way out of." This may be the first time a serving member of the AFP has admitted that the current system of trying to stop drugs using the criminal justice system hasn't worked.

Sometimes miracles come in pairs because the same newspaper

report also quoted: “It’s not a war we will ever finally win,” Mr Abbott said on 3AW. “The war on drugs is a war you are going to lose.”

So having realised and publicly announced this reality will he do something more sensible about it? Well he went on to say: “You may not ever win it, but you’ve always got to fight it.”

Hmmm. I had my hopes up for a little while.

Police chiefs admit drugs they seize are just the tip of the iceberg

Keith Moor, Herald Sun, April 29, 2014

Commissioner Tony Negus of the Australian Federal Police has said tackling the illicit drug problem goes beyond just police work.

POLICE on Tuesday admitted that despite record seizures and arrests, they are still only detecting the tip of the drug iceberg.

Federal and state police chiefs confirmed every type of illicit drug is readily available on the streets.

On Tuesday, they appealed for community help to try to counter the drug pandemic crippling the nation.

The grim warnings from AFP boss Tony Negus and Victoria Police deputy commissioner Graham Ashton came as Prime Minister Tony Abbott declared the drug war is unwinnable.

But he vowed his government would fight it as fiercely as humanly possible.

“It’s not a war we will ever finally win,” Mr Abbott said on 3AW.

“The war on drugs is a war you are going to lose.

“You may not ever win it, but you’ve always got to fight it.”

He will have an ally in that fight in Opposition Leader Bill Shorten.

Mr Shorten contacted the Herald Sun to congratulate it on its coverage of the ice pandemic wreaking havoc in Victoria.

“Your story on ice was very timely as it is a real issue in our community,” he said.

“It doesn’t always make it to the national political issue of the day, but for a lot of people it’s a more immediate challenge than a lot of the other stuff we bang on about.”

An Australian Crime Commission report released on Tuesday painted a bleak picture of the size of the nation’s illicit drug problem.

“We’re intentionally using the term pandemic in terms of ice,” ACC chief executive officer Chris Dawson said.

“It’s akin to the cocaine crack problem in the USA.”

Mr Negus and Mr Ashton both said tackling the illicit drug problem went beyond just police.

“This isn’t a problem law enforcement can arrest its way out of,” Mr Negus said.

Mr Ashton said despite record seizures of drugs in the past year

there were no shortages on the street.

“It tells me we have got hold of the tip of the iceberg, or the tiger by the tail if you like,” Mr Ashton said.

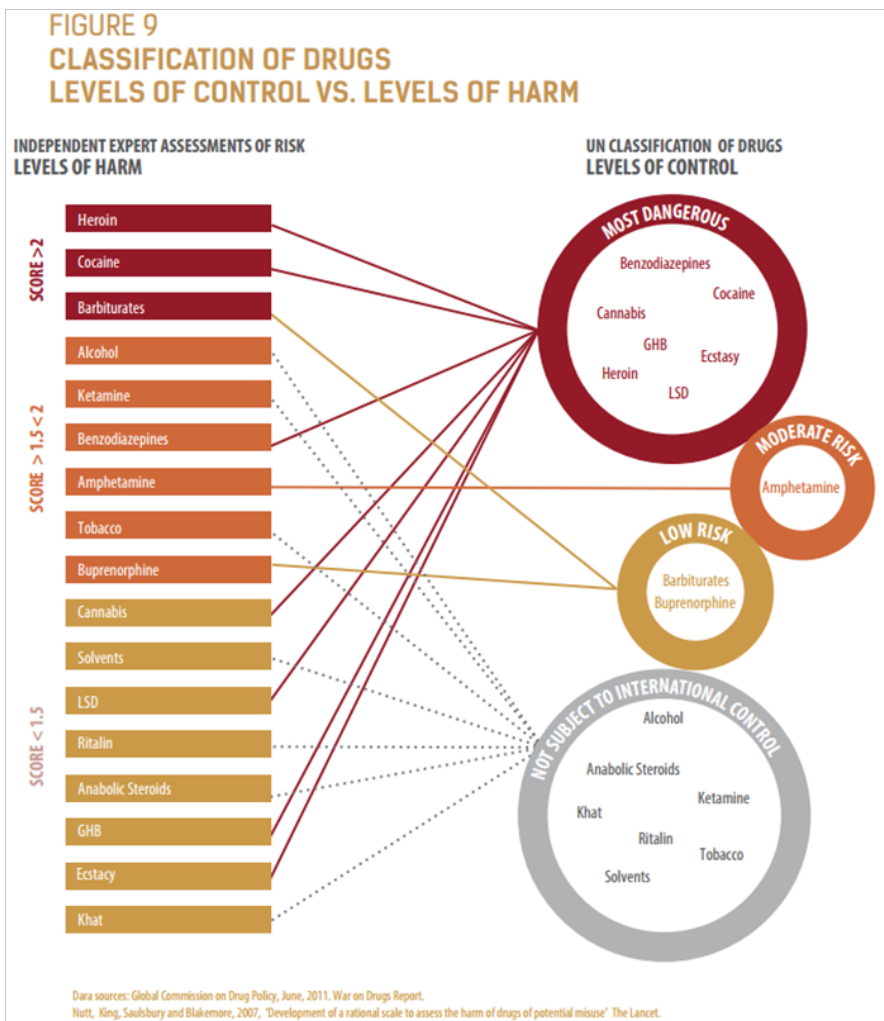
“It just highlights to me that police are only part of the solution.

