

Inquiry Name: Inquiry into the use of Cannabis in Victoria

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SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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Society has advanced to the point where it is difficult to justify treating cannabis as either a drug of dependence or a drug that leads to crime. It is important to analyse the current legal situation: hard drugs such as opioids and methamphetamine are known to cause severe health problems and the response to this is to make them illegal, which causes a serious crime problem because the government cannot regulate a black market. On the other hand, tobacco and alcohol similarly cause addiction and severe health problems, as well as domestic violence, and cost the health system billions each year, but are perfectly legal to consume. On the scale of body-chemistry altering substances, our culture has ordained that the degree of harm to an individual and to society caused by a substance will be central factor to whether it is illegal.

Thus, cannabis is an outlier because it causes next to no harm to an individual when compared to the damaging effects of lifelong drinking or smoking, or abuse of hard drugs. Smoking marijuana is known to cause less damage to lungs than tobacco and casual consumption does not cause addiction anywhere near the degree of alcohol or nicotine. As we observe the legalisation of cannabis around the world, and the popularity of its consumption here in Australia, culture no longer supports criminalization. Money is the reason why cannabis is kept illegal, as it is in the vested interests of the billion-dollar alcohol and tobacco industries to quell the legalisation of a substance that could grow into a competitive market.

But people will find access to the substances they want. Criminalizing a behaviour that one wishes to deter is not the most effective practice, because the black market doesn't care about safety, or standardization, or regulation of important metrics. The prohibition era in the US is a good example of this. Before prohibition, the government could control the liquor market and regulate it, and impose taxes and levies for a healthy income, as well as keep people safe by mandating licencing and overseeing production safety. Then during prohibition, the market was let loose and people would traffic alcohol in increasingly concentrated amounts to minimize detection, which led to a market that was not able to keep its consumers safe. Crime and gang wars erupted, the mafia was in control, which is the natural effect of a market when the government does not regulate it.

Cannabis is similar. While it is illegal, it cannot be controlled. If regulated, the government can tax the sale of marijuana like it does alcohol. It could hideously over-tax it like it does tobacco, because it will make a healthy income while disincentivising abuse. It can force illegal farmers out of business by mandating growing licences that incentivise consumers to buy legal products, which can be heavily overseen by the Department of Racing, Gaming, and Liquor (r Dept. of Health).

Criminalization is not an effective deterrent to something as inevitably part of our culture as cannabis. It is illogical to send people to prison for consuming a drug that causes objectively less harm than currently legal ones, and surely this committee can see, that even if they are opposed to the idea of consuming cannabis, that is in the interests of the government as well as the people that a safe, healthy, heavily-regulated market like nicotine and alcohol is a far more prudent treatment than criminalization, which is itself a highly conservative, ill-fitting, and out-dated solution that is failing at every turn.

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File1:

File2:

File3: