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Issue: 'Roos is right: AFL Drug Policy – Attitude and Action Matter!'

[*"Permissibility, availability and accessibility - all increase consumption."* Dalgarno Institute.]

(Melbourne coach Paul Roos questions AFL's three-strikes drug policy' Daniel Cherny Sports reporter: The AGE, April 7, 2015).

"Paul Roos isn't channelling Reagan or Nixon, he is speaking out for the vast majority of Australian's are who are exhausted by the utter chaos these 'permissive' drug policies have produced in this nation", said the Executive Director of the Dalgarno Institute, Shane Varcoe. Whilst a modest gain was made in 2012 by the league removing a ill-conceived self-reporting loophole, it was only one very small step in the right direction. A serious attitude and policy change is needed if effective action is going to be taken to protect not only the integrity of the sport, but more importantly the players."

Ever permissive attitudes toward illegal drugs are now bearing 'fruit', and it's rotten!

Rather than protecting player privacy while they 'play' with not only illegal but psychotropic toxins, it should be called out for what it is. All we are managing to produce with current process is delays, or worse, denials of proactive opportunities to engage the player in an intervention or prompt remediation. The data is clear, the longer the use/engagement with illicit substances the greater the risk of habituation or addiction. Consequently, it is not only a career at risk, but a person's health and often life, during and after football. (Ben Cousins is sadly tragic example of these permissive policies.)

Beyond that of course, is the tacit model being reinforced in the community; that 'drug use is not only overlooked and/or an inevitability, but more tragically it is seemingly to be validated as such by arguably, Australia's peak sporting code!

Mr Varcoe said, *"It's a concern that much drug education, which does work very well in the right context, is constantly being undermined by an attitude of 'permissiveness' or 'loophole' policies that send a message that certain people are 'above it'. Education and legislation persistently and uncompromisingly implemented does shift culture far better than simply 'education' alone! (I.e. QUIT Campaign) What must stop is all these contradictory messages, whether spoken or inferred, that fosters the undermining of good education i.e. 'don't' do drugs until you're 18 and then go for it, just be careful and don't die!"*

The Dalgarno Institute recommends:

- Both legislation and education as key foundations of culture shift. Increase investment in Demand and Supply Reduction policies is imperative.
- One time only chance for players foolish enough to use illegal drugs – not 'three strikes'. Introduction of compassionate, but uncompromising processes for quick detection and referral of player for intervention and remediation.
- The removal from sporting and high profile public arenas, of 'permissive' or 'entitlement' messages both overt and tacit which seek to 'normalise' some drug use as 'ok'.
- Better player support mechanisms to develop life/coping skills not just 'player performance'.

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Source: <http://www.theage.com.au/afl/afl-news/melbourne-coach-paul-roos-questions-afls-threestrikes-drug-policy-20150407-1mfq8s.html>

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