

7th May 2009

Dear

## **LOWERING THE BLOOD ALCOHOL CONCENTRATION LIMIT**

TRAFINZ – The New Zealand Traffic Institute calls on the Government to be international road safety leaders and enact legislation to lower the current blood alcohol concentration (BAC) limit in New Zealand, for adults, from 0.08 to 0.02.

Alcohol is one of the biggest contributing driver factors in New Zealand's road toll. In 2007 driver consumption of alcohol/drugs was a contributing factor in:

- 117 fatal traffic crashes (31.1% of all fatal traffic crashes);
- 402 serious injury crashes
- 1182 minor injury crashes

These crashes resulted in 128 deaths, 559 serious injuries and 1777 minor injuries, which were 30.3% of all road fatalities and 14.6% of all road injuries respectively in 2007. (Source: Ministry of Transport Motor Vehicle Crashes in New Zealand 2007)

It is submitted that a national BAC limit should give clear formal guidance to drivers to promote safe driving practices. TRAFINZ believes that New Zealand's current legal adult limit of 0.08, does not do this. This is supported through evidence from crash risk studies, demonstration of how much alcohol is required to be just over the current legal limit of 0.08 as well as the effect of this level of alcohol upon the driving task. Such demonstrations reveal that most individuals in the general driving population would have to be very drunk to be over this BAC limit.

The current limit also sends an ambiguous message to the public, is inconsistent with advertising campaigns and advice from key stakeholders warning of the dangers of drink driving, and is at odds with the government's Road Safety to 2010 strategy.

It is also pertinent that the World Health Organisation's position is that an upper limit of 50mg/100ml for the general driving population represents best practice (Peden et al, eds, 2004). However we consider that a limit of 0.02 would provide a clear and consistent message that alcohol impaired driving is unacceptable. Such a limit would align well with the Ministry of Transport's draft 2020 Road Safety Strategy, which aims for increasing reductions in road deaths and serious injuries.

Internationally the following BAC limits are in place at present:

### **0.08 BAC Limit**

United Kingdom	Kenya	Paraguay
Ireland	Malaysia	Singapore
Canada – 1 Province	Malta	Uganda
USA - 50 States	Mexico	Uruguay
Botswana	New Zealand	Zimbabwe
Guatemala	Nicaragua	Zambia

It should be noted that the United Kingdom is currently under scrutiny by the European Union with regard to its BAC limit being at odds with European Road Safety strategy. Ireland is also at present reviewing its limit.

### 0.05 BAC Limit

Australia	Argentina	Austria
Belgium	Bulgaria	Republic of Croatia
Belarus	Cambodia	Costa Rica
El Salvador	Kyrgyzstan	Latvia
Denmark	Finland	France
Germany	Greece	Iceland
Israel	Italy	Macedonia
Netherlands	Egypt	Portugal
Slovenia	Spain	Mauritius
Canada – 8 Provinces	Bosnia	South Africa
South Korea	Switzerland	Thailand
Turkey	Venezuela	Luxembourg

### 0.02 BAC Limit

Sweden	Norway	Estonia
Poland	Mongolia	

### 0.00 BAC Limit

Czech Republic	Hungary	Bahrain
Romania	Columbia	Brazil
Armenia	Azerbaijan	Panama
Slovakia	Pakistan	

Internationally, positive results when decreasing the BAC to 0.05 have been achieved. Examples of this include: Australia, Austria, Germany, France and Belgium with reductions in fatalities and alcohol related crashes shown ranging from 9 – 35% (Point Zero Five Group 2008) Therefore, better results can be expected from a 0.02 level.

The November 2004 Review of the New Zealand Road Safety to 2010 Strategy, by Jeanne Breen Consulting, proffered that the one of the most effective measures not yet implemented, would be to lower the blood alcohol concentration. This would see a significant reduction in the New Zealand road toll and help meet the Road Safety to 2010 strategy targets of less than 300 road deaths annually. While lowering the BAC to 0.05 would be in line with international best practice and aligns with early indications of recommendations from the NZ Law Commission's Liquor Review 2009, lowering it to 0.02 would position New Zealand as an international road safety leader.

Taking international reductions into account, a 0.05 level means New Zealand could expect to save between 14–72 lives and 260–1280 injuries each year, representing at the very least a 4.5% reduction in social cost ie: more than \$100 million annually (Jeanne Breen Consulting 2004, Vulcan et al 2003, Alcohol Healthwatch 2003). Greater savings could be expected from a 0.02 level.

If an intensive advertising and enforcement campaign was implemented in conjunction with the reduction in the BAC it is highly probable that far greater numbers of lives would be saved and the current significant rise in the rate of injuries, would become a reduction in injuries.

TRAFINZ therefore urges the Government to support a reduction of the BAC to align with:

1. National and Local Governmental commitments to Road Safety to 2010 targets.
2. The continued significance of alcohol-related road trauma both nationally and locally.
3. The need for urgent action if the road safety targets of 2010 and beyond are to be achieved.

4. Considerable evidence of the road safety and economic benefits of lower BAC levels.

New Zealand road-related alcohol harm statistics are likely to improve with an associated decrease in social costs if Government adopts a law change to lower the limit. This may also have flow-on effects for alcohol-related harm in general such as health and personal security benefits.

We urge the Government to give urgent consideration to this matter.

Yours faithfully