

## NEWSLETTER

November 2015



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### Annual General Meeting and BBQ

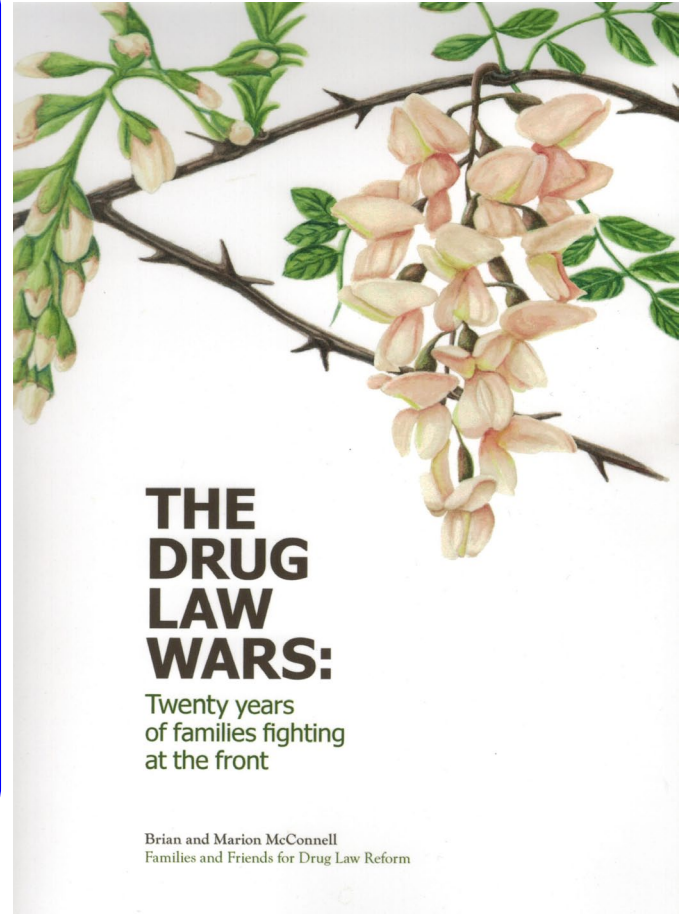
The FFDLR Annual General Meeting for 2015 is to be held on Thursday 26 November. It will include election of office bearers and presentation of the President's and Treasurer's Annual Reports. **Please note that Brian will not be seeking re-election as President. Please consider nominating.**

This will be our last meeting for 2015 and will be preceded by an end of year BBQ. It would be great to see as many of you as possible attend; spouses and partners are welcome. The BBQ will commence at 6pm followed by the AGM at 7.30pm.

It will be held at the home of Bill and Mary Bush, who will supply meat and salad etc for the BBQ but ask members to bring along a sweet or drink.

Please RSVP by Tuesday 24th November to Bill and Mary by email at bushwil@velocitynet.com.au or phone 6257 1786. You will be given their address when you reply.

Looking forward to this important and enjoyable end of year event.



### Purchasing a book

The Drug Law Wars books are available through the website [ffdlr.org.au](http://ffdlr.org.au) by downloading a simple order form and attaching it to an email to the treasurer, Bob McFadden. Payment can be made by direct credit to FFDLR's account details of which together with Bob's email are on the order form.

OR you can post the order form with cheque to FFDLR, PO Box 7186, KALEEN 2617 and a book will be posted to you.

Cost of the book is \$25 + postage of \$2.

The book would make a great Christmas present to let your friends know what you have been involved in for the last 20 years and also to further raising awareness about the need for Drug Law Reform.

### Editorial

#### BOOK LAUNCH - 18 November, 2015

*The Drug Law Wars: Twenty years of families fight at the front*

The launch of FFDLR's book to commemorate its twenty years of activity was a memorable occasion. Friendships between original members of FFDLR were renewed and experiences recalled. It was pleasing to see some members of the ACT Assembly present. The Reception Room at the ACT Legislative Assembly was brimming with conversation from all sectors of the community as a large number of participants enjoyed the refreshments and the strumming of the ukelele by Alison Oakleigh before the official proceedings began. The display of books was attractively set up by members of ATODA and the books were selling well.

