Final report of schoolies celebrations in Victoria 2009: analysis, conclusions and recommendations
Schoolies week

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A report commissioned by the Victorian Drug and Alcohol Prevention Council for the Victorian Department of Health

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Executive summary

The Schoolies Research Project was implemented to document and analyse the expectations and behaviour of school leavers in Victoria regarding alcohol and drug use, associated risk taking behaviours, motivations in attending the celebrations, expectations regarding behaviour, activities and services provided, and perceptions of issues such as safety. Participants were also provided with opportunities to make suggestions for improvements. This phase of the project analysed data collected at 2009 ‘schoolies’ celebrations in Victoria and compared it with young people’s expectations of the celebrations, and with behaviour of other age-matched cohorts.

Key findings from the research are summarised briefly below:

- The majority of respondents were finishing secondary school, were Australian-born, did not identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and were aged 18 years. Most were celebrating schoolies on the Surf Coast; almost three-quarters intended to stay for 4–7 days.
- The most frequently reported activity was ‘socialising at beach’; the best aspects of schoolies most nominated were ‘beach’, ‘partying’ and ‘being with friends’. Most young people appear prepared to pay for these themselves.
- Alcohol use was common and often heavy; just under half (46 per cent) reported typically consuming five or more drinks on one occasion when drinking at schoolies. Participants generally reported consuming more alcohol at schoolies than they typically drink; greater frequencies and quantities. Most reported that their parents and friends were ‘ok’ with their drinking and bought alcohol for themselves.
- Engagement in risk-taking behaviours was more common among males than females; the most common was drunkenness.
- Very few participants reported engaging in risk-taking behaviours associated with illicit drug use. Use of illicit drugs was far less common than of alcohol; the most frequently used was cannabis. Significantly more males than females reported lifetime and recent use of all drugs (including alcohol).
- Schoolies were aware of, but did not frequently use the support services and often did not know who provided the support. However interviews indicate they placed high value on them with regards to providing a feeling of safety.

Three-quarters of attendees reported that schoolies had met their expectations; with fulfilment of these influenced by presence of supports, sense of safety, and the availability of activities and transport. Discussion of specific expectations yielded some differences from the actual event:

- The event sample nominated ‘beach’ and ‘drinking’ as the best part; more of the expect sample had nominated ‘meeting new people’ than at the event.
- More of the expect sample nominated ‘socialising at pub/club’ and ‘live music’ as activities than those at the event, potentially due to accessibility.
- Fewer at the event than in the expect sample reported having had a hangover, vomited due to drinking and had sex with a new partner.

Behaviour of the Victorian schoolies was compared with other groups of young people:

- Alcohol and drug use were less frequent at Victorian schoolies than at the Gold Coast but similar to those at the Whitsundays. Risk taking behaviours followed similar trends.
- Use of all substances was higher among Victorian schoolies than reported as “usual” in the corresponding age groups for the National Drug Strategy Household Survey and the Victorian Australian Secondary Students’ Alcohol and Drug Survey was however lower than recent use reported by young people at Big Day Out events.
Key recommendations are discussed further in the text but are summarised below:

- Continue monitoring of substance use and other risk-taking behaviour at the sites of Victorian schoolies celebrations.
- Continue use of effective and highly-valued safety-net services at these sites.
- Supplement these risk mitigation strategies with preventative strategies including the promotion of local, safe and healthy alternative activities on a user-pays basis; recognising that these should not place undue resource burdens on local councils.
- Continue promotion of Victorian sites as places for low-key, relaxing celebrations rather than large party centres.
- Engage with local residents and business groups to further develop opportunities for young visitors to contribute positively to the host communities.
- Formally evaluate any new strategies implemented to manage schoolies celebrations.

Overall, schoolies celebrations in Victoria involve less risk-taking behaviour than at the Gold Coast, while still posing significant management issues for local councils and health management concerns for State Government. Ongoing monitoring, prevention and risk-management strategies are imperative.

### Introduction

#### 1.1 Overview

School leaver celebrations are often associated with alcohol misuse and risk taking, and can create concern for the communities involved. In Victoria, ‘Schoolies Week’ is celebrated for approximately two to three weeks from late November to early December in three locations: the Surf Coast, Bass Coast and the Mornington Peninsula. Each of these locations has developed a response to school leaver celebrations with an awareness of the social, political and economic conditions in these areas.

The Schoolies Week Interagency Steering Committee (SWISC, chaired by the Office for Youth) facilitates a coordinated approach in responding to issues relating to school leaver celebrations in Victoria. A number of organisations including local councils, Victoria Police and youth organisations collect information relating to school leaver celebrations. However, no information/data collection system is in place in Victoria to provide an overall, holistic picture of how many young people attend Schoolies Week, for what period, and what resources are provided.

The Victorian Drug and Alcohol Prevention Council (VDAPC) commissioned this project to assist communities involved in school leaver celebrations by providing information on prevention and harm minimisation approaches to ensure the safety of young people and wellbeing of the host community. Included in the project is the development of systems for data collection and analysis to monitor issues relating to young people’s celebration choices and to inform choices on such approaches.

The Victorian Drug and Alcohol Prevention Council commissioned DRUG ARM’s Centre for Addiction Research & Education (CARE) to undertake this project. DRUG ARM has been involved in providing support at schoolies events in Queensland for 20 years. CARE has been conducting research into drug and risk-taking behaviour at schoolies on the Gold Coast for 10 years. In addition to experience in research, evaluation, education and quality improvement, CARE has a specific team of drug and alcohol prevention workers with expertise in minimising alcohol and drug-related harms in the community.

#### 1.1.1 Project description

This project comprised several elements:

- A review of the parties interested or involved in schoolies celebrations and interventions in Victoria and their potential contribution to the project.
- A review of the available literature to provide an understanding of young people’s celebrations, the role of alcohol and drug use, and to review approaches used for minimising the harms of alcohol and other drugs and associated behaviour at youth events.
- A review of the data collected at sites in Victoria over the last few years to understand issues surrounding schoolies celebrations including alcohol and drug use, support provision, community impact and planning, and to analyse gaps in current data collection.
- Design of a coordinated model for collection and analysis of ongoing data at Victorian sites, from which to monitor trends at ensuing events, including risks and harms.
- Collection of information from stakeholders including young people celebrating, support services at the events, members of the local community and local government about young people’s expectations of celebrations, appropriate and achievable interventions, and the impact of celebrations on the communities in which they occur.
1.2 Background

1.2.1 Literature review

As noted above, a literature review was conducted during early stages of this project. It sourced published literature associated with previous research conducted on schoolies celebrations, literature sourced through government reports and evaluation findings and qualitative data from event coordinators and working groups. The framework under which these were reviewed comprised three broad areas to represent the unique context surrounding schoolies celebrations:

1. event specific articles
2. youth behaviour associated with alcohol and drug use
3. evidence-based literature relating to health promotion, preventative strategies and harm reduction approaches that have the capacity to target schoolies events.

Following is the executive summary from this companion document, Schoolies celebrations: social norms, risks and prevention strategies. A review of the literature (dated 15 October 2009). Please see this document for a complete review of research and literature on schoolies celebrations in Australia.

Upon completion of Year 12, Australian young people expect to celebrate in a fashion that will allow them to experience a sense of freedom, a relaxation of regulations and the opportunity to socialize with friends. This celebration, widely known as schoolies (or leavers in Western Australia) also presents an opportunity for school leavers to broaden their normal practices away from adult supervision and engage in deliberate risk-taking behaviour, which may include binge drinking, the use of illicit drugs, violence and unprotected casual sexual activity. Although this behaviour is heavily influenced by young people’s social norms, beliefs and attitudes, significant social harms and negative health consequences are experienced at many if not all schoolies destinations.

Schoolies celebrations occur nationally and with the exception of the Gold Coast location which attracts up to 30,000 young people, most significant locations in other states experience crowds of between 5,000 and 10,000. Several studies have found strong links between young people’s expectation of schoolies and the actual outcomes. Many have an expectation to be drunk, but even more reported having experienced drunkenness. Many expect to have sex, but only half of these report having sex; however a significant proportion of these report non-use of protective measures. Violence, verbal and physical abuse and sexual harassment are also experienced during the schoolies festival but are again, not unexpected. Although these are frequently linked to other older non-schoolies groups attending the event, these issues are reported at large-scale events in Australia as well as at similar events overseas, and appear to be part of the cultural perception of how a significant event is celebrated.

In Australia, public health strategies addressing issues associated with alcohol use have primarily focused on chronic long-term health impacts. Recent research indicates that as a nation, our alcohol consumption may be declining, however more young people are drinking alcohol, at an earlier age and developing high risk-drinking patterns.

The social influence and acceptance of alcohol in our communities underpins young people’s preferences and patterns of drinking. An increase in high-risk drinking behaviours and a change in preference for stronger pre-mixed drinks may warrant a need for more community-level awareness of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Guidelines, and in particular, knowledge of what constitutes low-risk drinking.

In the context of adolescent alcohol use and the harms associated with this, abstinence on a social scale is extremely difficult, therefore the principle of harm minimisation has been used to guide many interventions developed to oversee these celebrations.

Planning and coordinating schoolies responses has involved key stakeholders in each state including state government departments, local governments, non-government agencies, community and youth groups, and volunteers. The diversity of partnerships has allowed a broader range of issues to be addressed, however fundamentally all groups have implemented risk management strategies that have been developed to reduce the harms experienced at schoolies by young people and to lessen any negative impact felt by the hosting communities. Community engagement in problem solving and decision-making approaches has been fundamental to the success of these working groups, particularly in developing and maintaining strong partnerships and a coordinated approach. Communities have benefited from this in experiencing a more educated public, a more cohesive community and recognition of their capacity and the resources that have been made available to the schools project.

It has become evident through this review that key stakeholders involved in reducing the harms associated with schoolies celebrations have maintained a strong focus on the risk management perspective to underpin the development of their strategies. Rather than relying solely on risk-management and harm-reduction strategies, evidence supports embracing a health promotion approach. This should also consider the social and environmental determinants associated with alcohol misuse and its attendant behaviours that impact on the broader community and not solely a specific target group. Changes in the broader alcohol environment, targeting specific determinants such as community attitudes to and consumption of alcohol and the modelling of desirable behaviour, may ultimately lead to changes in young people’s behaviour.

In moving towards this contemporary approach, partnerships established to coordinate schoolies responses will have the opportunity to be strengthened by ongoing opportunities to collaborate on positive projects and the development of broader mutual understandings. Most importantly, this paradigm shift may in turn eventually reduce the need for harm reduction and risk management activities.

1.2.2 Data review

In order to better understand the issues surrounding schoolies celebrations, a review was undertaken of the data collected at three selected sites in Victoria over the last few years. These included information on alcohol and drug use, support provision, emergency responses, community impact and planning. This review also allowed for the analysis of gaps in current data collection methodologies. Following is the executive summary from this companion document, Schoolies celebrations in Victoria: a review of the available data. Please refer to this document for a complete review of the data that was available on schools celebrations in Victorian locations at the time of writing.

A review of the data collected at Victorian sites of schoolies celebrations was undertaken to provide context for the subsequent research to be conducted during 2009. At the request of the VDAPC, the Councils of Surf Coast Shire, Bass Coast Shire and Mornington Peninsula Shire were approached to share reports produced after schoolies celebrations in their regions from 2008 and, if available, from previous years. Where available, these reports have been provided to the research team. They included information from police, local health services, youth or support agencies, registration processes and councils. These data were analysed for site specific issues, trends and compared to information from other schools sites in Australia where available.
Due to the inconsistent nature of the information collected, comparisons were difficult to draw. However, a number of consistent issues were identified:  
- Alcohol consumption, often to excess, often by underaged or inexperienced drinkers, caused behavioural and safety issues for both the young people and the communities in which they celebrated.  
- Use of illicit drugs appears to be relatively infrequent.  
- Interactions with either local youth or ‘toolies’ (older, non-schoolies) are problematic.  
- Local concerns centred around damage to property, traffic and inappropriate disposal of glass around public areas such as beach fronts.