“So we need obviously the investment in the health sector. There is a great education message to be communicated to the youth.

“The intimate involvement of family in trying to deal with this menace as well is really, really important.”

The level of control doesn’t match the associated harm.

source: <http://idpc.net/publications/2014/06/not-just-in-transit-drugs-the-state-and-society-in-west-africa>



The war on drugs is lost – legalise the heroin trade

Comment by: William Patey, British ambassador to Afghanistan from 2010-2012, The Guardian, Wednesday 25 June 2014

I did not believe it before I went to Afghanistan. But it’s now clear that prohibition is no answer to this deadly scourge

When Tony Blair deployed British troops in Afghanistan, ending the illicit production and supply of opium was cited as a key objective. In 2001 the prime minister linked heroin use in the UK with opium cultivation in Afghanistan: “The arms the Taliban buy are paid for by the lives of young British people buying their drugs. This is another part of the regime we should destroy.” Yet after 10 years of effort with tens of thousands of troops in

the country, and having spent billions trying to reduce poppy cultivation, Afghans are growing more opium than ever before.

As the December US troop draw-down deadline approaches, the UN Office of Drugs and Crime estimates that last year Afghanistan produced nearly \$3bn worth of opium, and its derivatives heroin and morphine. Since 2002 the US has provided more than \$7bn for counter-narcotics efforts and agriculture stabilisation programmes.

John Sopko, the special inspector general for Afghan reconstruction, told a US Congress subcommittee recently: “On my trips to Afghanistan in 2013 and earlier this year, no one at the (US) embassy could convincingly explain to me how the US government counter-narcotics efforts are making a meaningful impact on the narcotics trade or how they will have a significant impact after.” The illicit global trade in drugs has an estimated annual turnover of \$320bn and the war to stop it costs \$100bn a year.

In a country such as Afghanistan, with weak institutions, remote areas ripe for poppy cultivation and a well-established smuggling network, we are fighting a lost battle. It is well understood that not only does illicit trade migrate towards “ungoverned spaces”, particularly those inhabited by people in dire poverty, it then makes matters far worse.

In 2012 the International Institute for Strategic Studies published *Drugs, Insecurity and Failed States: The Problems of Prohibition*, concluding that “the present enforcement regime is not only failing to win the ‘war on drugs’, it is also a major cause of violence and instability in producer and transit countries”. Afghanistan exemplifies this in spades. The opium trade is corrupting Afghan institutions at all levels – arming insurgents and warlords, and undermining security and development.

In short, the war on drugs has failed in Afghanistan, and without removing the demand for illicit opium, driven by illicit heroin use in consumer countries, this failure is both predictable and inevitable. If we cannot deal effectively with supply, then the only alternative would seem to be to try to limit the demand for illicit drugs by making a supply of them available from a legally regulated market.

