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MEDIA RELEASE

Revealed: alcohol industry heavily dependent on risky drinking

20 January 2016: A new report has exposed the Australian alcohol industry's heavy reliance on risky drinkers, with over 3.8 million Aussies averaging more than four standard drinks of alcohol a day, twice the recommended health guidelines.

Targeted by the alcohol industry and branded 'super consumers', the industry's best customers represent just 20 per cent of Australians aged 14 and above, yet they account for a staggering 74.2 per cent all the alcohol consumed as a nation each year.

Risky Business, a new report prepared by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE), underlines how dependent Australia's alcohol industry has become on ensuring its best customers continue to drink at dangerously high levels.

FARE modelling reveals that if the alcohol industry's 'super consumers', the top 20 per cent of the population, reduced their consumption to within the guidelines, which recommend drinking no more than two standard drinks per day to reduce the lifetime risk of harm from alcohol-related diseases and injury, then the total alcohol consumed in Australia would decrease by a staggering 39 per cent or 38 million litres of pure alcohol.

The findings, drawn from an analysis of the study *Understanding recent trends in Australian alcohol consumption* by the Centre for Alcohol Policy Research (CAPR), also dismantle an industry narrative that relies on a decline in total annual alcohol consumption to falsely argue that Australians are drinking more moderately.

In actual fact, the decline in the amount of alcohol being consumed as a nation is masking alarming patterns of consumption in significant segments of the population.

Over 1.9 million Australians drink on average more than six standard drinks per day, three times the amount outlined in the *Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol*. Just under a million Australians consume on average more than eight standard drinks per day, equivalent to more than four times the recommended guidelines.

FARE Chief Executive Michael Thorn says as well as dispelling industry falsehoods regarding the extent of alcohol misuse, the report exposes the alcohol industry's dirty little secret.

"The alcohol industry is totally dependent on risky drinking. This is its dirty little secret. It's an industry built on identifying, targeting and exploiting its best customers, and ensuring that almost four million



Foundation for Alcohol
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Australians continue to misuse and abuse alcohol and are responsible for nearly three quarters of all the alcohol consumed by the nation,” Mr Thorn said.

Mr Thorn says the alcohol industry’s economic dependence on risky drinkers explains, but does not excuse, its complete failure to encourage its customers to drink within the recommended health guidelines.

“The alcohol industry markets this vague, undefined and unhelpful concept of ‘responsible drinking’ while all but ignoring the existence of the Australian drinking guidelines. Not because it might have a small impact on its bottom line, but because doing so would result in economic failure. If the industry’s best customers were to drink within the guidelines, the total alcohol consumed as a nation would be reduced by 39 per cent or more than 38 million litres of pure alcohol,” Mr Thorn said.

Mr Thorn says it is for this reason that public health researchers and advocates refrain from working with the alcohol industry due to irresolvable concerns regarding its commercial vested interest. He calls on government representatives to do the same, and exclude the industry from influencing alcohol policy, if Australia is serious about reducing alcohol harms and saving lives.

ENDS

Media notes

The *Risky business* video, narrated by founder of Parton Me and former 2CC Canberra Breakfast Presenter Mr Mark Parton, can be viewed online. High resolution versions of the video together with social media infographics are available to the media by request.

Mr Michael Thorn and Mr Mark Parton are available for interview.

Media contact: Jeremy Henderson 0425 559 710

FULL VIDEO <https://vimeo.com/152113867> password: media

SHORT VIDEO <https://vimeo.com/152112498> password: media

Alcohol Truth is a Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education campaign that puts the facts at the forefront of discussion on alcohol. Alcohol Truth explores alcohol industry efforts to counter evidence-based strategies to tackle alcohol harm in Australia.

The **Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE)** is an independent, not-for-profit organisation working to stop the harm caused by alcohol. Alcohol harm in Australia is significant. Over 5,500 lives are lost every year and more than 157,000 people are hospitalised making alcohol one of our nation’s greatest preventative health challenges. For over a decade, FARE has been working with communities, governments, health professionals and police across the country to stop alcohol harms by supporting world-leading research, raising public awareness and advocating for changes to alcohol policy. In that time, FARE has helped more than 750 communities and organisations, and backed over 1,400 projects around Australia.