In general, celebrations appeared to be slightly less problematic than those at the Gold Coast. Disruptions noted by local residents and services appeared to depend on the number of schoolies that visited. Busier locations experienced more episodes of traffic, vandalism and disturbance, with less overall disruption than seen on the Gold Coast. Local interventions were based largely on harm reduction, and appeared successful at engaging the visitors positively, although they did not appear to reduce the levels of alcohol consumption. It is recommended that a consistent and directed approach to the collection, collation and recording of data is taken up in future years to enable more rigorous monitoring of emerging trends and comparisons between sites.

2 Method

Analysis of data from the three nominated Victorian schoolies sites showed the need for the design of a coordinated model for collection and analysis of ongoing data at Victorian sites to monitor risks and harms. This system design was undertaken as part of the project, and involved consultation with local schoolies coordinating bodies as well as inclusion of government project requirements. The elements comprised data collection instruments and protocols for their use, data analysis frameworks, ethics approval for these, and matrices in which to collect and compare other locally collected information. Following is a summary of the method used to investigate schoolies celebrations at Victorian locations in 2009. For a complete description of the methodology, please refer to the companion document, Schoolies celebrations: a model for data collection (dated 31 October 2009).

2.1 Participants and surveys

2.1.1 Participants

The majority of information was collected directly from young people. Two samples of young people were recruited for the project: those who planned to attend a schoolies celebration in Victoria and those who were in attendance at one of the target schoolies locations. Three locations were targeted at the request of the VDAPC:  
1. Surf Coast: Lorne and Torquay  
2. Bass Coast: Cowes, Phillip Island  
3. Mornington Peninsula: Rye

After approval of the methodology and instruments by the Department of Human Services, ethics approval for the research was sought from the Alfred Hospital Human Research Ethics Committee. The Ethics Committee Certificate of Approval (number 364–09) was granted on 29 October 2009. In accordance with ethics approval, all participants in both samples were aged 16 years or over. Surveys were anonymous and participation in the study was voluntary.

2.1.2 Expectations survey

Young people who planned to attend a celebration, referred to as the ‘expect sample’, completed the Schoolies Expectations Survey. This survey included demographic information, details about planned schoolies celebrations, risk-taking behaviours, and alcohol and other drug use. The survey was completed online and resulted in a valid sample of 98 participants.

2.1.3 Event survey

Young people attending schoolies celebrations at one of the target locations, referred to as the ‘event sample’, were approached to complete the Schoolies Event Survey. This survey included similar items to the expectations survey, but asked about what had actually happened while at schoolies rather than what participants expected to happen. A valid sample of 1,116 participants completed the event survey, but not all participants completed all sections and therefore numbers vary across items.

2.1.4 Stakeholder interviews

Interviews were conducted at schoolies locations with two groups of stakeholders: young people attending schoolies and community members. The semi-structured interviews conducted with young people further explored their beliefs and attitudes regarding drug and alcohol use, and associated risk-taking behaviours at celebrations. Three young people were interviewed at Mornington Peninsula, 19 at Phillip Island and 25 at the Surf Coast.
Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with community members, at Phillip Island, Mornington Peninsula and Lorne. These included youth workers, local council representatives, local business owners and one resident. Interviews discussed topics of community attitudes toward schoolies; information, resources and support available for residents; the impact of schoolies on the environment; and any perceived benefits to the influx of schoolies. Also discussed were interest in and capacity for participating in planning and monitoring activities.

### 2.1.5 Other data from schoolies locations

Analysis of data collected at previous events, information deemed important (and possible to collect) by stakeholders and that desirable to contextualise information collected through the surveys and interviews was used to generate an on-site data collection matrix. This spreadsheet (see Appendix 2) was colour coded by service type to enable use of appropriate sections by any of the organisations providing services at schoolies locations.

### 2.2 Procedures for data collection

#### 2.2.1 Expectations survey

Participants were recruited via websites commonly accessed by young people seeking information on schoolies celebrations:

- [www.youthcentral.com.au](http://www.youthcentral.com.au) (hosted by the Office for Youth)
- [www.yibs.net.au](http://www.yibs.net.au) (youth in Bass Shire; hosted by YMCA Bass Coast Youth Services)

The survey was available for approximately one month, from the date of ethics approval (29 October 2009) until the nominal start of schoolies celebrations (21 November 2009). Participants who were attending schoolies celebrations but not expecting to complete Year 12 in 2009 (and therefore not technically ‘schoolies’) were identified but not excluded from participation.

#### 2.2.2 Event survey

Research teams, comprised of DRUG ARM staff and trained research volunteers recruited from Victorian universities, operated in public areas of congregation at Lorne, Torquay, Rye and Coves. Teams were active over five days (26 November to 30 November 2009 inclusive) across the midpoint of the fortnight identified by local coordinators as the schoolies period.

All young people present at the nominated schoolies locations were invited to participate unless they were unduly intoxicated. Again, those who had not just completed Year 12 were identified by a specific question in the survey but not excluded from participation. Participants were verbally advised of the informed consent process and offered a hard copy of the Participant Information and Consent Sheet (see Appendix 1). Surveys were paper-based for self-completion by young people.

Where facilities existed, access to a web-based version of this survey was also offered. Examples of such on-site opportunities included the Mornington Peninsula Youth Service’s “Beachcomber” bus and the Lorne Visitors Centre. Schoolies participants were also made aware of the availability of the web-based survey via the youth websites used for the expectations survey. The web-based survey was available from 22 November 2009 until 31 January 2010.

Some incentives were offered for participation. Those who completed surveys at schoolies locations were offered health promotion items including caps, pens, yo-yos and information sheets with YouthCentral branding. On-line participants and those who took part in interviews were offered entry into a prize draw for an iPod Touch MP3 player.

### 2.2.3 Interviews

Young people at schoolies locations were invited to take part in interviews when encountered during their stay. Interviews of young people were conducted individually or in small groups, according to their preference, and predominately during the day to reduce the likelihood of intoxication. Adult stakeholders at schoolies locations were invited on encounter to take part in interviews during the research period.

### 2.2.4 Other data

The spreadsheet suggesting desirable data types was distributed via the SWISC to organisations providing services at schoolies locations. Services were encouraged to collect such data during their operations at schools and share these with the schoolies research team for analysis.

### 2.3 Analysis

Interview transcripts and survey commentary were analysed for recurring themes and issues. Survey data were analysed using PASW Statistics 18. Descriptive statistics were computed for both the expect and event samples. Chi-square tests of significance were conducted for the event sample to identify any significant differences between genders and between schoolies locations. Comparisons of schoolies locations refer to differences between Mornington Peninsula (MP), Phillip Island (PI) and Surf Coast (SC). In the tables in this report, these are referred to by their initials.

The following symbols are used to denote these results:

- $\chi^2$: chi-square test
- N.S.: non-significant result ($p > .05$)
- $p < .01$: significant result with probability of less than .01
- $p < .05$: significant result with probability of less than .05

#### 2.3.1 Chi-square tests

Chi-square tests were conducted to compare differences in categories between the event sample and the schoolies participants but not excluding those identified as ‘schoolies’. For these analyses, the following categories were used.

- Gender: male, female
- Context: schoolies, non-schoolies
- Age categories: 15-16, 17-18, 19-25
- Drinking: none, low, moderate, high
- Intoxication: none, light, moderate, heavy
- Activity: most, none

#### 2.3.2 Comparison of schoolies locations

Chi-square tests of significant results are compared across schoolies locations for each of the variables identified in the event sample.

### 2.3.3 Factor analysis

Factor analysis was used to find patterns in the data by reducing the number of variables and allowing correlations between variables to be more apparent.
3 Results

Results pertaining to the expectations and event surveys are taken from the companion document, Schoolies celebrations in Victoria: preliminary findings from surveys of participants at Victorian locations in 2009 (dated 28 February 2010). Please see this document for a complete presentation and discussion of these findings. In this section, detailed comparisons within the samples are described, and these data contextualised by comparison with other data sets.

3.1 ‘Schoolies’ surveys

3.1.1 Demographic characteristics

Expect versus event sample
The demographic characteristics of participants in the expect and event samples are presented in Table 1. A greater proportion of those in the expect sample were female (67 per cent compared with 55 per cent). The median age of both samples was 18 years. The vast majority in both samples were born in Australia and did not identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Similar proportions were finishing secondary school (89 compared with 96 per cent) and, of these participants, the proportions from different school types were largely comparable. There were differences between participants not completing secondary school, with more in the expect sample still at school and more in the event sample at university.

Comparisons between schoolies locations
The majority of the expect sample intended to celebrate schoolies on the Surf Coast (68 per cent), with Torquay and Lorne the most commonly identified locations. This was followed by 18 per cent celebrating interstate, seven per cent at Phillip Island and six per cent at other locations (no participant identified Mornington Peninsula). The Surf Coast was the most popular location for the event sample, with 44 per cent attending celebrations at this location. The remainder of the sample comprised 33 per cent attending at Phillip Island and 23 per cent at the Mornington Peninsula.

A significantly greater proportion of the event sample that attended schoolies on Surf Coast (39 per cent) completed the survey online compared to those at Mornington Peninsula (three) or Philip Island (one per cent). There were significantly fewer females at Mornington Peninsula (46 per cent) than at Philip Island (56 per cent) or Surf Coast (60 per cent). Significantly fewer participants had just finished secondary school at Mornington Peninsula (91 per cent) than at Philip Island (97 per cent) or Surf Coast (97 per cent). Among these participants, there were significant differences according to location in the type of school attended. The greatest proportion at Mornington Peninsula was from Catholic schools (43 per cent) followed by government schools (33 per cent). The greatest proportion at Philip Island was from government schools (50 per cent) followed by independent schools (36 per cent). The greatest proportion at Surf Coast was from government schools (46 per cent) followed by Catholic schools (31 per cent).

Significantly fewer participants at Mornington Peninsula (91 per cent) than at Philip Island (97 per cent) or Surf Coast (97 per cent) had just finished secondary school. Of these non-school leavers, the greatest proportion at both Mornington Peninsula and Surf Coast were at university (43 per cent and 31 per cent respectively), while none at Philip Island were at university. The greatest proportion at Philip Island were employed (44 per cent) compared to 29 per cent at Mornington Peninsula and eight per cent at Surf Coast.
Table 1: Demographics of samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Expect sample</th>
<th>Event sample by location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=98)</td>
<td>(n=1116)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey format</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in person</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>online</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>(n=98)</td>
<td>(n=1098)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>median (range)</td>
<td>18 (16-22)</td>
<td>18 (16-21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of birth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATSI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finish secondary school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of those that finished secondary</td>
<td>(n=1064)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School type</td>
<td>(n=87)</td>
<td>(n=1054)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of those that hadn’t finished this</td>
<td>(n=49)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed/employ status</td>
<td>(n=11)</td>
<td>(n=43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE/other ed.</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Still at school</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1.2 Summary of demographic characteristics

- The majority of both expect and event samples were Australian-born and aged 18 years.
- A greater proportion of the expect than event sample was female (67 per cent vs. 55 per cent).
- The majority of both expect and event samples were celebrating schoolies on the Surf Coast.
- The majority of both samples were finishing secondary school.
- Among the event sample, the greatest proportion of those finishing secondary school were from Catholic schools at Mornington Peninsula and from government schools at Philip Island and SC.
- Of those not completing secondary school, more in the expect sample were still at school and more in the event sample were at university.

Table 3.1.3 Length of stay and cost

Three-quarters of the expect sample (75 per cent) intended to stay at schoolies for 4–7 days, followed by 14 per cent planning an 8–10 day stay. This was comparable to responses from the event sample (see Table 2), with 71 per cent nominating 4–7 days and 17 per cent nominating 8–10 days. While the majority at all locations intended to stay for 4–7 days, significantly more at Surf Coast (83 per cent) nominated this period.

