

MANDATORY PREGNANCY HEALTH WARNINGS — ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

683. Mrs J.M.C. STOJKOVSKI to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the impending Australia and New Zealand Ministerial Forum on Food Regulation and the minister's call for the immediate introduction of mandatory pregnancy health warnings on alcoholic beverages. Can the minister outline the reasons that these health warnings should be mandatory and what action is needed for these warnings to be made mandatory?

Mr R.H. COOK replied:

I would like to thank the member for Kingsley for her question. Before I answer, I acknowledge in the gallery year 11 politics and law students from Wesley College and their teacher, Mike Filer, who joined me for lunch today. Thank you very much.

On Friday, as the member says, I will be attending the Australia and New Zealand Ministerial Forum on Food Regulation. We will be calling on my counterparts in the commonwealth, state and territory governments to support the McGowan government's position that pregnancy health warnings should be made mandatory on the labels of alcoholic beverages. We know that the incidence of foetal alcohol spectrum disorder in our communities is having a devastating impact on our young people. Members would have heard the Minister for Corrective Services recently talking about the fact that Telethon Kids Institute research showed that one-third of the kids in Banksia Hill Detention Centre were suffering from symptoms associated with FASD. We have to do more and we know that the voluntary scheme that is in place, and has been in place since 2011, has meant that only 48 per cent of alcohol products available for sale have displayed pregnancy warnings on the labels. In particular, we know that women mostly drink wine—they are the majority of wine consumers—and as few as 40 per cent of wine products carry the pregnancy warning.

Many members will recall the current warnings on alcohol products. I am showing a picture of an example here for members. There is a small diagram of a pregnant woman alongside other warnings to do with the alcohol content of the drink. Unfortunately, research has shown that many women interpret this as meaning that if they are pregnant, they can have 1.3 standard drinks. We know that there is no such thing as safe drinking when women are pregnant, and from other studies we know that many people support this. In fact, 65 per cent of Australians support the use of mandatory pregnancy warnings on alcohol containers. Research has also shown that for alcohol warning labels to be most effective they should be large enough to be easily noticed and read, appear on the front rather than the side of packaging, be varied frequently to avoid overexposure, and contain a clear, simple and accurate message for the specific health effects of alcohol. This Friday's meeting will be an important opportunity to speed up the process.

Although there is a suggestion that we go into a lengthy consultation process on mandatory labelling, I will be putting forward an alternative motion calling on members to agree that clear pregnancy warning labels become a mandatory requirement on alcohol products and to initiate a process to achieve this outcome without delay. There is no cure for FASD, but it is preventable. We can do it with quick, decisive action. As one person pointed out to me last night at a meeting, although the warning labels may make just a little bit of difference, if they make just that much difference, they are worthwhile.

The SPEAKER: Member for South Perth and member for Collie–Preston, I know you are both a bit on the deaf side, but we do not want to hear what you are saying. If you would like to come round the back there, please.