

Media statement

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**Sir Geoffrey Palmer
President
Law Commission**

**LAW COMMISSION SUGGESTS AN END TO THE CONSCIENCE VOTE FOR
ALCOHOL BILLS**

Alcohol laws are too important to be left to a conscience vote says Law Commission President Geoffrey Palmer.

Sir Geoffrey's comments come as the Law Commission tables in Parliament today the first of three reports on the reform of New Zealand's alcohol laws.

In the report, *Alcohol Legislation and the Conscience Vote*, the Commission has suggested that Parliament should no longer decide alcohol Bills on the basis of the conscience vote.

"Conscience voting can produce laws that are unclear and ineffective. All sorts of changes can be made to a Bill when a conscience vote is held because the House is in a state of free-for-all" says President, Sir Geoffrey Palmer. "Alcohol laws are simply too important to subject them to the vagaries of the conscience vote. Standard party-based voting will produce laws that are more consistent and durable".

The Law Commission is currently undertaking a major review of New Zealand's alcohol laws. The report notes that conscience voting for alcohol Bills developed in the 19th and early 20th centuries when the prohibitionist movement was at its height and alcohol was a highly divisive social issue.

"In those days the debate about alcohol was fundamentally about religion and morality" says Sir Geoffrey. "But times have changed. Now the emphasis is on achieving the right

regulatory balance between harm minimisation and individual liberty. This balance is much more likely to be achieved with party-based voting than conscience voting”.

It is a matter for each party in Parliament to decide on the use of the conscience vote for alcohol Bills.

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A copy of the publication is available on the Law Commission website:

<http://www.lawcom.govt.nz>