

## Walshe, Kate

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**From:** Walshe, Kate  
**Sent:** Thursday, 9 January 2014 4:56 PM  
**To:** Lion, Patrick  
**Subject:** [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED]

Like most Australians, I enjoy a drink on social occasions.

However, as a father and as a citizen, I'm appalled by the violent binge drinking culture that now seems so prevalent, especially at "hot spots" in our big cities. I'm sick of the fact that alcohol fuelled violence has turned places that should be entertainment precincts into 'no-go zones'. Hospital emergency departments should not be over-flowing with the victims of substance abuse every Friday and Saturday night. The media should not be full of stories about the latest casualties from our own streets.

We've got two problems. The first problem, which is a broad one, is the binge drinking culture which has become all too prevalent amongst youngsters over the last couple of decades.

I'm realistic enough to know that young people won't always be perfect and that making mistakes along the way is a normal part of growing up. I certainly made a few mistakes as a younger man and have got into some embarrassing situations. However, there's a world of difference between having two or three drinks a night and occasionally a bit more on a Saturday night and this new binge culture which sees young people drinking nothing from one week to the next and then, when they decide to have a drink, not knowing when or how to stop.

The second problem, and this is a truly insidious thing, is the rise of the disturbed individual who goes out looking not for a fight but for a victim. We are seeing these king hits - or as they are now being called coward punches. They are random acts of unprovoked, gratuitous violence.

Inevitably the target is an individual quietly getting on with life. People who have not done anything to anyone. This is a vicious, horrible change.

Brutal people, often with a history of violence, are getting it into their heads to pick on a vulnerable individual. It is utterly cowardly. It's brutal, it's gratuitous, it's utterly unprovoked and it should be dealt with very severely by the police and the courts.

It is well known that as a university student, I played rugby and boxed. Boxing taught me many things, including the power of a single punch. If there's danger from a single punch in a boxing ring, it is multiplied exponentially when it's delivered to an unsuspecting or unprepared victim on a concrete footpath, or in a crowded pub or club.

Tragically, it's not just one young life that is destroyed by an angry, indiscriminate punch but many. In an instant, one person becomes a victim, another a criminal – and the lives of their families are irrevocably damaged.

As Prime Minister I accept that the fundamental responsibility in this area lies with state governments. It's not just Barry O'Farrell's problem, it's an issue that communities are facing in suburbs and regional centres across Australia.

While, we all want to see the courts absolutely throw the book at people who perpetrate this kind of gratuitous, unprovoked violence, we have to recognise that courts can only act after a crime.

The challenge for officialdom at every level, for the police, for pubs and clubs as well as for parents and young people is to tackle the binge drinking culture and the violent behaviour that is accompanying it. We also have to identify if drugs like steroids are also contributing to this outbreak of violent behaviour. There is enough anecdotal evidence from police and our emergency rooms that what we are seeing is not fuelled by alcohol alone. All too often alcohol is consumed along with other drugs such as ice and other amphetamines.

We need to tackle this issue in a comprehensive and considered way. We don't need knee-jerk reactions and stunts that give the illusion of action, but don't make any real, lasting difference.

Where possible, we need community solutions between police, local government, pubs and clubs and residents. Some communities have already demonstrated that progress can be made and many pubs, clubs and alcohol providers have discovered it is better to solve a problem and be part of the solution, than have a solution imposed on them.

We have to approach this in a way that actually makes our streets safer. That means we have to resist the idea that one single action will change everything; that one group is responsible for this problem or that one politician has the answer or is the cause of the problem. While this is not an easy area, with much control in the hands of state and local governments, the Commonwealth stands ready to work with the states, parents and communities to tackle this scourge.

Alcohol has and always will be part of life in our country – and most countries in the world. Our challenge as a people is to ensure that we get the balance right again. Few of us can say we have been perfect when it comes to alcohol in our lives – but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't as individuals and as a society work harder at tackling dangerous behaviour and keeping our communities safer. After all, alcohol should be about adding to our celebrations rather than detracting from them.

ENDS