Participants in both surveys were asked who should pay the cost for organising schoolies activities (see Table 2). Three-quarters of the expect sample (76 per cent) nominated that they should pay the cost themselves compared to 54 per cent of the event sample. A greater proportion of the expect sample nominated ‘parents’ (26 per cent compared with 15 per cent), ‘friends’ (25 and six per cent) and ‘local council’ (22 and 16 per cent), while a smaller proportion nominated ‘government’ (17 per cent compared with 34 per cent). There were significant differences between participants by location, with more at Surf Coast nominating ‘local council’ (20 per cent) and more at Philip Island nominating ‘friends’ (nine per cent).

Table 2: Length of stay and cost

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schoolies</th>
<th>Expect vs. event samples</th>
<th>Event sample by location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=96)</td>
<td>(n=1106)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intended length of stay (days)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4–10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local council</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: Participants could nominate more than one source to pay costs.
3.1.4 Summary of length of stay and cost

- The majority of both expect and event samples were staying at schoolies for 4–7 days.
- The majority of both samples reported that they should cover the costs of schoolies themselves.
- Of the event sample, significantly more at the Surf Coast than Mornington Peninsula or Philip Island reported that the cost should be covered by ‘local council’.

3.1.5 Activities

**Participation**

The expectations survey asked participants what activities they intended to participate in and the event survey enquired about activities participants had actually participated in while at schoolies. Figure 1 presents the responses of both samples; the most commonly nominated activity in both was ‘socialising at beach’ (84 compared with 70 per cent). This was followed by ‘socialising at pub/club’ for the expect sample (78 per cent), which was only nominated by 38 per cent of the event sample. The other notable difference was for ‘live music’, which was nominated by 51 per cent of the expect sample compared to 20 per cent of the event sample. These differences may be due to factors such as the availability of these activities or the timing of survey completion (e.g., an event participant who intended to engage in the activity but had not yet done so at the time of completing the survey).

**Activities – expect and event samples**

- **Social at beach**
- **Swimming**
- **Eat out**
- **Social at accommodation**
- **Shopping**
- **Social at pub/club**
- **Live music**
- **Surfing**

**Participation**

Figure 2 presents the proportion of the event sample reporting participation in various activities according to location. In all three locations, the majority of socialising was done at the beach. However, the following significant differences were identified:
- Fewer at Philip Island nominated ‘socialising at beach’ (58 per cent), ‘socialising at accommodation’ (28 per cent) and ‘live music’ (12 per cent), while more at Philip Island nominated ‘surfing’ (23 per cent);
- Fewer at Surf Coast nominated ‘socialising’ (61 per cent) and ‘eating out’ (55 per cent), while more at Surf Coast nominated ‘socialising at pub/club’ (50 per cent); and,
- More at Mornington Peninsula nominated participating in ‘other sports’ (18 per cent).

**‘Best parts’ of schoolies**

Participants in both samples were asked what they thought are the best parts of a schoolies celebration (see Figure 3). The most common response of the expect sample was ‘being with friends’ (86 per cent) followed by ‘partying’ (79 per cent). The most common response of the event sample was ‘beach’ (78 per cent), which was nominated by 63 per cent of the expect sample. A greater proportion of the expect sample nominated ‘meeting new people’ (65 per cent compared with 50 per cent) and ‘going somewhere new’ (40and 15 per cent), while a smaller proportion nominated ‘drinking’ (43 Compared with 68 per cent).
Figure 4 presents the proportion of the event sample who nominated different activities as the ‘best parts’ of schoolies celebrations according to location. Significant differences were identified:

More at Mornington Peninsula nominated ‘letting loose’ (33 per cent), ‘travel away from home’ (20 per cent) and ‘trying new activities’ (15 per cent).

Fewer at Philip Island nominated ‘meeting new people’ (27 per cent), ‘being away from parents’ (17 per cent), ‘controlling own time’ (12 per cent), ‘going somewhere new’ (six per cent) and ‘feeling safe’ (nine per cent).

Fewer at Surf Coast nominated ‘beach’ (71 per cent) and ‘good weather’ (44 per cent), while more at Surf Coast nominated ‘being with friends’ (77 per cent).

Figure 4: Best activities – event sample by location

### 3.1.6 Summary of activities

- The most commonly nominated activity by both expect and event samples was ‘socialising at beach’.
- A greater proportion of the expect than event sample nominated ‘socialising at pub/club’ and ‘live music’ as activities.
- A large proportion of both expect and event samples nominated ‘being with friends’ and ‘partying’ as the best parts of schoolies.
- A greater proportion of the expect than event sample nominated ‘meeting new people’ as the best part, while more in the event than expect sample nominated ‘beach’ and ‘drinking’.
- There were significant differences between schoolies locations in reports of activities and best parts of schoolies.

### 3.1.7 Markers of risk-taking behaviour

**Expect versus event samples**

Participants were also asked to comment on a range of other occurrences, commonly used as markers of risky behaviour, that they expected to happen during schoolies week. Responses were then compared with responses from the event sample. The results are reported in Figure 5. Seventy-eight percent of the expect sample anticipated they would ‘get drunk’ compared to 72 per cent of the event group. More of the expect sample thought that they would ‘have a hangover’ than reported by the event group (64 per cent compared with 41 per cent), 35 per cent expected to ‘vomit due to drinking’ compared to 24 per cent reporting vomiting, and 28 per cent expected to ‘have sex with a new partner’ compared to 14 per cent of the Event sample who reported having sex with a new partner.

Figure 5: Risk-taking behaviours at schoolies – expect and event samples

# Percentages are calculated as a proportion of those who responded (as opposed to of the total sample) and varied by sample for each item — 77–88 per cent of the total expect sample and 93–95 per cent of the total event sample responded to these items.

* ‘Been cautioned by police’ was a subjective judgement made by participants and does not indicate that a formal police caution was actually made.
Gender differences

There were significant gender differences for the majority of responses. Significantly more males than females reported that they ‘got drunk’ (77 per cent compared with 69 per cent), ‘passed out due to drinking/drug taking’ (20 and 13 per cent), reported they had ‘been hurt or injured’ (25 and 19 per cent), ‘been in a fight’ (14 and seven per cent), ‘cautioned by police’ (23 and 10 per cent), ‘had sex with new partner’ (19 and nine per cent) and ‘had sex without a condom’ (15 per cent compared with seven per cent).

Comparisons by location

There were significant differences in the event sample according to schoolies’ location for a few of the risk-taking markers (Figure 7). Significantly more at Surf Coast than at the other locations reported that they ‘got drunk’ (79 per cent), ‘had hangover’ (48 per cent) and ‘vomited due to drinking’ (28 per cent). Significantly more at Mornington Peninsula than at the other locations reported ‘been cautioned by police’ (20 per cent).

Figure 6: Risk-taking behaviours – event sample by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drunk (p&lt;.01)</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hangover</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vomit drunk</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pass out drunk/drug (p&lt;.01)</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injury (p&lt;.05)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fight (p&lt;.01)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress/disress (N.S.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police caution* (p&lt;.01)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex new partner (p&lt;.01)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex no condom (p&lt;.01)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7: Markers of risk taking behaviour – event sample by location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MP (%)</th>
<th>PI (%)</th>
<th>SC (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drunk (p&lt;.01)</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hangover</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vomit drunk</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pass out drunk/drug (N.S.)</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injury (N.S.)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fight (N.S.)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress/disress (N.S.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police caution* (p&lt;.05)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex new partner (N.S.)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex no condom (N.S.)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* ‘Been cautioned by police’ was a subjective judgement made by participants and does not indicate that a formal police caution was actually made.
Schoolies celebrations: analysis, conclusion and recommendations

Participants concerns
Participants in the event sample were asked, for each occurrence used as a matter of risk-taking behaviour, whether they would be worried if they or a friend were involved in this situation. Responses are presented in Table 3, but due to the response format of this item, data must be treated with great caution. The survey required participants to tick a box if they were concerned and it is therefore not possible to distinguish a ‘no’ response from a missing response. The proportions presented are based on those who reported concern for any of the situations. Approximately one-quarter of the total sample did not respond at all to this section and it is unclear whether this indicates a lack of concern or missing data. This and other methodological issues are discussed in section 4.2.

For all markers, fewer than half of those who responded reported that they would be worried if they themselves or friends were involved. ‘Been in a car with a drunk driver’ was the risk behaviour nominated by the greatest proportion as worrying if engaged in by self (41 per cent) or friends (45 per cent). ‘Had or friends were involved. ‘Been in a car with a drunk driver’ was the risk behaviour nominated by the greatest proportion as worrying if engaged in by self (41 per cent) or friends (45 per cent). ‘Had or friends were involved. ‘Been in a car with a drunk driver’ was the risk behaviour nominated by the greatest proportion as worrying if engaged in by self (41 per cent) or friends (45 per cent). ‘Had or friends were involved. ‘Been in a car with a drunk driver’ was the risk behaviour nominated by the greatest proportion as worrying if engaged in by self (41 per cent) or friends (45 per cent).

Table 3: Concern regarding markers of risk – event sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk marker</th>
<th>Worried if s/he engages in situation (%)</th>
<th>Worried if friend engages in situation (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drunk</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hangover</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vomit due to drinking</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurt/injured</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fight</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passed out due to drinking/drug-taking</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Been cautioned by police*</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex with new partner</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex without a condom</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driven car under influence of alcohol</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Been in car with drunk driver</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driven car under influence of drugs</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vomit due to drug-taking</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injected drug</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stressed/distressed</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexually harassed</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency health services</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Percentages are calculated as a proportion of those who responded to any of these items (as opposed to of the total sample) – 67–73 per cent of the total event sample responded to these items. Calculating percentages based on a proportion of the total sample will not affect ranking of behaviours
* ‘Been cautioned by police’ was open to interpretation by participants and does not indicate that a formal police caution was actually made.

Table 3, but due to the response format of this item, data must be treated with great caution. The survey required participants to tick a box if they were concerned and it is therefore not possible to distinguish a ‘no’ response from a missing response. The proportions presented are based on those who reported concern for any of the situations. Approximately one-quarter of the total sample did not respond at all to this section and it is unclear whether this indicates a lack of concern or missing data. This and other methodological issues are discussed in section 4.2.

For all markers, fewer than half of those who responded reported that they would be worried if they themselves or friends were involved. ‘Been in a car with a drunk driver’ was the risk behaviour nominated by the greatest proportion as worrying if engaged in by self (41 per cent) or friends (45 per cent). ‘Had or friends were involved. ‘Been in a car with a drunk driver’ was the risk behaviour nominated by the greatest proportion as worrying if engaged in by self (41 per cent) or friends (45 per cent). ‘Had or friends were involved. ‘Been in a car with a drunk driver’ was the risk behaviour nominated by the greatest proportion as worrying if engaged in by self (41 per cent) or friends (45 per cent). ‘Had or friends were involved. ‘Been in a car with a drunk driver’ was the risk behaviour nominated by the greatest proportion as worrying if engaged in by self (41 per cent) or friends (45 per cent). ‘Had or friends were involved. ‘Been in a car with a drunk driver’ was the risk behaviour nominated by the greatest proportion as worrying if engaged in by self (41 per cent) or friends (45 per cent).

Table 3: Concern regarding markers of risk – event sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk marker</th>
<th>Worried if s/he engages in situation (%)</th>
<th>Worried if friend engages in situation (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drunk</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hangover</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vomit due to drinking</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurt/injured</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fight</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passed out due to drinking/drug-taking</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Been cautioned by police*</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex with new partner</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex without a condom</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driven car under influence of alcohol</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Been in car with drunk driver</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driven car under influence of drugs</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vomit due to drug-taking</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injected drug</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stressed/distressed</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexually harassed</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency health services</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Percentages are calculated as a proportion of those who responded to any of these items (as opposed to of the total sample) – 67–73 per cent of the total event sample responded to these items. Calculating percentages based on a proportion of the total sample will not affect ranking of behaviours
* ‘Been cautioned by police’ was open to interpretation by participants and does not indicate that a formal police caution was actually made.

