

# Tax push in poor taste

In the recent budget, one new tax stood out. It was the tax on alcopops – spirit- and wine-based drinks with soft drink added. These drinks, also known as RTDs (ready to drink) in the trade, are a popular choice for many Australians. As wine lovers we may not care for these but we should all be a little concerned by the Government using the tax system for social engineering.

The previous government was also guilty of this, but shouldn't governments stick to keeping a strong, stable economy and low inflation rather than influencing the public's choices in what they drink?

Concerns about a rise in binge drinking, particularly among the young, sparked the new tax. Unfortunately it also affects many older, more responsible drinkers too. The tradesman who prefers a Bundy and Cola to a VB after a hard day's work now also pays the new tax.

And it's possible the price hike will have little effect on binge drinking anyway. It's part of our culture, learning when you've had too much to drink is all part of growing up, and more importantly, drinking too much is not a recent phenomenon. David Boon's masterful innings of 50-odd beers on the long haul flight to London for the Ashes didn't happen last week, it's now part of cricker folklore.

Australians love a drink and a good drinking story, witness the completely unrepentant

## handpicked



Fergus McGhie

drinking that went on at the Logies a few weeks ago. Morning breakfast show hosts openly admitted to having had no sleep and feeling hung-over. Television's night of nights is just one big booze up, and has been for decades.

This is a tax to placate wozzers, and conservative teetotalers. It also misses the point that parents, publicans and retailers are the ones with the duty of care to our youth. Enjoying alcohol in all its forms requires proper policing and responsible service. Too often drunk members of the public are still served alcohol well past the point of intoxication. It is up to the community, not the Government, to change habits.

What is more concerning for wine drinkers is the possibility of future taxes on wine to further combat this issue. When RTDs get too expensive, the alternatives like bottled spirits, beers and wine become the next option. We already pay up to 40 per cent tax on some wines, which is more than enough, particularly when the industry has just struggled through consecutive poor vintages thanks to a long drought and other extreme

weather conditions like frosts, hail and even bushfires.

Bottled spirit sales are now on the rise in direct correlation to the drop in RTD sales. In some ways this is even more worrying. When young people buy RTDs there's an indication of standard drinks on the label. At least the dose is measured so it's possible the drinker can pace themselves. With a bottle of spirit it's much harder to judge a standard drink which has more dangerous consequences.

Of course if RTDs become more expensive in pubs and clubs the other alternative for young people is illegal drugs. All of a sudden a pill or some pot becomes a far more cost-effective option for a young person who wants to have a big night out. This is surely not the intention of the tax but with RTDs costing upwards of \$10 in a club, the likely scenario is a greater use of party drugs.

Let's just hope this ill-conceived new tax fails to make it through the senate. There are other ways to combat binge drinking. Responsible drinking begins at home. Parents need to educate their children, and those of us who sell alcohol need to become more aware of our duty of care when alcohol is involved. There's nothing dangerous about enjoying a drink or two every so often, we just need to do it responsibly.

■ Fergus McGhie is store manager of 1st Choice, Phillip.

## Drink now

**Chrismont 2006 Riesling King Valley, \$16**  
(ex-cellar door)

★★★★★ \$555

The warm days and cool nights of the King Valley are perfectly suited to aromatic varieties such as riesling. Chrismont is one of the best makers and this '06 is delicious. Beautifully balanced with floral aromas, the palate is fresh and crisp with hints of green apple and citrus. It will keep but to drink it now is a pleasure, so don't bother waiting.



## Something special

**Vasse Felix 2007 Semillon Margaret River, \$26**

★★★★★ \$555

Lean and crisp is the way I love my semillon and the Vasse Felix is absolutely perfect. There's the obvious grassy green pea character that is typical of Margaret River semillon with a mineraly stony aroma too. The palate is full of lemon and other citrus flavours with a touch of wild honey. It's the lean crisp finish though that seals the deal.



## For the cellar

**Tim Adams Reserve 2007 Riesling Clare Valley, \$35**

★★★★★ \$555

This is a beautifully pure expression of Clare riesling with all the lime, lemon and grapefruit flavours you'd expect. Hints of musk and blossom aromas lead to a finely structured wine built to last, possibly up to 20 years. Sadly the bottle in my fridge lasted about half an hour. From the first sip it was irresistible.



