

From: Michael [head@hempembassy.net]
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To the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Services - Inquiry into the Exposure Draft of the *Drugs of Dependence (Cannabis Use for Medical Purposes) Amendment Bill 2014* and related discussion paper

I have been living and working in Nimbin for almost thirty years. Since I discovered the origins of the so called drug war I have been involved in a HEMP (Help End Marijuana Prohibition) Embassy we started over twenty years ago to try and educate the public about the potential of the Cannabis plant and the problems created by prohibition. It has been a big learning experience for me and I would like to share some understandings I have.

I started using Cannabis when I was in my early twenties (I'm now 66) and soon discovered my debilitating migraines had ceased to happen. They used to put me to bed for the day. Any noise was excruciating and I would usually vomit and hide under a blanket away from any light which was equally excruciating. My mother suffered the same, and some of my siblings also. I smoke Cannabis daily now and haven't had a migraine in years.

And there are many many people like me. Most do not talk openly about their choice of medicine for various reasons, mostly losing ones job! There is a massive secret underground Cannabis culture out there in every suburb from what I have seen!

Cannabis is simply a medicinal herb that is useful for so many ailments. I have met thousands of people who are daily users, for various pains, and they have settled in to hiding their use and supply but it is an essential part of their daily life. Its anti inflammatory properties make it a terrific pain reliever. Pain relief is probably the most lucrative business on Earth. I have watched many people spend every cent they have on trying to eliminate pain.

A hundred years ago I believe the three most recommended remedies for pain and illness, in order, were...alcohol, opium, cannabis. Every old herbalist book has cannabis recommended for a multitude of ailments.

Prohibiting natures best pain relievers has been the biggest social disaster of our times in my opinion. The blackmarkets that have evolved on Cannabis, the Coca plant and the Opium Poppy have created the biggest money turnover of any business on Earth, along with armaments. Remember the Taliban grows 90% of the planets Opium which becomes heroin.

As people only use these drugs to try and have less pain, or dare I say it, enjoy their lives more, I don't see why it is a criminal offense at all. It's in truth a health issue isn't it? Pain relief is big business and that's why this drug war began. It's all about profit, money.

A lot of people use Cannabis to control, or stop, other drug use which is problematic for them....alcohol, ice, heroin, pills and powders. Cannabis generally helps people keep their lives together and gives them some detachment from their emotion, the biggest problem being the expense. Many Cannabis users do not drink alcohol at all. Cannabis is popular for withdrawals from other drugs also.

The stuff they are selling as synthetic Cannabis is nothing like Cannabis at all and in fact quite the opposite from my twice only experience. It is a chemical mix that used to be a copy of THC but not anymore, sprayed on another herb, Damiana or Mugwort usually. It would not exist without prohibition although a lot of its use is at mine sites as it does not register in drug testing.

So the sooner we can roll it over from a criminal issue into a health issue with proper health advice, quality control and regulations where we know what is in a product, the better. Similar guidelines to the consumption of alcohol is a good place to start.

I recommend people be allowed to grow their own plants, up to ten for a start, and personal possession and use is no longer a crime. However, a license is needed for selling Cannabis and all sales need to have health advice, like not smoking with tobacco!

So my recommendation is simple: personal use no longer criminal at all but selling without a license is. For supply it's best kept as a cottage industry I believe so limit the size of a producer/grower so it doesn't become like Big Tobacco. The employment benefits from that will be massive. Just look at Colorado. Use American state models to learn from, it would be ridiculous not too!

I appreciate this thinking is a few steps ahead of where we are at now but it is where to aim for. So first step on the journey is medical users given approval by a doctor be allowed to grow up to ten plants, or their carers, and be allowed to possess at any time a reasonable amount (an ounce?) and be able to store a quite large amount as it is seasonal (a kilo or two?). I hesitate on amounts because someone treating cancer needs a big quantity whereas an epileptic child doesn't need much at all.

Decisions on who gets a medical cannabis permit should be solely decided by a doctor, and why be too narrow? It's hard to put this plant in a box or category, it helps a huge variety of people for a huge variety of reasons. Personal use should not be an issue. Growing your own medicine is a winner for everyone (except Big Pharma and organised crime) including the health budget in a potentially very big way.

Making it a medical product may even help to deglamourise Cannabis for the young and impressionable, which is what has happened under prohibition. The lies that have been told by Governments about drug use have made it very difficult for people to believe advice now. With open honest advice their will be far less health risks and even smoking as people are educated about tinctures and oils as a more healthy way to ingest the plant. There are massive health savings to be made by re-legalising cannabis and regulating the industry.

Most Cannabis sold in Australia is hydroponically grown by organised crime in a bath of chemicals and bred to be big and fat for it is sold by weight. Of course there is no quality control or testing of the product under prohibition.

The new 'skunk' plants have been bred for profit not health and the focus on breeding plants with high THC, 'the stoner bit' which is just 1 out of more than 100 cannabinoids in the plant, may even be contributing to health issues. Testing and breeding strains to suit specific illnesses would be marvellous if the illegality was lifted and it could happen almost overnight as has happened in America.

There are over one hundred Cannabinoids identified so far and our bodies are riddled with Cannabinoid receptors. It seems we have been evolving for millennia with the plant! Until less than a hundred years ago when prohibition was introduced the Cannabis plant was one of the most grown plants on Earth, for its fibre, seed and flowers. Prohibition is all about profits!

There is no testing for Cannabis or its by products available in Australia, which is seriously frustrating and dangerous as there are literally thousands of medical makers and suppliers in Australia now, operating in the shadows.

To put it simply, prohibition was introduced when the petrochemical and pharmaceutical industries arrived, less than a century years ago. Big Business then organised the outlawing of the major natural competitors. It's time we reviewed the "drug war" and the impact of the lies and corruption from early last century which hoodwinked people then and still is today.

Michael Balderstone
President Nimbin HEMP Embassy
and Australian HEMP Party
51 Cullen Street

Nimbin NSW 2480

Phone: (02) 66 890326

www.hempembassy.net