3.1.8 Summary of markers of risk

- The majority of event and expect sample either expected to and actually did get drunk
- A greater proportion of the expect than event sample nominated ‘have a hangover’, ‘vomit due to drinking’ and ‘sex with new partner’.
- Of the event sample, significantly more at Surf Coast than Mornington Peninsula or Philip Island reported risky alcohol use.

3.1.9 Substance use

Expect versus event samples

Both the expectations and event surveys asked participants what substances they had used during various time periods (see Table 4). This did not provide comparison between expectation and reality, but asked both samples about their usual use. Several issues require that some of these data are treated with caution. Discrepancies between samples are likely to be influenced by differences in the proportions of each sample who responded to these items. Further, inconsistencies in how some of these items were interpreted and answered by participants are likely to have impacted on the results. Specifically, discussions with survey participants indicated that some read the ‘ever used’ option as ‘never used’. The percentages reported for this item are therefore likely to over-estimate the prevalence of lifetime use. Again, these methodological issues are discussed in section 4.2.

The majority of both samples reported lifetime alcohol use and use of alcohol in the last 12 months. More of the event sample had used alcohol recently (79 per cent in the last seven days; 63 per cent in the last 24 hours) than the expect sample (58 per cent and 10 per cent respectively). These differences may be due to when the survey was completed; those in the event sample were at schools (and therefore more likely to be celebrating), while those in the expect sample were likely to be completing final examinations.

Very few participants in either sample reported illicit drug use in the last seven days and last 24 hours. Lifetime use of all illicit drugs was reported by approximately half of those in the expect sample who responded and approximately one-quarter of those in the event sample who responded, with the exception of cannabis (reported by 39 per cent).

Table 4: Substance use – expect and event samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug</th>
<th>ever† used (%)</th>
<th>last 12 months (%)</th>
<th>last 7 days (%)</th>
<th>last 24 hours (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamines</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecstasy</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocaine</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallucinogens</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benzodiazepines</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

† These data may be an over-estimate due to possible misinterpretation of the question, and should be treated with caution.
Gender differences

Males and females in the event sample were compared on use of alcohol and other drugs across the various time periods. There were significant gender differences for lifetime use of all substances, with significantly more males than females reporting use (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Lifetime alcohol and other drug use – Event sample by gender

There were no significant gender differences for alcohol use in the last 12 months or last seven days, however significantly more males than females reported use of alcohol in the last 24 hours (Table 5). Recent use of all other substances was reported by significantly more males than females.

Table 5: Recent alcohol and other drug use – event sample by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substance</th>
<th>Used last 12 months (%)</th>
<th>Used last 7 days (%)</th>
<th>Used last 24 hours (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Sig. (x²)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>86.4</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>N.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>p &lt; .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecstasy</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>p &lt; .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamine</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>p &lt; .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocaine</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>p &lt; .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallucinogens</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>p &lt; .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benzo-diazepines</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>p &lt; .05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparisons by location

There were also significant differences between event participants at the different locations (Figure 9). Lifetime alcohol use was reported by significantly more participants at MP, while lifetime use of all other drugs was reported by significantly fewer participants at PI.

Figure 9: Lifetime alcohol and other drug use – event sample by location

The only significant differences between locations in recent use were of alcohol in the last seven days and the last 24 hours (Table 6). Significantly fewer participants at Surf Coast than Mornington Peninsula and Philip Island reported alcohol use in these time periods.

Table 6: Recent alcohol and other drug use – event sample by location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substance</th>
<th>Used last 12 months (%)</th>
<th>Used last 7 days (%)</th>
<th>Used last 24 hours (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MP</td>
<td>PI</td>
<td>SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>86.9</td>
<td>87.6</td>
<td>85.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecstasy</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamine</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocaine</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallucinogens</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benzo-diazepines</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.1.10 Risky alcohol consumption

The expectations and event surveys included three questions drawn from the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT, 2nd Edition; Babor et al., 2001). These are used to determine frequency of alcohol consumption, intensity of alcohol consumption and frequency of risky alcohol consumption (according to NHMRC guidelines) respectively:

1. AUDIT 1: In the past 12 months, how often did you have a drink containing alcohol?
2. AUDIT 2: In the past 12 months, how many drinks containing alcohol did you have on a typical day when drinking?
3. AUDIT 3: In the past 12 months, how often did you have 6 or more drinks on one occasion?

Again, these questions do not compare expectation to eventuation, but describe differences between samples in usual drinking behaviour.

In response to AUDIT 1, similar proportions of the expect and event samples reported drinking ‘never’, ‘monthly or less’ and ‘2–4 times a month’ (see Figure 10). Higher frequencies of use were reported by the event than the expect sample – 16 per cent compared with seven per cent reported use of alcohol ‘2–3 times a week’ and six per cent of expect participants reported use ‘4 or more times a week’.

In response to AUDIT 2, largely similar proportions in the two samples reported typical consumption of different amounts of alcohol (see Figure 11). Participants in the event sample were more likely to report consuming larger amounts of alcohol – 30 per cent of the event sample compared with 18 per cent of the expect sample reported drinking seven or more drinks. According to NHMRC guidelines (National Health & Medical Research Council, 2009), consumption of more than four drinks in a session is considered risky and more than six, highly risky.

In response to AUDIT 3, participants in the event sample reported higher frequencies of consuming 6 or more drinks on one occasion (‘risky drinking’) than those in the expect sample (see Figure 12). ‘Never’ consuming this amount was reported by 22 per cent of the expect sample and 8 per cent of the event sample. In contrast, consuming this amount ‘weekly’ or more often was reported by 30 per cent of the event sample and 5 per cent of the expect sample.

Gender differences

There were significant gender differences among participants in the event sample for all three AUDIT items. For AUDIT 1 (Figure 13), females were more likely to report drinking 2–4 times a month or less and males more likely to report drinking two or more times a week (p < .01).
For AUDIT 2 (Figure 14), consuming 3–4 or 5–6 drinks was reported by 60 per cent of females compared to 41 per cent of males, while consuming seven or more drinks was reported by 42 per cent of males compared to 22 per cent of females (p < .01).

Figure 14: AUDIT 2 – event sample by gender

For AUDIT 3 (Figure 15), females were more likely to report consuming six or more drinks ‘less than monthly’ or ‘monthly’, while males were more likely to report consuming this amount ‘daily or almost daily’ (p < .01).

Figure 15: AUDIT 3 – event sample by gender

Comparisons by location
There were no significant differences between schools locations on AUDIT 1, with the greatest proportion of participants at all locations reporting alcohol use ‘2–4 times a month’ (Figure 16).

Figure 16: AUDIT 1 – event sample by location

There was a significant difference between schoolies locations on AUDIT 2 (Figure 17), with Surf Coast less likely to report having 1–2 drinks (14 per cent) and more likely to report having 7–9 drinks (22 per cent) than Mornington Peninsula or Philip Island (p < .05).

Figure 17: AUDIT 2 – event sample by location

There was also a significant difference between schoolies locations on AUDIT 3 (p < .01). As shown in Figure 18, participants at Philip Island were more likely than those at Mornington Peninsula or the Surf Coast to report ‘weekly’ (30 per cent) or ‘daily or almost daily’ (14 per cent) consumption of six or more drinks on one occasion and less likely to report ‘never’ (0 per cent) and ‘less than monthly’ (18 per cent) drinking.
3.1.11 Usual versus schoolies alcohol consumption

The expectations survey asked participants how they expected their drinking at schoolies to compare to their usual drinking practices. The greatest proportion (40 per cent) reported that they expected to drink ‘more or much more’ at schoolies than they usually do. Drinking ‘about the same’ was reported by 38 per cent and drinking ‘less or much less’ by 22 per cent.

This was supported by data from the event sample who were asked, ‘while at schoolies, how many drinks containing alcohol did you have on a typical day when drinking’. Figure 19 shows responses to this item and reports of typical drinking amounts, as assessed by AUDIT 2. Consuming 1–4 drinks was reported by 44 per cent as typical compared to 30 per cent at schoolies. In contrast, consuming seven or more drinks was reported by 30 per cent as typical compared to 48 per cent at schoolies. Therefore, participants generally reported consuming greater amounts of alcohol at schoolies than they typically drink, in accordance with their expectations.

Gender differences

There was a significant gender difference for alcohol consumption at schoolies (Figure 20). Females were more likely than males to report consuming smaller amounts of alcohol. Consumption of 10 or more drinks on a typical day at schoolies was reported by 38 per cent of males compared to 14 per cent of females (p <.01).

Comparisons by location

There was also a significant difference between locations for alcohol consumption at schoolies (Figure 21). Participants at the Surf Coast were less likely than those at Mornington Peninsula or Phillip Island to report typically consuming 1–2 drinks (seven per cent) and more likely to report consuming 10+ drinks (28 per cent) while at schoolies (p <.01).

3.1.12 Comparisons with friends and others

The expectations survey asked participants to compare their typical drinking practices to that of their friends and others. Participants in the event survey were asked how they perceived their drinking at schoolies compared to that of their friends and to others at schoolies. Responses to these items are presented in Figure 22 for ‘friends’ and Figure 23 for ‘others’. Drinking ‘less or much less’ than friends was reported by more of the expect than event sample (45 per cent vs. 21 per cent), while more in the event than expect sample reported drinking ‘more or much more’ (29 per cent compared with seven per cent). Accordingly, drinking ‘less or much less’ than others was reported by more of the expect than event sample (66 per cent compared with 41 per cent), while more in the event than expect sample reported drinking ‘more or much more’ (17 per cent compared with seven per cent). These data suggest that participants perceive their typical drinking to be less than that of others, while their drinking at schoolies is more likely to be perceived as greater than that of others.
Schoolies celebrations: analysis, conclusion and recommendations

Figure 22: Drinking compared to friends – expect and event samples

![Figure 22: Drinking compared to friends – expect and event samples](image)

Figure 23: Drinking compared to others – expect and event samples

![Figure 23: Drinking compared to others – expect and event samples](image)

Gender differences

Males and females in the event sample were compared on these items and significant gender differences were found (Table 7). On both these items, females were more likely to report drinking less and males were more likely to report drinking more than friends and others.

Table 7: Drinking at schoolies compared to friends and others – event sample by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event sample</th>
<th>I drink less or much less (%)(n=1011)</th>
<th>I drink about the same (%)</th>
<th>I drink more or much more (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.24 0.16 0.50 0.51 0.26 0.34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.73 0.22 0.84 0.51 0.77 0.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. ($^2$)</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.1.13 Others’ attitudes toward drinking

Participants in both samples were asked about their parents’ attitude to them drinking in general, parents’ attitude to them drinking at schoolies and friends’ attitude to them drinking at schoolies. For both samples and on all items, the greatest proportion responded ‘they’re ok with it’. In the expect sample, this parental ‘acceptance’ was reported by 76 per cent for their drinking in general, and by 61 per cent for at-schoolies drinking. 81 per cent believed their friends were ‘OK with’ them drinking at schoolies. 72 per cent of the event sample reported their parents being “OK with” them drinking in general, and 70 per cent for their at-schoolies drinking. 64 per cent of the event sample believed their friends accepted their drinking at schoolies.

3.1.14 Influences on alcohol choice

Both the expectations and event surveys asked participants what factors were important to them when choosing what to drink (Table 8). The two most influential factors nominated by both samples were ‘taste’ and ‘price’. Significantly more females than males selected ‘taste’ (88 per cent compared with 78 per cent) and ‘price’ (78 per cent and 62 per cent), while significantly more males than females selected ‘what I can access’ (14 per cent compared with nine per cent).