## Bleasdale Sparkling Shiraz

Langhorne Creek, \$19

★★★★★ \$555

What better drink to savour on a winter's day. Rich and very quaffable, the Bleasdale Sparkling Shiraz is just the sort of thing for a sparkling lover who wants a little comfort drink in the cooler months. Red berry fruits and richer Vegemite and toast flavours are all neatly wrapped up by fine drying tannins.



## Scarborough 2005 Chardonnay

Hunter Valley, \$24

★★★★★ \$555

Often Hunter chardonnay is overlooked in favour of semillon, but when made well it can be excellent. Ian Scarborough's is a good example. Fine and elegant, its crisp acidity supports white peach and melon fruit with a touch of savoury French oak for complexity. There's some cellaring potential but for me I'd rather drink it in the next year or two.



## Zema Estate 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon

Coonawarra, \$25

★★★★★ \$555

The Zema wines are easily capable of maturing for more than a decade but they are also very drinkable as young wines, you just don't get the benefit on time. This '05 shows classic regional flavours. Deep garnet red with cassis and hints of vanilla oak aromas, the palate is ripe, rich and mouth filling. Typically dry dusty tannins finish things off perfectly.



For the first time, wines at the Canberra International Riesling Challenge in October will be judged based on regions. The challenge's chairman, Ken Helm, said the Australian Wine and Brandy Corporation's recent decision to promote "regional hero" wines on the export market supports the innovative approach that the challenge organisers are taking.

"After eight years, the challenge is determined to continue to lead the way by refining the judging process," Helm said.

"In a way it is almost impossible, and certainly unfair, to try to compare a Clare or Eden Valley riesling with a wine from Tasmania or the Canberra region. Or in the northern hemisphere, to attempt to judge the Mosel against the Rhinehesan wines in Germany."

Under the new judging system the gold-medal-winning wines from each region will then go to judging by country and gold-medal-winning

wines here will progress to the final judging for the ultimate trophy for "Best in World Riesling".

Entries for the 2008 Canberra International Riesling Challenge will open on Sunday and close on July 18. Online entry and other details will be available on [www.rieslingchallenge.com](http://www.rieslingchallenge.com) next month.

The event will again be hosted at the Hyatt Hotel Canberra from October 14-18, 2008.

## grapevine

Winemaker Greg O'Keefe, a former partner in the well-known Tasmanian Winery, Fishburn and O'Keefe Wines, is back with his own label,

## quaffers



Chris Shanahan

# Hops: in the mix of history

As we enter an era of ever-hoppier boutique beers and increasingly bland pop beers, it's interesting to note that hops simply weren't there for most of brewing history.

From its emergence around 10,000 years ago until about half a millennium ago, beer was probably far sweeter than the drink we know today.

Bavaria's Rheinheitsgebot of 1516 – a beer purity law (some would argue that it was, in fact, a restrictive trade measure at the time) limiting ingredients to water, malted grain and hops – confirms that bitter beers were well established in that part of the world, and perhaps elsewhere in Europe.

However, the British appear to have viewed the introduction of hops into brewing as, well, just not cricket, preferring sweet, malty ales seasoned with "spices, herbs and barks of trees".

Indeed, Henry VIII (1491-1547) banned the use of hops in brewing and the ban held until 1552.

Five centuries on, our brewers work with a great diversity of hops varieties in granulated and dried-head formats and, occasionally, fresh-from-the-plant.

These days brewers add hops at varying stages of the boil, and even afterwards, to create a range of aromatic, flavour and bitter sensations.

## Brew reviews

### Marston's Pedigree Exceptional Premium Ale

500ml \$7.29

This is an English ale, weighing in at a modest 4.5 per cent alcohol. It's mid-amber coloured, with a rich, spon-taneous head and warm, subtly fruity ale aroma and just a hint of hops. The palate's beautifully balanced, mild and creamy soft with a lingering but smooth hops bitterness.



### Fullers ESB Champion Ale

500ml \$7.49

Just a little more alcohol than normal (5.9 per cent) boosts the sweet, fruity, malty aroma and palate, adding to the already opulent malt flavours and syrupy rich texture. Under the pleasing citrus-peel flavour that marries with the brisk, hops bitterness. A complex, warming beer to sip slowly.

