Correspondence from Professor Anne Ludbrook  
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I have been following the work of the committee relating to the Alcohol Bill 
with interest and came across a reference to my research in the official 
record. I would like to draw your attention to a presumably inadvertent error in 
the interpretation of my findings.

This comes just after col 2720 in the report

Helen Eadie: The literature review by Ludbrook, in 2004, outlined that 
although there is "unconvincing evidence" that price affects consumption in 
heavy drinkers, there is more convincing "indirect evidence" that it does, 
which comes from studies that have shown a decrease in alcohol-related 
problems following increases in taxation. Would you comment on that?

Dr Meier: That study is from 2004 and the Wagenaar study is from 2008. It is 
the same kind of study, but Wagenaar is slightly more up to date. I have seen 
studies that suggest that dependent drinkers are price sensitive because they 
tend not to have much money, but I have seen other studies that suggest that 
binge drinkers are not very price sensitive. We can only work from the data 
we have about how it works in the UK.

Helen Eadie: Do you accept that Ludbrook is a valued study and that it has 
integrity equal to your own studies?

Dr Meier: Yes.

However, the relevant paragraph from my report states:

3.5 There is conflicting evidence concerning the relative effects of 
price on heavy drinkers. Studies relating prices to alcohol consumption for 
heavy drinkers provide less convincing evidence than studies relating tax 
changes to changes in the incidence of alcohol related problems, such as 
mortality, morbidity, accidents and crime, which show reductions in problems 
resulting from price rises (Babor et al 2003). These studies provide indirect 
evidence that price increases are reducing the incidence of problem drinking. 
Chaloupka et al (2002) report similar findings. They emphasise the 
importance of considering the full price of alcohol, which includes acquisition 
costs, and not just the monetary price.

I never used the word unconvincing in respect of the effect of price on 
consumption with respect to heavy drinkers; rather I was contrasting the 
relative strengths of evidence drawn from two different kinds of study. I was 
also referring to studies based on price increases, not necessarily taxation. 
Price increases can derive from more than source.

As a long time advocate of evidence based policy making I hope you won't 
mind me making these points. As Ms Eadie was kind enough to call my
report a valued study I would not wish the Committee to misinterpret its findings or to have this uncorrected in the record of the Committee's work. Dr Meier was of course correct to point out also that further evidence has accumulated since my report was written.

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