Table 8: Influences on alcohol choice – both samples and event sample by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors when choosing alcohol</th>
<th>Expect vs. event samples</th>
<th>Event sample by gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taste</td>
<td>Expect sample (%)</td>
<td>Event sample (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=83)</td>
<td>(n=1007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taste</td>
<td>0.90 0.84</td>
<td>0.88 0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>0.08 0.71</td>
<td>0.78 0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What I can access</td>
<td>0.05 0.11</td>
<td>0.09 0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotions</td>
<td>0.04 0.03</td>
<td>0.01 0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisements</td>
<td>0.00 0.02</td>
<td>0.01 0.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.1.15 Source of alcohol

Both the expectations and event surveys asked participants the typical source of the alcohol they consume (Table 9). The majority of both samples reported that they buy the alcohol themselves. A greater proportion of the event sample nominated ‘friend’ (22 per cent compared with 12 per cent), while a greater proportion of the expect survey nominated ‘parents’ (16 per cent vs. 8 per cent). Within the event sample, significantly more males (77 per cent) than females (70 per cent) reported buying alcohol themselves, while significantly more females (10 per cent) reported obtaining alcohol from their parents than males (five per cent).

Table 9: Source of alcohol – both samples and event sample by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of alcohol</th>
<th>Expect vs. event samples</th>
<th>Event sample by gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buy it myself</td>
<td>Expect sample (%)</td>
<td>Event sample (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=83)</td>
<td>(n=1004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.69 0.73</td>
<td>0.70 0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bought by a friend</td>
<td>0.12 0.22</td>
<td>0.24 0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided by parents</td>
<td>0.16 0.08</td>
<td>0.10 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bought by sibling</td>
<td>0.04 0.02</td>
<td>0.02 0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bought by stranger</td>
<td>0.00 0.01</td>
<td>0.01 0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: participants could nominate more than one source
3.1.16 Summary of substance use

- Alcohol use was common among both expect and event samples, while use of illicit drugs was uncommon.
- Cannabis was the most commonly used illicit drug.
- Risky drinking was more common at schoolies than at other times, in terms of both frequency and quantity of alcohol use.
- Of the event sample, significantly more males than females reported lifetime and recent use of all drugs.
- Males were more likely than females to report risky drinking practices.
- The greatest proportion of the event sample reported having an alcoholic drink 2–4 times a month in the past 12 months.
- Approximately one-quarter (26 per cent) of the event sample reported typically consuming 3–4 or 5–6 drinks on one occasion when drinking.
- The majority reported having six or more drinks on one occasion monthly or less in the last 12 months.
- The majority of both the expect and event samples reported that their parents and friends were ‘ok’ with their drinking.
- Most participants in both expect and event samples bought alcohol for themselves.
- ‘Taste’ and ‘price’ were the most important factors nominated by both the expect and event samples when choosing alcohol.

3.1.17 Wellbeing and support

Support services

Participants in both surveys were asked about their awareness of services available at schoolies (Table 10). Over three-quarters of both samples reported that they knew who to contact for an alcohol or drug-related problem. Approximately half of both samples reported that they were aware of the chill out zones. Half (52 per cent) of the expect sample expected to use these areas, while only 16 per cent of the event sample reported actual use of these areas. Among the event sample, there were significant differences between locations. Significantly more at Surf Coast (61 per cent) were aware of the COZ than at Mornington Peninsula (29) and Philip Island (36 per cent). And significantly more at Surf Coast (25 per cent) reported use of the COZ than at Mornington Peninsula (12) and Philip Island (8 per cent). Of those who had used the COZ, the vast majority (83 per cent) found them helpful, with no significant differences between locations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Know to contact for alcohol/drug problem</th>
<th>Expect (%)</th>
<th>Event (%)</th>
<th>Sig. (x2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes (n=87)</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>N.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chill out zones</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aware of Expect to use/used</td>
<td>(n=87)</td>
<td>(n=1050)</td>
<td>p &lt; .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If used, found them helpful</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessed other support services</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=1049)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mental health

The Kessler 6-item Psychological Distress Scale (K6) was included in the event survey. The K6 is a measure of generalised distress during the past month that was developed using general population samples (Kessler et al., 2002). The K6 demonstrates strong agreement with the Composite International Diagnostic Interview (CIDI); a widely used diagnostic instrument in epidemiological research (Kessler & Ustun, 2004). According to the K6, of those who responded (n=1049), almost the entire sample (95 per cent) was at low risk of psychological distress.

3.1.18 Summary of wellbeing and support

- Over three-quarters of both the expect and event samples knew who to contact for an alcohol or drug-related problem at schoolies.
- Approximately half of both samples were aware of the chill out zones.
- More participants expected to use than actually used the chill out zones.
- Use of the chill out zones was reported by significantly more at Surf Coast than Mornington Peninsula or Philip Island.
- Almost the entire event sample was of low risk of psychological distress.
3.2 Qualitative Interviews

In order to better understand attitudes towards behaviour at schoolies, a number of interviews were undertaken. These included local residents, business owners, council and other service-providing stakeholders. Due to the time-intensive nature of these interviews, only a relatively small number were undertaken; however, the comments provided add colour to the quantitative data provided in surveys. Schoolies themselves were also interviewed on site and their comments were supplemented by those left on the surveys that were completed online.

3.2.1 Schoolies interviews

Interviews with young people provided some insight into their motivation and the beliefs behind their behaviour. Direct (verbatim) quotes from these are included below.

Location:
Cost, beach and safety appear to be the main issues influencing schoolies’ decisions to travel to local beachside destinations in preference to Queensland. Access to accommodation through family or family friends is a factor in choosing. Many schoolies were in private housing rather than commercially booked properties, and appeared to have booked with a small group of friends, rather than an entire class heading to the one location. Finding and booking accommodation which is close to home and familiar rather than interstate seems an easier process for the school leavers (only 15 per cent of the event sample had nominated “going somewhere new” as one of the best parts of schoolies).

There is also less expense in road transport than airfares; despite acknowledging they had saved for this event, many young people found the cost of holidaying away from family at home was more than expected.

Young people also appear to expect the Victorian venues to provide a lower-key holiday, in line with local promotions, such as the “Good Times Great Breaks” promotion from Surf Coast Shire.

“We got a cheap place to stay here through a family friend – its safer than the Gold Coast and close to the beach.”

“Cheaper than flying to Queensland”

“Not crazy like Queensland”

“Schoolies was how I expected in Torquay, relaxed compared to other places, with more of a genuine good time feel to it rather than everyone just getting drunk and passing out”

Behaviours and attitudes at schoolies

Drinking was widely reported in the interviews, but regarded as part of the holiday. Males more than females reported more drinking at schoolies than “usual”, but described hangovers and falling about as marks of “having really wasted”, and part of the expectation.

“We had all the things we needed: Food, money, alcohol and a bed.”

“Getting marinateddddd”

“My group of friends and I definitely went through a lot of alcohol …There were a few drunken accidents but nothing serious that we couldn’t take care of. Nothing different from drunken aunt’s and uncles or family friends at a 50th birthday party.”

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There seemed to be a perception that drinking is acceptable, but drug use is not. Illicit drug use did not appear to be either prevalent or well-received. There was some expectation that there would be more drugs around than were apparent; some of this was coloured by accounts of Gold Coast celebrations.

- ‘Drinking I don’t have a problem with as long as they still has some element of control – drug use is BAD BAD’
- ‘Nobody’s doing drugs – not cool. Thought there would be lots of drugs but no – good thing’
- ‘Haven’t seen many drugs around – except for weed’

Safety and support

Many comments were made about protective behaviours at schoolies: the message about the safety of groups and looking out for each other appears to have been embraced, although some noted the annoyance of having to ‘play nanny’ to friends who were out of control.

- ‘Always stay together and don’t let anyone go home alone’
- ‘We stick together, especially at night’
- ‘Safer than I expected. My friends and I knew where to draw the line and all made sure we kept ourselves and each other safe’
- ‘annoying to have to look after friends who couldn’t control themselves’
- ‘We all looked after each other and there were no negative outcomes other then a few hangovers’

Support provided by other agencies was highly valued, even if the young people didn’t actually use it often. Some knew which agency had supported them (‘youth workers’ and ‘Red Frogs’ were both named) but many just saw the supports as part of the landscape. The police were also well regarded as providing a safe environment and not being overbearing.

- ‘youth workers were very supportive: handing out …water and checking that females in particular were safe’
- ‘allowed you to feel supported but not in a parental way’
- ‘a great deal of support if ever I needed it’
- ‘I was happy with the support, I didn’t use or need it that much anyway’
- ‘The police did an excellent job I witnessed no fights in a week which was unexpected’

Best and worst parts of schoolies

Interviewees rated ‘being with friends’ highly, also evident from survey data, but relaxing, especially post exams, was very favourably noted, rather than just partying. Freedom from parental oversight was also a positive factor:

- ‘It was quite laid back and relaxing which was exactly what I wanted out of it’
- ‘Schoolies was just a great time to chill out with mates’
- ‘Not having to be bugged about getting out of bed, worrying about results, or due work’
Although 63 per cent had noted in the expect surveys that they looked forward to meeting new people, once on holiday the schoolies tended to stick with friendship groups. (Schoolies interviews were planned as individual events, but the attendees preferred to stick with their group no matter what.) Mixing seemed to be easier if accommodation was shared with others (e.g. resorts or youth hostels).

‘good to hang out with my close friends’
‘Chill with mates, chill with our group’

Many of the comments showed they enjoyed meeting new people but organised opportunities to mix were apparently less explicit than desired. Despite relishing the laid back and unstructured holiday scene, the schoolies lamented the lack of organised activities. This was particularly an issue for those who were under 18 and so had no access to events in licensed venues. Groups of mixed ages were left with a choice – leave the under-18s or all stay home together. Young people were aware of a need to be engaged and kept busy, but seemed to want activities where they could enjoy themselves safely:

‘Not that much really going on, the pubs closed at 12, which is quite early, open longer and the council providing more activities could be beneficial to the area as less school leavers will resort to just hanging around the town having nothing to do and resorting to causing trouble’

‘More events were needed, especially at night, as I had multiple friends who were underage and couldn’t do anything’

One negative issue noted was harassment by older people (‘toolies’) or other locals. A number of schoolies were concerned about locals ‘picking fights’ and making them feel unwelcome. Although under-age revellers were not apparently less explicit than desired. Despite relishing the laid back and unstructured holiday scene, the schoolies lamented the lack of organised activities. This was particularly an issue for those who were under 18 and so had no access to events in licensed venues. Groups of mixed ages were left with a choice – leave the under-18s or all stay home together. Young people were aware of a need to be engaged and kept busy, but seemed to want activities where they could enjoy themselves safely:

‘A lot of unwanted attention and sometimes followed by cars’
‘Older people coming into nightclub and trying to act with younger kids – not many places to get away.’
‘…Young locals would always start trouble’

3.2.2 Community members

Of the community members interviewed, few were positive about the influx of schoolies. Most did not feel that schoolies celebrations fitted with their local community’s image. Longer-term residents value the quiet and cite noise, litter and vandalism as their major concerns. Although some recognised the schoolies as bringing business into a typically low-season period, non-business residents felt that the types of business benefits were not broad enough to be worth the disturbances.

‘All the money goes into the alcohol outlets and fast food places. Restaurants may as well close for the period’

‘Other visitors are put off and stay away during schoolies so we lose business’

Business owners were more likely to be positive in anticipation of increased trade, but even some of this group felt that the disruption was more trouble than it was worth. 2009 produced lower attendances in the first week of the expected period, possibly due to bad weather. This was noted by the businesses as disappointing but residents relished the quieter time. Local press was divided in its coverage; at Phillip Island, several strongly negative articles appeared. Surf Coast and Mornington Peninsula however, mostly reported positive stories. Locals cited the press as contributing negatively to attitudes:

‘Local papers give the community a very negative perspective of these young people’

Information, resources and support available for residents

Most interviewees perceived a lack of information received about the forthcoming event, desiring more information about the onset of schoolies, what ‘events’ would take place, and how residents could access support. A number called for a greater police presence during the schoolies period but many expected local councils to be responsible.

