



**MEDIA RELEASE**

**12 October 2009**

## **Majority think lowering drinking age has been bad for New Zealand**

Ten years after the country's drinking age was lowered to 18, 74 percent of New Zealanders think it has had a negative impact on our society, according to a recent Research New Zealand poll. Five percent thought it had had a positive effect and 17 percent felt it had made no difference. Older people and higher income<sup>i</sup> households thought most strongly that lowering the drinking age had negatively affected society.

The poll also asked Kiwis if they agreed with the New Zealand Law Commission's recent recommendation that there should be a split purchasing age, where 18 year olds can buy alcohol at bars and restaurants but you have to be 20 to get it from shops. Respondents were divided on this suggestion, with half of all respondents in favour and the other half disagreeing.

However, a substantial 63 percent of people also agreed with another of the Commission's recommendations, that anyone found drunk in a public place should receive an instant fine.

The bill, which passed by a narrow majority in 1999, was the subject of a heated debate with critics such as the New Zealand Medical Association saying it would worsen the poor public health consequences associated with teenage drinking<sup>ii</sup>. In 2005, a bill attempting to raise the age back to 20 was defeated by a 72-49 majority.

Research New Zealand's managing director, Emanuel Kalafatelis says he is unsurprised by these latest poll results.

"I don't think anyone would dispute that there is an issue with problem drinking in New Zealand. Of particular concern is the health and safety of our youth and other groups in society.

"There has long been discussion around how the lower drinking age influences alcohol abuse. Whether the answer is putting the drinking age back up, or looking at solutions such as strengthening community-based and other education programmes, will no doubt continue to remain open to much debate."

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**Table 1: Opinion regarding the lowering of the alcohol purchasing age from 20 to 18 – By age**

*It has been 10 years since New Zealand's alcohol purchasing age was lowered from 20 to 18. Overall, do you believe this has had... ?*

	Base =	Total	18-34 years	35-54 years	55 years or more
		500	130	200	170
		%	%	%	%
A positive effect on New Zealand society		5	5	3	6
A negative effect		74	59	84	76
Or no effect at all		17	27	10	15
Both a positive and negative effect		1	2	2	1
Don't know		4	7	2	4
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

**Table 2: Agreement with Law Commission's recommendation for a 'split purchasing age' – By age**

*The Law Commission has recently reviewed New Zealand's alcohol laws. One of the recommendations they have made is a split purchasing age, where 18 year-olds can buy alcohol in bars and restaurants, but you have to be at least 20 to buy alcohol from liquor outlets and other off-license premises.*

*Do you agree or disagree with this recommendation?*

	Base =	Total	18-34 years	35-54 years	55 years or more
		500	130	200	170
		%	%	%	%
Agree		51	49	49	54
Disagree		46	49	47	42
Neither		2	1	2	3
Don't know		1	1	2	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

**Table 3: Agreement with Law Commission's recommendation that anyone caught drunk in a public place should receive an instant fine – By age**

*The Law Commission has also recommended that anyone caught drunk in a public place should receive an instant fine. Do you agree or disagree with this recommendation?*

	Base =	Total	18-34 years	35-54 years	55 years or more
		500	130	200	170
		%	%	%	%
Agree		63	56	61	72
Disagree		34	40	36	24
Neither		1	1	1	2
Don't know		2	3	2	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

*The Research New Zealand poll of 500 people aged 18 and over was conducted by telephone between the 8 and 10 of September 09. The maximum margin of error is +/- 4.5 % (at the 95% confidence level). The data has been weighted to ensure it is an accurate representation of the New Zealand population 18 years and over. The poll was not taken on behalf of any organisation but as part of Research New Zealand's monthly survey of attitudes and opinions.*

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<sup>i</sup>Higher income households (83 percent of those earning \$70,000 or more, compared with 72 percent of those with income \$40,000-\$60,000 and 66 percent of those with income under \$40,000)

<sup>ii</sup> Dr. Pippa McKay, New Zealand Medical Association, 27 July 2009

<http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/GE9907/S00106.htm>