

## A potent top end mix: kava, petrol and alcohol

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The Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) recently convened in Darwin for its second meeting of 2005. As part of the meeting the ANCD conducted an open forum with Northern Territory based drug and alcohol frontline staff to discuss issues affecting the sector, clients and people in Indigenous communities. During the forum two specific issues, kava and petrol sniffing, captured the ANCD's attention.

Forum participants told the ANCD that kava is adversely affecting a number of Indigenous communities and it is having a detrimental impact on culture.

ANCD member and Chair of the National Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Committee (NIDAC), Associate Professor Ted Wilkes commented, "It is evident that kava is causing significant health, social and economic problems in top end communities and we need to work together to address these issues. The ANCD, through NIDAC, will be exploring the range of issues associated with kava use and working to ensure that any potential solutions have cultural credibility and community acceptance."

In regard to petrol sniffing Associate Professor Wilkes stated, "The ANCD has again heard about the extent and impact of petrol sniffing in Indigenous communities. The ANCD welcomes the Australian Government's commitment to addressing this issue through the provision of Opal fuel to a number of Indigenous communities. Opal fuel is lead-free and contains low levels of aromatic hydrocarbons. However, anecdotal reports indicate that demand for this type of fuel has already exceeded supply and it is essential that all governments work collaboratively to ensure that this alternative fuel is made available to as many Indigenous communities as necessary in an effort to tackle the health problems linked to sniffing."

During the ANCD meeting members welcomed recent announcements made by the Hon Christopher Pyne MP (Parliamentary Secretary for Health) and the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy (MCDS) about the impact of the National Competition Policy in regard to liquor licensing. Co-Deputy Chair of the ANCD and Chair of the Working Group that is developing Australia's National Alcohol Strategy 2005-2009, Professor Margaret Hamilton commented, "Alcohol consumption is an intrinsic part of Australian culture and changing it will be a long term, challenging task that will require coordinated leadership from all levels of government. In regard to regulatory mechanisms such as the National Competition Policy, the ANCD welcomes the MCDS exploration of the public health impact of this policy. When implementing policies such as the National Competition Policy it should be a requirement to weigh up the economic benefits alongside the safety, health and social impacts."

Finally, members discussed a range of new projects that the ANCD could commission in 2005-2006, one of which will be an exploration and analysis of the issues facing young homeless drug users.

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*The ANCD is the principal advisory body to Government on drug and alcohol issues.*

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