People interviewed thought that providing organised activities was a good idea to divert schoolies from drinking.

‘We need to actively promote a safe and positive day program, well in advance of the start of Schoolies’

However many expressed concern over a lack of resources available to coordinate the school leavers and reduce disturbances that may occur, worrying that the local council (and its rate payers) were funding activities that were of benefit to a small, short-staying minority.

Interest in/capacity for participating in planning and monitoring activities

A number of locals indicated interest in participating in planning groups, with some already involved. Numerous interviewees were interested in and felt capable of collecting information including accommodation use, transport, activity costs, expenditure, incidences and alcohol and drug referrals. Most felt that this information would help provide the community with a better understanding of the schoolies behaviour, broader community needs and direction needed to coordinate safe and enjoyable celebrations.

3.3 Comparisons with other data

3.3.1 Other data from Victorian ‘schoolies’ locations

Data collected by other agencies at the three nominated schoolies locations were collated for comparison with survey data. A spreadsheet had been circulated to all members of the SWISC prior to schoolies to indicate the types of information desirable, and suggest which bodies might be capable of collecting it. Information returned showed that considerable variation remains in the amount and type of information available. Some key indicators are noted below.

Attendees: registration data and other estimates were provided by council representatives

Phillip Island (PI): 1300 registrations, estimate this is 33 per cent of attendance (total 3900)
Mornington Peninsula (MP): 750 registrations, estimate this is 30 per cent of attendance (total 2500)
Surf Coast (SC): 2000 registrations, estimate this is approximately 50 per cent of attendance (total 4000)
Total cohort: approximately 10,400 persons; surveys: 1116 (11 per cent of attendees)

Gender balance: estimates provided by council representatives

PI: 40 per cent female
MP: 60 per cent female
SC: 60 per cent female
Surveys: 55 per cent female overall
Police involvement: data supplied by Victoria Police

PI: 17 crime offences; nine related to AOD; four violence reports; 38 noisy party calls; 59 vandalism incidents reported

MP: 229 call outs; 35 offences related to AOD; one violent incident; one property damage

SC: call out total not recorded; 84 crime offences; 23 related to AOD; 0 violent incidents; 82 local law infringements recorded

Health issue presentations/interventions; data provided by local hospitals/clinics/ambulance, youth services, Surf Lifesaving Victoria and Red Frogs

PI: Six hospital presentations (all alcohol related); 46 Red Frogs interventions (four AOD); no SLSV data

MP: no hospital presentations, local clinics ‘nil above usual’; 75 via Red Frogs (six AOD); 121 preventative actions, nine minor first aid

SC: 130 presentations at hospital/clinics (eight AOD); 30 via YSAS (15 AOD); 63 via Red Frogs (18 AOD); 387 preventative actions, 18 minor first aid, one major first aid, 11 rescues

It is difficult to draw comparisons between the sites using these data as recording systems vary, some considerably. Overall the impression seems that Surf Coast schoolies required more medical interventions, which correlates with more Surf Coast survey respondents reporting use of emergency health services (nine per cent compared with five per cent at Mornington Peninsula and Philip Island), however this may be a reflection of the accessibility of these services.

Total police interventions appear to be commensurate with the number of attendees, with proportionally more AOD-related offences at the Mornington Peninsula. Surf Coast and Mornington Peninsula each hosted twelve extra officers during the schoolies period, so this may be relative to the number of police in the area: 20 per cent of Mornington Peninsula survey respondents reported ‘cautions’ from police, while only 11 per cent of Philip Island and 16 per cent of Surf Coast respondents did so.

Overall, it appears that survey results are aligned with data collected by other agencies.

3.3.2 ‘Schoolies’ in Queensland

The most popular location for schoolies celebrations in Australia is the Gold Coast (GC) in Queensland. DRUG ARM has been collecting data at this location since 1999. In 2009, data were also collected at the Whitsundays in Queensland (WS). Included here for comparison purposes are 2008 data from the Gold Coast and 2009 data from the Whitsundays. Both an expectations and an event survey were completed on the Whitsundays, while only an event survey is currently available for the Gold Coast.

Demographic characteristics

Table 11 presents key demographic characteristics of the expect samples for Victoria and the Whitsundays, and the event samples for Victoria, Whitsundays and Gold Coast. The proportion of the sample that was female was greater for Victorian expect (67 per cent) than for the other samples. The median age for the Victorian samples was 18 years compared to 17 years for the Queensland samples, reflecting differences in schooling ages in these states. The upper age range of participants in the Gold Coast event sample was much higher (34 years) than in the other samples. Fewer than ten per cent of all samples identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. The largest proportion of the Victorian expect sample were still at school (55 per cent), of the Victorian event were at university (50 per cent), of the Whitsundays event were at TAFE/other educational institution (50 per cent) and of Gold Coast event were employed (43 per cent).

Risk-taking behaviours

Presented in Figure 24 is the proportion of each sample that reported expecting to engage in or actually engaging in various risk-taking behaviours while at schoolies. Variation in reports of these behaviours is evident. ‘Getting drunk’ was reported by the fewest participants in the Whitsundays event sample (66 per cent) and the most in the Gold Coast event sample (84 per cent). Both ‘having a hangover’ and ‘vomit due to drinking’ were reported by greater proportions of the expect samples than the event samples suggesting that more anticipated experiencing these behaviours than actually eventuated. One-third (34 per cent) of the Whitsundays event sample reported ‘injury/got hurt’, while one-fifth (21 per cent) of the Gold Coast event sample reported ‘sex without a condom’.

Table 11: Demographic characteristics of Queensland and Victorian schoolies sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>VIC Expect (n=98)</th>
<th>WS Expect (n=501)</th>
<th>VIC Event (n=1112)</th>
<th>WS Event (n=345)</th>
<th>GC Event (n=956)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>(n=67)</td>
<td>(n=501)</td>
<td>(n=1112)</td>
<td>(n=345)</td>
<td>(n=948)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median (range)</td>
<td>(18-20)</td>
<td>(16-19)</td>
<td>(16-21)</td>
<td>(16-19)</td>
<td>(16-34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATSI</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>(n=98)</td>
<td>(n=501)</td>
<td>(n=1112)</td>
<td>(n=345)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>(n=98)</td>
<td>(n=501)</td>
<td>(n=1112)</td>
<td>(n=345)</td>
<td>(n=956)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finish secondary school</td>
<td>(n=98)</td>
<td>(n=502)</td>
<td>(n=1113)</td>
<td>(n=333)</td>
<td>(n=951)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of those that hadn't finished this year</td>
<td>(n=11)</td>
<td>(n=49)</td>
<td>(n=10)</td>
<td>(n=173)</td>
<td>(n=167)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>(n=36)</td>
<td>(n=26)</td>
<td>(n=30)</td>
<td>(n=15)</td>
<td>(n=9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE/other ed.</td>
<td>(n=9)</td>
<td>(n=21)</td>
<td>(n=50)</td>
<td>(n=14)</td>
<td>(n=14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Still at school</td>
<td>(n=55)</td>
<td>(n=16)</td>
<td>(n=20)</td>
<td>(n=15)</td>
<td>(n=15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Schoolies celebrations: analysis, conclusion and recommendations

Schoolies surveys in Queensland and Victoria asked about alcohol and other drug use in the last seven days and the last 24 hours. As evident in Figure 25, alcohol use in both time periods was reported by the greatest proportion of participants in the Gold Coast event sample and the smallest proportion in the Victorian expect sample.

Figures 26 and 27 present use of illicit drugs as reported by all samples. Use of cannabis and ecstasy in both time periods was most prevalent in the Gold Coast event sample. Apart from very low frequencies of cannabis use, participants in the Victorian expect sample reported no use of illicit drugs in the last seven days or last 24 hours.

Substance use

Schoolies surveys in Queensland and Victoria asked about alcohol and other drug use in the last seven days and the last 24 hours. As evident in Figure 25, alcohol use in both time periods was reported by the greatest proportion of participants in the Gold Coast event sample and the smallest proportion in the Victorian expect sample.

Figure 25: Alcohol use in last seven days and last 24 hours – Queensland and Victoria samples

Figure 26: Illicit drug use in last seven days – Queensland and Victorian samples

Figures 26 and 27 present use of illicit drugs as reported by all samples. Use of cannabis and ecstasy in both time periods was most prevalent in the Gold Coast event sample. Apart from very low frequencies of cannabis use, participants in the Victorian expect sample reported no use of illicit drugs in the last seven days or last 24 hours.
Schoolies celebrations: analysis, conclusion and recommendations

Figure 27: Illicit drug use in last 24 hours – Queensland and Victorian samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>V Event</th>
<th>WS Event</th>
<th>GC Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecstasy</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamine</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocaine</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallucinogens/LSD*</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benzodiazepines</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Victorian surveys asked about hallucinogens, Queensland surveys asked about LSD

Support services

Table 12 presents the proportion of each schoolies sample who reported knowledge and use of support services available at schools. Knowledge of services to contact for an alcohol or drug problem was reported by the smallest proportion of the Gold Coast event sample (67 per cent). There was variation in awareness of chill out/recharge zones from 46 per cent of the Victorian event sample to 88 per cent of the Whitsundays event sample. Such variation was replicated in actual use of these zones – 16 per cent of the Victorian event sample compared to 61 per cent of the Whitsundays event sample. The majority of all those who used these zones found them helpful.

Table 12: Knowledge and use of support services at schoolies – Queensland and Victorian samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support service</th>
<th>VIC Expect (%)</th>
<th>WS Expect (%)</th>
<th>GC Event (%)</th>
<th>WS Event (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Know to contact for alcohol/drug problem</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chill out/recharge zones*</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aware of</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If used, found them helpful</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Victorian and Whitsundays' surveys asked about 'chill out zones', Gold Coast asked about 'Recharge zones'

3.3.3 National Drug Strategy Household Survey

The National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS) has been conducted in Australia every two to three years since 1985. The 2007 data collection is the ninth survey in the program and more than 23,000 people aged 12 years or older provided information about their drug use behaviours, knowledge and attitudes (AIHW, 2008).

Table 13 compares reports of drug use by 14–19 year olds in the NDSHS 2007 with those of the Victorian Schoolies expect and event samples. It is evident that lifetime use of all drugs was reported by substantially higher proportions of the schoolies samples than the NDSHS sample. Factors such as different sample sizes and inclusion of different ages (14–19 in the NDSHS and 16–21 in our Victorian Schoolies Survey) would have made some contribution to these differences. However, it is likely that the methodological issues related to these items in the schoolies surveys was a major factor in the results, particularly with respect to the proportion reporting that they had 'ever used' each substance (see section 4.2).

Table 13: Substance use by 14–19 year olds, NDSHS 2007 compared with Victorian schoolies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alcohol and other drug use</th>
<th>NDSHS Expect (%)</th>
<th>Event (%)</th>
<th>NDSHS Expect (%)</th>
<th>Event (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>74.1</td>
<td>98.6</td>
<td>92.6</td>
<td>70.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamines</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecstasy</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocaine</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallucinogens</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3.4 Australian Secondary School Students’ Alcohol and Drug Survey

The Australian Secondary Students’ Alcohol and Drug Survey (ASSADS) is a national survey on the use of alcohol and other drugs by Australian secondary school students. 2005 marks the eighth national survey in the series and a total of 21,805 students aged 12–17 were surveyed (White & Hayman, 2006). Table 14 presents the proportion of 16 and 17 year olds reporting alcohol use across various time periods. It is evident that these largely correspond to the schoolies proportions presented in Table 13. Use in the last week was elevated in the schoolies samples; however, this is likely due to survey completion at a time of celebration.

