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**SOCIAL COST OF CHEAP GROG**

# Bargain wine prices a 'major worry

■ **Natasha Boddy**

Australia's grape glut has pushed the price of some wines to under \$2 a bottle, making it cheaper to drink than bottled water.

With wine being sold regularly for less than \$4 a bottle, the record lows have reignited debate over whether a floor price should be imposed on alcohol.

An investigation by *The Weekend West* found a range of red and white wines retailing for as little as 40¢ per standard drink, cheaper than bottled water at about 50¢ for 250ml.

With some liquor chains such as Dan Murphy's selling many wines for \$3 to \$4 a bottle, WA Wine Industry Association president John Griffiths said such cheap wines were often sold below cost.

"The only reason why those winemakers or grape growers

would be selling below cost is because they're in a case of hardship and just trying to maintain some sort of cash flow," he said.

"Whilst it may, on the surface, appear a great bargain for the public, generally speaking, it's really taking advantage of people who are in a difficult situation and it's unlikely to be a high quality product."

National Drug Research Institute director Steve Allsop said it was a worry that that alcohol was being sold at such low prices. "The evidence is very strong; cheaper alcohol does result in increased consumption and increased harm, not just for the drinker of course but for everyone else," he said. "So it might be cheap at the bottle shop but it's a high public health cost."

McCusker Centre for Action on

Alcohol and Youth director Mike Daube said: "It's a major worry — this kind of pricing makes alcohol dirt cheap and attractive to people with alcohol problems and to kids."

Mr Griffiths said the industry was very aware that "problem drinkers" were an issue. "We believe strongly that rather than targeting all the population with prohibition measures, perhaps dealing directly with that group of problem drinkers is probably going to be more successful," he said.

The impact of alcohol and its social cost on the community is part of the focus of a parliamentary inquiry. Its findings are expected to be delivered to the State Government on May 26.



**Bowled over: Taster Alicia Boudville completes the wine blind taste test.**