Carrie Fowlie, CEO of the Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Association, welcomed the audience and introduced Senator Katy Gallagher to launch the book.

Katy began her speech with the following words:

- For anyone who wants to understand the history, development and implementation of Australia's drug laws this is the book for you.
- For anyone who wants to understand the human cost and the personal stories of lives lost and families left heartbroken this is the book for you.
- For anyone who wants to understand other alternatives to standard drug policy and laws this is the book for you.

Katy went on to say

'The Drug Law Wars' chronicles the earliest days of a community led movement - from the days before Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform to the forming of the organisation, to the development and expansion of the families led model - not just across Australia but to other parts of the world. It's a history that has been shaped by the dedication, perseverance, eternal optimism and sheer persistence of a small group of individuals who managed against the odds to spread an alternate message to the one commonly understood across the community.

Katy's speech was not the typical political speech one often hears on such occasions but a very human response to the hopes and despair of a community organisation that had been trying to bring change in a difficult area.

Whilst the book examines in honest detail the gains made it also looks at the losses as well. Although on my reading of the book – these can't be seen as losses – sure the ultimate goal wasn't realised in every case – safe injecting room, heroin trial stand out as examples here – it is clear that every campaign, won or lost, continued to progress the principles of the organisation – through fierce advocacy and evidence based arguments – calm, considered and rational arguments at that – understanding and awareness of Australia's drug policies, the needs and rights of users and the needs and rights of families were enhanced.

Following is part of Marion and Brian McConnell's response.

Never in my wildest dreams did I think that when this group began back in 1995 following the tragic loss of so many young lives would we be here today, 20 years later still advocating for change to our drug laws. The book tells of what has been for many of us a long unrelenting battle, a battle that I believe has proved to be one of the hardest if not the hardest social justice issue on which to make traction. Difficult issues like abortion and gay rights have made progress over time, issues like poverty and homelessness whilst by no means stabilised at least are broadly discussed and debated.

Drug Law Reform is not the taboo subject that it was in 1995 but even though drugs are implicated in many of the most costly social issues it is still difficult to get political parties to openly discuss the full scope of the

research and evidence that advocates a move away from prohibition. I hope this book gives them not only the courage to do so but gives them very good reasons why it is essential that they do so.

Many of us lost our family members because the drugs they received were unregulated and uncontrolled. We want drugs to be less available to our kids but if they are going to use drugs we want them to live through the experience without adverse health consequences. This would be more likely if drugs were treated as a health and social issue and not a law enforcement one and drugs were controlled and regulated by governments. As Johann Hari said "Criminalisation makes drugs much more deadly, and punishment makes addiction radically worse".

We are at a tipping point. Change is imminent. Even the Office at the United Nations has just this month put out a report - *What comes after the war on drugs* the introduction of which says "In April 2016, diplomats, experts and civil society actors from around the world will gather for three days at a rare Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, called to address the world drug problem (UNGASS 2016). This gathering reflects a growing sense in some quarters, particularly in the Western Hemisphere, that the so-called 'War on Drugs' has failed, and that global drug policy needs rethinking." This coming from a United Nations that in 1998 declared the world would be drug free by 2008.

Our personal hope is that the launch and reading of this book will help all of us, all of you to understand that the 'War on Drugs' is a war on our young people and real peace offerings need to begin.

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The title of the book is styled on a war theme. It is a symbolic twist on US President Nixon's War on Drugs and is presented as a series of themes rather than a chronological record. FFDLR has been engaged in a fight for better drug laws and better drug policies, not unlike any world conflict, not unlike any war. The symbolism of the front cover artwork will also become clear when the chapter, *Remembering the fallen* has been read.

The Book can be purchased through the website at a cost of \$25 + \$2 for postage.

## Media on the book

### The war on drugs 'has failed', say experts

The New Daily, Nov 13, 2015, John Stapleton

Inappropriately treating drug addiction as a law enforcement issue rather than a medical and personal problem have led to many unnecessary deaths.