Half of the world’s opium is grown for the legal opiates market of which the UK grows 3,500 hectares. This legitimate drug trade does not fund the Taliban and warlords, and there is no reason why it cannot be expanded to include non-medical trade and use.

I am not the first former ambassador who has served in a drug-producing country to call for an end to prohibition. In 2001 my colleague Sir Keith Morris, the former UK ambassador to Colombia, told the BBC that if drugs were legalised and regulated the “benefits to life, health and liberty of drug users and the life, health and property of the whole population would be immense”.

Many more have made the same plea. In 2002 the home affairs select committee called on Britain to initiate a debate at the United Nations on alternatives to drug prohibition – including legal regulation. One of its members was David Cameron MP.

I understand why some politicians are reluctant to take up this debate. Before going to Afghanistan my own instincts told me that it could not be right to decriminalise drugs. But my

experience there has convinced me that all political parties need to engage seriously, without trying to score points off each other.

I was deeply moved when I came across an article written by a mother who had lost both of her sons to heroin overdoses. In the unregulated prohibited market there is no quality control, no purity guide, and no safer use advice. Had her two boys been able to acquire their heroin from a doctor, they might well still be with us. In fact thousands of dependent users around Europe are already prescribed heroin, including a handful in the UK, with great benefits to them and society as a whole.

Tony Blair was absolutely right to make the link between opium production in southern Afghanistan and heroin use in Britain. But it is clear now that he and others were wrong to think this link could be broken through military action internationally and police enforcement domestically.

Putting governments in control of the global drugs trade through legal regulation will remove the incentive for those in fragile, insecure regions to produce and traffic drugs. Putting doctors and pharmacists in control of supply in the UK will save lives, improve health and reduce crime. Ultimately we could improve the underlying lack of wellbeing that drives so many in the UK and Afghanistan into lives of degradation and misery.

For the sake of both Afghans and British citizens, senior politicians must take responsibility for the failings of global prohibition, and take control of the drug trade through legal regulation.

‘Fair trade’ cocaine and ‘conflict-free’ opium: the future of online drug marketing

James Martin, Senior Lecturer in Criminology at Macquarie University, *The Conversation*, 12 Aug 2014

*Disclosure Statement: This article is based on research drawn from *Drugs on the Dark Net* recently published by Palgrave Macmillan.*

In October 2013, US authorities shut down Silk Road, the world’s largest cryptomarket. At the time, prosecutors claimed that the closure of the so-called “eBay of illicit drugs” represented the beginning of the end for online drug distribution.

This assertion has since proved incorrect. Over the past ten months, drug trading on the “dark net” has recovered rapidly. It is now estimated to be at least twice the level it was at the height of Silk Road’s popularity.

A new generation of cryptomarkets is supplying the expanding online drug trade. They are populated by thousands of dealers who use digital encryption to communicate with clients, spruik their wares and conduct illicit transactions.

For dealers, selling drugs online offers significant advantages over face-to-face retailing. They have immediate access to a huge and steadily growing international customer base. They are also able to sell drugs without physically interacting with customers, thereby decreasing the risk of arrest by undercover police.

Perhaps most importantly, the anonymity and geographical separation of online drug trading eliminates the possibility of violence at the hands of rival dealers. This differs significantly from the conventional drug trade where organised crime groups

use serious, often lethal force to eliminate competitors and establish control over drug-retailing territory and trafficking routes.

The inability of dealers to use violence is one of the most striking and potentially socially beneficial implications associated with the rise of the online drug trade. It also raises an intriguing question: how do drug dealers compete with one another when violence and intimidation are no longer viable options?

Customer feedback plays a crucial role in regulating online drug markets. As is the case with legitimate trading websites such as eBay or Amazon Market, all customers who purchase drugs via a cryptomarket are encouraged to leave feedback about the quality of goods received and the level of service provided by particular dealers.

This information takes the form of a rating out of five stars, as well as more detailed comments regarding the speed of delivery and the sophistication of “stealth” measures used to conceal drugs in the post.

Critically, dealers are unable to alter the feedback that their customers upload. This means that both positive and negative reviews are permanently recorded on a dealer’s publicly listed “seller page”.

Feedback therefore provides prospective customers with an objective indication of the dealer’s past reliability and the perceived quality of the drugs they have sold. Research indicates that this information is central to consumer decision-making when considering an online drug purchase.

The importance of maintaining a blemish-free reputation means that online dealers are often highly conscientious in cultivating positive relationships with their customers. Top-ranked dealers (those who have attracted the greatest levels of positive customer feedback) regularly communicate with their clients using rhetoric more familiar in the world of conventional corporate retailing.

Understand that your Feedback is the foundation of our business ... If you have ANY problems, please contact us before giving us a bad rating. In 99% of the cases we are able to satisfy you! Please leave also your honest feedback, to help following buyers get an opinion about us :)

– Excerpt from seller page – Tormarket, accessed December 11, 2013

Online drug vendors typically employ a range of corporate retailing techniques. This includes providing mission statements, “oaths to customers” and detailed “terms and conditions” advising international shipping times and purchasing procedures. In a further stark contrast to the conventional drug trade, many even offer full or partial refunds for drugs that are found to be sub-standard or are intercepted by customs.

Managing the expectations of existing customers is only part of the challenge for dealers operating in this new, hyper-competitive online environment. They must also create innovative marketing strategies to attract new customers.

Commonly used methods are bulk purchasing discounts, loyalty programs and periodic promotional campaigns on holidays such as New Year’s Eve and “International Pot Day”. Other gimmicks include “two-for-one” specials, lottery giveaways and free drug samples.

Even more intriguing is the use of marketing strategies that mimic corporate social responsibility initiatives. These may take the form of financial sponsorship of organisations likely to be viewed favourably by online drug consumers. For example, one

Australian drug vendor recently advertised their enterprise as a:

Proud financial supporter of WikiLeaks and Bluelight.

At the more extreme end of socially progressive marketing strategies used by online dealers are those that involve the promotion of drugs on the basis of supposedly “ethical”, “fair trade”, “organic” or “conflict-free” sources of supply.

We are a team of libertarian cocaine dealers. We never buy coke from cartels! We never buy coke from police! We help farmers from Peru, Bolivia and some chemistry students in Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina. We do fair trade!

– Excerpt from seller page – Evolution, accessed December 28, 2013

This is the best opium you will try, by purchasing this you are supporting local farmers in the hills of Guatemala and you are not financing violent drug cartels.

– Excerpt from seller page – Evolution, accessed March 28, 2014

Naturally, it is impossible to verify these claims. It seems unlikely that such descriptions are accurate given the myriad problems that exist certifying similar schemes in the conventional economy. However, the fact that online dealers are employing these strategies points to the creation of an increasingly gentrified online drug trade.

This digital alternative to street-based drug retailing rewards dealers for using innovative and non-violent methods of competition, and for providing quality goods and services. Drug consumers, meanwhile, are offered an unprecedented range of choice and information about products available. They are also treated with a civility that reflects their purchasing power.

While there remain serious dangers inherent to buying illicit drugs online, including the risk of lethal product adulteration, the rise of cryptomarket-facilitated drug trading presents a range of advantages over the violence and exploitation associated with the conventional drug trade.

Drugs on the Dark Net is out now from Palgrave Macmillan. Annual ACT ATOD Sector Conference

Annual ACT ATODA Sector Conference Sept 2014

The ACT Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drugs Sector Conference aims to facilitate access to the latest evidence relating to best practice and seek to strengthen the capacity, skills and knowledge base of workers.

Alcohol, tobacco and other drug research policy and practice are continually evolving. Various approaches underpin our understanding of and responses to the related harms, and have a direct impact on the choices, information and interventions available for people who use and are affected by psychoactive substances. This conference will bring together researchers, practitioners, policy makers, consumers and families to discuss real world scenarios and to help us consider their implications. Topics include:

Medical cannabis, E-cigarettes, Drug driving, New psychoactive substances.

Date: Wednesday 24 September 2014.

Time: 9am – 5pm.

Venue: National Portrait Gallery of Australia (King Edward Terrace, Parkes).

More info & registration: www.atoda.org.au/activities/conference.