

Letter to the Editor
Rotorua Daily Post, 13 January 2016

Dear Sir/Madam

Tommy Wilson's article (Legal drug real headache – RDP January 11), as do most discussing the impact of drinking in New Zealand, would have us believe that our drinking patterns and the amount we drink is ever increasing – as are the social harms as a result. This is simply not the case – but don't believe me - instead here is a snapshot of relevant information from the Ministry of Health's own surveys on alcohol use since 2007/08.

The Ministry reports that fewer of us are drinking, risky drinking has decreased, drinking-related injuries have decreased, the harm caused to us by someone else's drinking has decreased, the age which we start drinking has increased (this is a good thing, by the way) and, importantly for Mr Wilson's '*growing binge-drinking youth quake heading our way*' - binge drinking has decreased.

The fact is 80% of us drink moderately, sociably and responsibly. As Mr Wilson rightly points out a portion of this 20% who do not are addicts and need specialist support.

For the rest it is clear that young men and women, Maori and Pacific Islanders are over represented. This is as unacceptable to the alcohol industry as it is to all of us. To fix this some would say put the price up – others propose shutting the doors of pubs and bottle stores earlier and still others promote putting the drinking age up.

But none of this actually works. The old adage – it's not what we're drinking; it's the way we're drinking holds true. In other words change the behaviours that lead to risky drinking.

We believe this means all of us taking responsibility for better drinking – the pub and bottle store owner, the parent, the workmate, the friend, the person lifting a glass right now, government and industry. It's a long term conversation which will accelerate the positive changes already happening.

To see what we're doing collectively as an industry to create a moderate drinking culture take a look at cheers.org.nz.

Robert Brewer
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