The approach by Australia's politicians has been arguably inept, whipping up moral hysteria in the community for electoral gain.

The failure of successive governments to accept the advice of policy experts has led to a booming drug trade,

according to experts. The trade is apparently so profitable the Australian Crime Commission admitted this year that hundreds of millions of dollars are now being funnelled by crime gangs out of Australia to fund terrorist groups such as Islamic State.

A new book *The Drug Law Wars: Twenty years of families fighting at the front*, to be launched by Senator Katy Gallagher in Canberra on Wednesday, details both the suffering of families and broader social consequences. Rather than arguing for a crackdown, they claim prohibition has failed and many of their children would still be alive if the country had adopted a more liberal approach.

The book comes at a time when there is a worldwide rethink on drug policy. The United Nations General Assembly is holding a special session next April following the release of a report titled *What Comes After the Drug Wars?*

The last special session on drugs was held in 1998. Its focus was the total elimination of drugs from the world. Today there is a push to rethink an approach which has proved counterproductive. Never before have so many governments voiced displeasure with the international drug control regime, including the conduct of the International Narcotics Control Board.

*The Drug Law Wars* has been compiled by the volunteer organisation Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform (FFDLR).

The group began with a group of grieving parents who refused to accept a system that was not protecting their kids.

Co-founder Marion McConnell said prohibition guaranteed a profitable drug trade and therefore the continuing availability of drugs to young people.

"I first found out my son was using heroin when he overdosed close by our home," she said.

"The ambulance arrived but the police also attended. I didn't understand why the police were involved when my son just needed medical help. My immediate thought was this was wrong. The law should not be involved. This is a story of perseverance by distressed families through times of hope and times of despair."

The FFDLR have many influential supporters. Mick Palmer, former Commissioner of the Australian Federal Police, told *The New Daily*: "Seeing this as simply a law enforcement issue has proven a failed exercise. It hasn't worked, never worked and has no chance of working."

Commissioner Palmer said it was difficult to get political traction for drug law reform because being "tough on drugs" was an easy message to deliver.

"In my experience it is hard to get politicians even to enter the debate," he said.

"That climate is changing. It has taken a long time for the lights to come on but we are closer to meaningful political debate than we have ever been."

As well as moving stories from affected families, *The Drug Law Wars* contains contributions from some of Australia's leading health professionals.

Director of think tank Australia21 Emeritus Professor Bob Douglas praised FFDLR for being at the forefront of efforts to inject sanity into the debate.

"The cost of the war on drugs to Australian society is huge and its benefits are negligible," Professor Douglas writes.

"At last this is beginning to sink in, both at the national and international level."

Professor Desmond Manderson from the ANU wrote that Australian drug laws had a long history of reflecting concerns and anxieties that had little to do with drugs.

"Over the years, each prohibition has driven traffickers and users to find alternatives, leading to an ever-expanding list of prohibited drugs. At the same time, the profits available to sellers has increased. The regime of legal prohibition has not broken the business model of the drug trade. On the contrary, it is responsible for it."

Johann Hari, author of arguably the best book ever written on the subject, *Chasing the Scream: The First and Last Days of the War on Drugs*, said the new book from the perspective of Australian families was a significant contribution to understanding the pain created by inappropriate laws and the urgent need to pursue alternatives.

"The war on drugs has killed hundreds of thousands of people across the world," he said.

"Nobody knows that better than the authors of this book. Criminalisation makes drugs much more deadly, and punishment makes addiction radically worse."

## **The war on drugs has been lost around the world, Canberra is no different**

Editorial, *The Canberra Times*, November 21, 2015

It has become clear that the war the world has waged on drugs for decades has not delivered on its intentions to eradicate the problem.

The crackdown on suppliers and traffickers and the continued persecution of drug users has not stopped people using the illicit substances or ended drug overdoses.

Countless families are still left heartbroken every year as loved ones lose their lives through the drugs they use.

This includes a number of Canberrans who have been forever linked by the tragedy of a loved one lost to drugs.

These families, led by Marion and Brian McConnell who lost a 24-year-old son to a heroin overdose in 1992, have bravely shared their pain with the world in the hope that things would change.