Table 14: Alcohol use by 16–17 year olds, ASSADS 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alcohol</th>
<th>Ever used (%)</th>
<th>Used last 12 months (%)</th>
<th>Used last week (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ASSADS 2005 included 69 secondary schools in Victoria (government, Catholic and independent), with 4,552 students aged 12 to 17 years surveyed (White et al., 2006). Table 15 presents alcohol and other drug use reported by 16 and 17 year olds in the Victorian sample. Again, lifetime illicit drug use was elevated in the schoolies samples (see Table 13) in comparison and is likely due to methodological issues with the survey. Cannabis use reported in Table 15 most closely resembled that of the event schoolies sample.
### 3.3.5 Big Day Out music festival

The Big Day Out (BDO) is an annual music festival held in major capital cities around Australia. Data on attendees have been collected in NSW, Queensland and Victoria. Some results are briefly reported here as a further means of comparison of the current schoolies data with research conducted on a similar demographic at a recreational event. In 2009, 348 surveys were collected at the Gold Coast BDO and data are available for the 278 participants who were residents of Queensland (Bryant et al., 2009). Just under half the sample (49.3 per cent) was female and the median age was 23 years. A small proportion identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (5.8 per cent) and 30 per cent had completed Year 12. Data were also collected at the Victorian BDO for 2009. Of these, 603 surveys were collected from attendees aged 16–19 years (Gold & Hellard, Burnet Institute, pers. comm.). More of that sample were female (64.7 per cent), and although closer in age to the schoolies cohort, the education level was again lower (46.8 per cent had completed high school).

Table 16 compares recent substance use by BDO and schoolies attendees. Note that Victorian BDO attendees were asked about substance use in the past month; those in Queensland and the Victorian schoolies reported on use in the previous 12 months. It is evident that use of all drug types was more prevalent among the Queensland BDO sample than the schoolies samples. Victorian BDO attendees reported levels of use in the past month similar to that of schoolies in the past year.

### Table 16: Recent substance use by 16–17 year olds, ASSADS Vic 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug use</th>
<th>ASSADS Vic 2005 (Ever used) (%)</th>
<th>ASSADS Vic 2005 (Used last 12 months) (%)</th>
<th>ASSADS Vic 2005 (Used last month) (%)</th>
<th>ASSADS Vic 2005 (Used last week) (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>94.0</td>
<td>96.5</td>
<td>95.2</td>
<td>94.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamines</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecstasy</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocaine</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallucinogens/LSD</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17 below compares substance use across all cohorts. Note that there are some differences in reporting between samples as mentioned above. For this comparison, data from 17 year old ASSAD respondents have been selected as the closest age match to the schoolies groups.
3.3.6 Summary of comparisons with other data

- The Victorian schoolies sample is of greater median age than both Gold Coast and Whitsunday schoolies samples, and had fewer participants than the Gold Coast who had not just finished secondary school.
- "Getting drunk" was the most common risk-taking behaviour reported by all schoolies samples. Fewer Victorian schoolies reported being drunk than those at the Gold Coast, but similar proportions reported drinking to the point of hangover or vomiting. A smaller proportion of Victorian attendees reported having unprotected sex.
- Alcohol use was reported by fewer Victorian schoolies than those at the Gold Coast; recent use of cannabis and ecstasy were also less frequent. Patterns of substance use by Victorian schoolies were closer to that of the Whitsundays than the Gold Coast.
- Schoolies in Victoria reported less use of substances than the Big Day Out cohorts, which more closely resembled those of Gold Coast schoolies.
- Lifetime and 12-month use patterns were more similar to those of Victorian ASSAD respondents and more than those of the NDSHS. Very recent (seven-day) use of substances by Victorian schoolies was more frequent than either non-event cohort.
- Victorian schoolies reported more knowledge of who to contact for an alcohol or drug problem, but less awareness of chill out zones, and were less likely to have used support services.
- Survey data appear consistent with information collected by other agencies at the Victorian schoolies sites, although considerable variability remains in the quality of these secondary data.

4 Discussion

4.1 Summary of findings and implications

4.1.1 Demographics

The majority of schoolies in both expect and event samples were finishing secondary school, Australian-born, did not identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and were aged 18 years. The majority were female. Schooling type was dominated by government schools (45 per cent) followed by Catholic (29 per cent) and independent schools (24 per cent), with some variation across venues. More of the Morninton Peninsula attendees were from Catholic schools; more of the Phillip Island ones were from independent schools. This reinforces the need for any preventative actions taken prior to schoolies (such as education campaigns, information dissemination) to be implemented across the education system, not just at government schools.

4.1.2 Tourism indicators

More young people choose to celebrate schoolies on the Surf Coast than other areas, with Lorne the most popular location. This has distinct implications for the local community, as the area is geographically restricted and the regular population very small, concentrating the impact of the influx of young people.

Almost three-quarters in the samples planned to stay at schoolies for 4–7 days, but this time was spread across a two week period. Although previous observations noted an even spread across the fortnight: the majority of schoolies waited for the second week in 2009. This unpredictability of arrival (which is possible with a majority of family-organised private rentals, rather than commercial rental arrangements) means that any intervention efforts must currently be planned for the full fortnight, which may stretch resources.

4.1.3 Activities

The most commonly reported activities at schoolies was 'socialising at beach' and 'swimming'. More of the expect sample had nominated 'socialising at pub/club' and 'live music'; however limited access to these reduced their rank as reported activities. In Lorne, the single pub was well patronised, especially on 'schoolies only' evenings, but tight monitoring of under-age entry meant that schoolies under 18 were excluded from these gatherings. This was noted by young people as splitting up friendship groups and isolating some attendees.

Live music was not provided; a DJ performed on two occasions across the fortnight. Similar monitoring and arrangements were in place at Mornington Peninsula and Phillip Island. Thus under-age socialising was restricted to public places (Lorne foreshore, Rye Village Green, the jetty area at Cowes) and private parties. This has implications for safety and enforcement efforts, harms at private parties (especially those relating to alcohol over-consumption) are difficult to monitor, and the parties themselves disturb locals in residential areas. Public congregations require diversion of police to monitor, but if these are in 'dry' public areas, alcohol consumption may be reduced.

The 'best part of schoolies' nominations featured time with friends, partying and the beach. Differences were present between the expect and event samples. The two top five rankings are given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Expect</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Beach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Party</td>
<td>Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Meet new people</td>
<td>Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Beach</td>
<td>Drink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Drink</td>
<td>Weather</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although many were keen to meet new people in the expect sample, the event young people stayed close to current friendship groups. Much time was spent at the beach (despite inhospitable weather in week one) as it was the easiest place to socialise. The fall in ranking of ‘friends’ at the event may well be a consequence of the concerted time spent in close quarters, to which most of the young people will not have been accustomed. Interviews and survey comments alluded to discord in some groups over the week.

It may be helpful to consider under-age (and thus alcohol-free) events at local commercial venues during the period, to encourage young people to party away from the residential area and in an area with easy access to supports. Although live music (heavily nominated in the expect cohort) carries noise concerns, the centralisation of this noise at a venue may reduce some residential noise complaints. This approach may have the added advantage of encouraging interaction between groups; despite visions of adventure, the schoolies appear to need some impetus to move out of their social comfort zone.

Schoolies indicated a willingness to pay for activities themselves. However, this willingness reduced from 75 per cent in the expect sample to 54 per cent when on site. Anecdotal evidence suggests this may be due to a lack of awareness of the real cost of holidaying away from home. Any ticket sales should thus be sold ahead of time. The challenge remains to provide some limited activities while minimising the cost and resources required, both of which appear to be resented by local residents. There may be an opportunity to promote local tourism functions instead, organising low-level activities to feed into local business. These still promote healthy alternative activities while offering opportunities to engage the local community more positively.

4.1.4 Substance use

Alcohol use was common in both samples: 79 per cent reported drinking in the last week. The majority of both the expect and event samples reported drinking regularly (2–4 times a month) in the past 12 months, but drinking at high-risk levels (six or more drinks on one occasion) monthly or less.

Participants generally reported more frequent drinking at schoolies than they typically drink. Consumption of greater amounts of alcohol was also reported; with 70 per cent reporting typically consuming five or more drinks on one occasion at schoolies. The greatest proportion of the sample (42 per cent) believed this was about the same as others at schoolies. Low risk drinkers believed they were well below norm. Males were more likely than females to report risky drinking practices, and to believe they drank more than their friends and others at schools.

Seventy per cent of the sample reported that their parents and friends were ‘ok’ with their drinking at schoolies. The majority of study participants were over 18 years of age, so legal concerns are not implicated. However, the increase in scale of drinking at Schoolies is considerable (as discussed in Section 3.1), and parents may not be fully aware of this increased consumption and the associated risks. A targeted awareness program for adults and parents about alcohol consumption at schoolies may be warranted.

Most schoolies bought alcohol for themselves (as the majority of participants were over 18 years of age). Price and taste were key determinants in the choice of alcohol that was purchased. Young people also reported that the content percentage of alcohol also informed their choice. Comments indicated that this was less of an aware, harm-minimising approach than a desire to become intoxicated quickly and inexpensive. Spirits were commonly purchased. Pricing schemes related to alcohol content may thus be useful in reducing consumption in this group.

4.1.5 Risk-taking behaviour

Similar patterns of risk markers are reported by Victorian schoolies as by their counterparts on the Gold Coast, but to a lesser extent. Similarly though, behaviours regarded by others as risks are planned as part of the event. Schoolies expect to get drunk (78 per cent), get hung over (63 per cent), vomit (36 per cent) and pass out (17 per cent) from their consumption. This is achieved, to a slightly lesser extent for hangovers (41 per cent) and vomiting (24 per cent). Engagement in risk-taking behaviours was indicated as more common among males than females.

Although we have noted great concern about over-interpreting faulty data regarding the level of young people’s concern about risk markers, it appears that most of those described above are not of major concern to the schoolies themselves. As discussed the companion document, Schoolies celebrations: social norms, risks and prevention strategies. A review of the literature. (Roach & Salom, 2009), behaviour regarded by adults as risky is often seen by young people as “part of the party”, and is expected and planned. This highlights the need for awareness campaigns to firstly ensure that the target audience recognises the risk, and then associates with it themselves, if any positive impact is to be made. This is illustrated by the survey participants’ attitude towards driving under the influence.

The risk marker recognised as most worrying by this group was driving under the influence – which was undertaken by seven per cent of event respondents. It is possible that, as mostly newly-licensed drivers, to whom independent transport is of value, this group associate with the behaviour and thus are perhaps better recognise the risks associated.

One marker of risk in this study is a major public health concern. This is despite, or possibly because of, lower levels of concern reported by study participants. A large proportion of study participants reported unprotected sex (11 per cent of the total). Sexual health messages may now have been eclipsed by other concerns, and this may have resulted in complacency in a confirmed sexually active group. It may be prudent to revitalise the appropriate sexual health messages presented to schoolies.

4.1.6 Wellbeing issues

Almost the entire sample was of low risk of psychological distress according to the K6 instrument, despite having just completed their major exam period. As 19 per cent reported experiencing stress/distress at schoolies, it is likely that this is more related to event or behaviour-related issues than previous activities.

Schoolies appeared to know who to contact for an alcohol or drug-related problem at schoolies. Approximately half of both samples were aware of the chill out zones, even if only one-fifth of the sample used them. Use of the zones was reported by significantly more at the Surf Coast than at Mornington Peninsula or Phillip Island, which may reflect the profile of chill out zones at the different locations.

Similarly for other support services, schoolies were aware of them more than used them, often having little idea of who provided the support. This might encourage service providers to more heavily promote awareness of their organisations. Interviews indicate that schoolies placed great value on knowing supports from all organisations (including the police) were there if needed.

4.2 Methodological issues

A number of methodological issues require comment. Although the survey results are prey to the subjectivity of self-report, this is inevitable and a recognised limitation of research in this area. Other means of determination (such as testing to monitor AOD consumption) are not feasible in this context.

Another concern raised is the inclusion of data from intoxicated young people in the survey results. This was largely addressed by collecting most data during daylight hours, as anecdotal evidence suggested that most participants did not drink, or drank less, during the day. It was not desirable to actively exclude intoxicated young people from participating in the surveys as we did not wish to skew the data sample through selection of respondents. However, it was possible to reduce the inclusion of poor quality data during the analysis phase.
It has been suggested that future large-scale data collection could be undertaken in facilities located closer to where the majority of schoolies activities take place. Although the rate of survey completion was high, especially considering the length of the current instrument, it is worth considering a scaled down version for future use. Ideally a street intercept survey should require only a few minutes to complete, with simple, unambiguous questions.

More complex questions requiring interpretation and discussion should be moved into an interview format. This need was particularly evident in responses to the ‘concern over markers of risk taking’ questions. The tick box format did not allow differentiation between a ‘no’ response and a missing response. It appeared that only those who had engaged in a particular behaviour reported on whether it was of concern. This made validation difficult. However, as young people themselves are major stakeholders in Schoolies, it was important to try and ascertain their major concerns; further work in a different format will assist with this.

Changing to an interview format will have significant cost implications, or will reduce the number of responses, but may provide more reliable responses to complex questions regarding attitudes and beliefs. It may raise new issues about disclosing some behaviours, and would thus require that interviewers are prepared to offer support should the need arise.

Questions regarding substance use should be clarified by removing the ‘ever used’ option, as this was frequently mistaken for ‘never used’. As most of the schoolies age group is relatively naive regarding drug use, the 12-month use question will give sufficient estimation of overall experience.

The prevalence of sexual activity as a new partner and unprotected sex in the responses prompt the re-introduction of a question regarding overall sexual activity. Along with research showing the rise in prevalence of sexually transmitted infections such as Chlamydia, this highlights the need for more awareness of sexual health issues in this group of young people.

The timing of data collection should be reviewed to ensure best representation of activity reported. In response to local information suggesting the middle weekend as peak time, with young people’s arrivals spread evenly over the fortnight, a five-day period across this weekend was selected. If the two-week period remains the norm, it is suggested that intercept surveys and/or interviews be timed for the middle of each week (e.g. Tuesday–Thursday) to allow participants to actually engage in activities they had planned. As many respondents in the 2009 study had only recently arrived at their chosen location, we may have under-estimated some risk-taking behaviours.

A number of options exist for future data collection. It may be that on-site large scale data collection is not required annually, but should be considered every two to three years for accurate monitoring. As a supplement, the online surveys represent a less resource-intensive option which could be offered annually. This however will require extensive promotion of the survey to schools and continued offer of incentives to participate.

The expectations survey should be offered for a longer period, from approximately mid June to mid November, to allow for greater use. The survey collecting information on what happened at the event should be offered from mid November to mid February. This will minimise likelihood of intoxication when completing survey, ensure that respondents have been at schoolies long enough to answer the survey, and can restrict errors in completion through design. Commentary functions allow young people to reflect on their experience in more detail if they wish.

Concerns remain about consistent and routine data collection by service providers across the sites. There was some uptake in 2009 of the suggested format for documentation, however some services commented on established methods being easier to implement. It is likely that any agreed single format for data collation will require some ‘translation’ from the origin. It is proposed that the original spreadsheet be re-distributed to services with some form of ‘Translation advice’. However, centralising data will retain the responsibility of monitoring, analysing and feeding back this data to the organisers.

5 Recommendations

Continue monitoring of substance use and other risk taking behaviour at the sites of Victorian schoolies celebrations

As discussed above, to ensure that resources allocated to supporting young people at schoolies celebrations are diverted to the areas of greatest need, it is important to continue monitoring indicators of need such as risky behaviours and health issues, as well as alcohol and drug use and sexual activity. A centralised facility could be maintained where data can be collated, analysed and reported on to organising groups such as the SWISC, with information specific to each site available to those coordinators. This will require adoption of an agreed framework for the collection of consistent and comparable data.

Continue use of effective and highly-valued safety-net services at all three sites

Although schools report more awareness than use of support services, their function as a harm reduction strategy remains valid. Their presence contributes positively to a feeling of safety and the expectation of a semi-controlled environment for the visitors. It is important that services are able to provide staff (including volunteers) with skills appropriate to the needs of the schoolies they support. Knowledge of first aid principles, drug and alcohol use and the ability to deal with emotional situations are necessary. It will be important to monitor locations to ensure that emerging venues (such as mainland sites near Phillip Island) are able to be supported. It may also be helpful to increase residents’ awareness of the type, extent and purpose of these services, and to reassure them that such services are not provided at the expense of support for regular residents.

Supplement these risk-mitigation strategies with preventative strategies

A harm-reduction approach tends to be reactive and implies a certain level of inevitability of the risks and behaviours seen at schoolies. To adopt a more hopeful paradigm and to promote positive change, the inclusion of a complementary, proactive health promotion approach is suggested.

Any school-based education or awareness campaign should begin early. Queensland-bound schoolies have confirmed their plans by early Year 11. Those remaining in Victoria may remain flexible during year 12, but will often have decided on activities early on. Campaigns intending to reform attitudes towards alcohol consumption should focus on much younger age groups and include parents and other adults in the target group.

Information provided to schools should include the promotion of local safe and healthy alternative activities. These can be provided on a user-pays basis, recognising that these should not place undue resource burdens on local councils.

Continue promotion of Victorian sites as places for low-key, relaxing celebrations rather than large party centres

Current patterns of substance use in Victorian schoolies locations more closely resemble those of quieter celebrations than full festival situations. Care should be taken regarding promotion of ‘carnival’ atmospheres as this may change the schoolies ‘setting’ to one more conducive to drug use, particularly stimulants. The introduction of all-age, substance free events at local venues may allow greater access for young people to festivities but place them in a safer and better monitored environment. This may lessen the impact of house parties in residential areas. Ticket sales for such events should be finalised prior to schoolies, both to create demand, confirm attendance numbers and ensure that schoolies are able to afford the event. It will be important to ensure that local communities are also aware that the costs of these activities are being met by the schoolies.

Build on current marketing successes, using positive messages such as ‘look out for your mates’ when introducing new concepts. The inclusion of messages encouraging planning and activities is encouraged, along with respect for local communities.
Engage with local residents and business groups to further develop opportunities for young visitors to contribute positively to the host communities. Young people have consistently requested activities during schoolies. In order to balance these requests with low levels of participation noted in previous years, activities should leverage existing tourist opportunities and attractions. This in turn provides income for local businesses. Opportunities should also be pursued to involve young people in short-term community projects during schoolies. This allows positive interaction with residents, which promotes respect between the groups, and encourages host communities to see schoolies in a more positive light.

Formally evaluate any new strategies implemented to manage schoolies celebrations. Any new strategies implemented to reduce the negative impact of schoolies celebrations should be planned to include a component of evaluation, monitoring both process and impact. This allows successes to be measured and effective programs to be more easily translated into new areas. Regular feedback between locations should facilitate this process. Again these processes highlight the need for consistent data collection methodologies and the maintenance of a central facility for analysis and dissemination of information. Bodies such as the Office For Youth may have appropriate resources for this function.

6 Conclusion
Schoolies at Victorian locations continue to present challenges in health and risk management, community engagement and resourcing. Substance use and associated risktaking behaviours are notable, but reflective of wider societal expectations regarding celebration. Despite this, Victorian schoolies’ end of Year 12 celebrations appear to be hugely appreciated by participants, are lower risk than at other locations, and well managed by local organising groups. Ongoing collaboration and support will no doubt ensure that these successes continue.

References

Companion documents
Salom, C. (2009), Schoolies week research project plan.

Other references
National Health and Medical Research Council (2009), Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
Appendix 1: 
Participant information and consent sheet

Schoolies Research Victoria – risk behaviours and attitudes towards drug use and risk-taking at schoolies celebrations

Principal Researcher: Dr Stuart Kinner

Other Researchers: Ms Caroline Salom, Ms Jessica George

1. Introduction

You are invited to take part in this research project as you intend to complete your year 12 schooling this year (2009). We are planning to conduct a study at schoolies in 2009 in Victoria to better understand alcohol and drug use and their influence on risk taking behaviour and would like here to understand your expectations of schoolies. This Participant Information and Consent Sheet tells you about the research project. It explains what is involved to help you decide if you want to take part.

Please read this information carefully. Ask questions about anything that you don’t understand or want to know more about.

If you decide you want to take part in the research project, you will be asked to complete this survey. By completing it you are telling us that you consent to taking part in the research project, and you consent to the use of your personal and health information.

You will be given a copy of this Participant Information and Consent Sheet to keep.

2. What is the purpose of this research project?

The purpose of this project is to investigate attitudes towards schoolies, alcohol and drug use and associated risk-taking behaviour in young people attending Schoolies Week in 2009. We know from past research that young people celebrating schoolies are often at risk of injury and ill health as a result of alcohol or drug use, and aim to better understand these risks.

As part of the study during schoolies in 2009 we will ask participants about their alcohol and drug use, engagement in risk taking activities and their expectations, attitudes and concerns regarding these. We will use this information to determine a) risk factors associated with schoolies celebrations in Victoria and b) what the concerns of young people participating in these celebrations are.

3. What does participation in this research project involve?

Participation in this project will involve approximately 5 to 15 minutes of your time to participate in a survey. This survey may be completed on paper or on the internet. All information collected is confidential and anonymous. You will not be paid for your participation in this research, but you may choose to enter a draw for an Apple Ipod by providing your contact phone number or email address. Those contact details will be stored separately from survey responses.
10. Is this research project approved?

The ethical aspects of this research project have been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Alfred Hospital.

This project will be carried out according to the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) produced by the National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia. This statement has been developed to protect the interests of people who agree to participate in human research studies.

12. Who can I contact?

The person you may need to contact will depend on the nature of your query. Therefore, please note the following:

For further information:
If you want any further information concerning this project you can contact the principal researcher on 03 8506 2368 or Ms Caroline Salom on 07 3620 8811 or at care@drugarm.com.au.

For complaints:
If you have any complaints about any aspect of the project, the way it is being conducted or any questions about being a research participant in general, then you may contact:

Name: Rowan Frew
Position: Ethics Manager, Research & Ethics Unit, Alfred Hospital
Telephone: 07 9076 3848
b) Community stakeholder interviews:

The period before schoolies
Do you think there is a positive atmosphere prior to schoolies?
Is the broader community in favour of schoolies celebrations in the area?
Does the broader community receive information about schoolies prior to the celebrations?
Did the business central area receive any information prior to schoolies?
What sort of behaviour do you expect from the schoolies while they are in your community?
What are your expectations of the number of schoolies who will celebrate in this area?

The period during schoolies
Do you think the community has the resources needed for schoolies celebrations?
Do you think the police responded promptly to any violence or disturbances within the community as a result of schoolies celebrations?
Do you think the levels of noise and litter during schoolies are higher than at other times?
Do you think the organised activities were a good idea? Do you have any suggestions for other activities?
Do you think the media has portrayed schoolies positively?
Do you think the schoolies celebrations fits with the image of the community?
Have you seen an increase in campaigns or advertising targeting risky drinking during the schoolies period?

The period after schoolies
What could you do to make schoolies better/safer/more enjoyable next year?
Was there enough support available for the school leavers in the area?
Did you experience a sense of community engagement with your involvement in schoolies?
If you are not already would you like to be part of a schoolies working group?
Do you think the broader community has benefited from the schoolies celebrations as well as the school leavers?

Moving forward
What sort of information do you have the capacity to collect and or report on during schoolies?