It is a sad indictment on our society that the group – Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform – feel that so little has been achieved in the past 20 years.

Only this year there has been clear examples of the



intolerance society still shows towards drug users, even in the case of those using illicit substances to relieve pain of chronic conditions and terminal illnesses.

The very fact that the ACT government is exploring a needle exchange program inside the Alexander Maconochie Centre shows an admission that drugs are freely entering the prison.

This is the right step for the territory in confronting the problem – accepting what cannot be controlled but regulating the use of the drug to ensure safety for users and those around them.

This same approach should be taken more broadly within the community with the legalisation of medicinal cannabis.

Regulating an industry that makes life livable for those suffering with debilitating illnesses is simply the right and just thing to do.

It is time for a wide-ranging debate on the war against drugs and in particular if it's one that society should continue to fight in the same unsuccessful way for another 20 years.

## **The UN 'wants to decriminalise all drugs'**

The New Daily, Oct 20, 2015, Rose Donohoe

Billionaire Richard Branson leaked alleged details of an embargoed report online.

Mega businessman and activist Richard Branson has claimed the United Nations is about to call on all world governments to decriminalise all drugs.

Branson, who was allegedly given access to an embargoed UN statement, wrote on his website that he felt it was important to reveal the details before the UN bowed to government pressure to change its message.

According to Branson, the report by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime was also shown to other media organisations such as the BBC.

In it, the UNODC recommends governments do away with laws which punish drug possession in small quantities and for personal use.

“My colleagues on the Global Commission on Drug Policy and I could not be more delighted, as I have stated in embargoed interviews for the likes of the BBC,” Branson wrote.

“Together with countless other tireless advocates, I've for years argued that we should treat drug use as a health issue, not as a crime.”

According to Branson, the report was set for release at the International Harm Reduction conference in Malaysia on Monday, but is still under wraps.

“As I'm writing this I am hearing that at least one government is putting an inordinate amount of pressure on the UNODC,” he wrote.

“Let us hope the UNODC, a global organisation that is part of the UN and supposed to do what is right for the

people of the world, does not do a remarkable volte-face at the last possible moment and bow to pressure by not going ahead with this important move.”

In his plea, Branson cited the billions of dollars poured into drug law enforcement that have failed to curb drug addiction.

Branson has praised Portugal's drug policy in the past, which adopted decriminalisation for possession in 2001. Since then, Portugal's drug addiction rate has dropped, while the number of addicts seeking therapy has doubled, according to the Cato Institute.

## **The UN Has Not Officially Backed a Paper Calling for the Global Decriminalization of Drugs**

time.com, Oct. 20, 2015

The paper had earlier been leaked by tycoon and drug-reform advocate Richard Branson

A UN document calling for the worldwide decriminalization of all narcotics used for personal consumption, does not have official backing of the organization, the BBC reports.

A briefing paper by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) — which recommended that countries consider “decriminalizing drug and possession for personal consumption” — reportedly came under pressure from at least one UN member nation.

The paper, prepared by Dr. Monica Beg, the head of the UNODC's HIV/AIDS section in Vienna, for discussion at a forthcoming conference, had not received official organizational backing, the BBC quoted multiple sources within the UN as saying. One representative said that Beg was merely “a middle-ranking official” expressing her professional perspective.

The document itself, news of which was prematurely released by Virgin Group founder and drug-reform advocate Richard Branson, says it “clarifies the position of UNODC” in informing country responses to drugs, “to promote a health and human-rights approach to drug policy.”

The vast majority of UN member countries still consider drug use and possession criminal offenses punishable by varying fines and durations of imprisonment, which the UNODC paper calls a “disproportionate response” leading to larger societal issues.

“Treating drug use for nonmedical purposes and possession for personal consumption as criminal offenses has contributed to public-health problems and induced negative consequences for safety, security, and human rights,” the document adds.

A UNODC spokesperson had earlier refuted media reports about the “nature and intent” of the document based on Branson's statement, as well as the rumored pressure for its withdrawal.

Read more at <http://time.com/4079216/un-drugs-decriminalization-unodc/>