

Background.

I am Keith Gordon Edward Bolton, Australian Citizen, NSW resident and Founding Director of Ecotechnology Australia Pty Ltd which currently has 21 employees. I hold a Bachelor of Agricultural Science and a Ph.D in Environmental Engineering.

This document presents a summary of my experiences with Cannabis along with my views and beliefs formed as a result of these experiences.

I highly commend the Leadership demonstrated by members of Portfolio Committee 1 for investigating the impact of the regulatory framework of Cannabis in NSW.

I strongly support all provisions of the proposed Drug Misuse and Trafficking Amendment (Regulation of Personal Adult Use of Cannabis) Bill 2023.

In the longer term, I support the production, regulation, taxation and sale of Cannabis within a regulatory framework similar to the drug alcohol, noting that alcohol is a drug with a very high risk of harm, and that harm is effectively managed within the regulatory framework.

Table 1. A summary of my experience with Cannabis

Relevant Experience	Experience Outcomes
<p>Lived in the Northern Rivers for >35 years</p> <p>1978 – 1988 2000 – present</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adult use of Cannabis is common in the Northern Rivers, its use has increased over time, and the use of Cannabis is increasingly acceptable by the Community. - The great majority of Cannabis-users experience beneficial effects from their use of Cannabis - A minority of people experience adverse effects caused by Cannabis use, particularly minors and those who suffer from mental health issues - Many people in this region have criminal records due to their use of or dealings with Cannabis, which affects their employment and other opportunities. This makes people less productive and more likely to exhibit antisocial behaviors and attitudes. - The Cannabis RDT tests have sharply increased the amount of people who encounter legal consequences from their use of Cannabis, despite the fact that it is well recognized that the Cannabis RDT tests can detect traces of THC and do not test for impairment. In contrast the well researched 0.05 ppm driving limit placed on alcohol is an excellent measure of impairment caused by alcohol. - The main harm caused to people who use Cannabis is their interaction with the legal system. The impacts are greater on

	<p>people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and young people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prohibition inevitably leads to a black market which is untaxed, and proceeds are often diverted to nefarious and antisocial activities
<p>1988 – 1991 Bachelor of Agricultural Science, Plant Sciences Stream. The University of Queensland</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I learnt that Cannabis was cultivated worldwide for millennia because of its exceptional fibre, food, fuel, medicinal, religious and recreational qualities. - A student submitted a botanical assignment with pressed plants including a Cannabis leaf. Police were alerted and the student was expelled.
<p>1995 – 1999 Doctoral Student, School of Environmental Engineering, Griffith University Business Owner Decision Earth, a hemp importing and wholesaling company</p>	<p>Doctoral thesis: From Wastes to Resources: Constructed Melaleuca Wetlands for Sewage Treatment Plants</p> <p>Hemp business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Imported and wholesaled a wide range of hemp products from Hungary, China, Thailand and Nepal including hempseed oil, raw hemp fibre, twines & webbing, paper, fabrics, clothing and accessories. - There was a significant demand for hemp products, however at the time, Australia and most other countries did not have a hemp industry. - Prohibition laws and enforcement effectively de-legitimised and destroyed the previously thriving hemp industry in Australia and worldwide. History suggests that this was one of the ulterior motives behind Cannabis prohibition. - A load of hempseed oil I imported was seized by customs and destroyed (it contained sub-psychoactive traces of THC), resulting in an interview with Federal Police, after which the investigation was closed.
<p>2001 - 2004 Post-Doctoral Fellow and Research Fellow, School of Environmental Sciences, Southern Cross University</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pioneered research into “mop-crops”, which are fibre crops irrigated with effluent from wastewater treatment plants as a means of effluent reuse - I was one of the first people in NSW to receive a license to cultivate hemp for the purposes of scientific research as a dispensation to the Drug Misuse and Trafficking Act. - Became an advocate for the legitimization and re-establishment of the hemp industry in Australia - Became an advocate for Cannabis and other drug law reform based on principles of harm minimization.
<p>2005 – 2013 Professional Witness, “Cannabis Expert”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Professional witness for around 10 cases involving the use of or dealings with Cannabis - Witnessed first-hand the adverse impact of Cannabis prohibition laws on individuals and their Communities.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Witnessed the high costs of enforcing prohibition laws. - Through my work as professional witness, I came to the realisation that prohibition laws effectively create and subsidise the black market.
<p>2004 – Present</p> <p>Founding Director, Ecotechnology Australia Pty Ltd (82 106 758 123) Trading as Ecoteam</p> <p>Supervisor of Water Operations Division</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I have worked with Aboriginal Communities for two decades managing drinking water and wastewater systems, and have been a consultant to Aboriginal Local Aboriginal Land Councils and other Aboriginal organizations. - Ecoteam has employed Aboriginal people since 2008. Currently, four of Ecoteam’s twenty one staff are Aboriginal. - I have witnessed that Aboriginal people are disproportionately impacted by Cannabis prohibition laws (amongst other laws), they are more likely to be apprehended for their use of or dealings with Cannabis, and are more likely to receive criminal convictions - Although Aboriginal people are over-represented in prisons by a factor of ten or more, I can confirm that Aboriginal people are not ten times “badder” than people in the broader Community. Cannabis prohibition laws widen the gap for Aboriginal people. <p>I have worked with NSW Correctional Centers since 2017 when Ecoteam’s Water Operations Division started working with Balund-a Correctional Centre. Ecoteam holds long-term contracts to manage the drinking water supply systems at Balund-a CC and Glen Innes CC, and has provided specialist water and wastewater consultancy services to other Centers including Kirkconnel, Mid North Coast CC, Macquarie CC, and St Heliers CC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Witnessed the exorbitant costs of incarcerating people - a significant proportion of the prison population are incarcerated due to their use of and dealings with drugs including Cannabis. - Despite the high costs of operating Correctional Centers, they are under-resourced and incompetently managed. Legislative changes to decriminalize adult use of Cannabis (and other victimless crimes) will reduce the stress placed on the states prison system.

As a taxpayer, Australian Citizen, and NSW resident

- I commend the Committee and support team for investigating the politically-sensitive issue of Cannabis regulation.
- I support all provisions of the Drug Misuse and Trafficking Amendment (Regulation of Personal Adult Use of Cannabis) Bill 2023, and I am aware that many people in the Northern Rivers likewise support the Bill.
- I strongly object to the use of our collective scarce resources being used to enforce Cannabis prohibition laws because prohibition doesn't reduce Cannabis use or the harm caused by Cannabis use; Instead, Cannabis law enforcement is very expensive and causes great harm to individuals and society
- I strongly object to Cannabis and other drug prohibition laws that perpetuate a black market allowing billions of dollars of revenue to remain untaxed and to fund other criminal and nefarious activities.

As an academic and hemp researcher,

- I have learnt about the long history that humans have had with the genus Cannabis, and the many resources that are provided by Cannabis.
- I have witnessed that prohibition laws effectively prevented a useful resource from being utilized despite the fact that the main products derived from Cannabis are not drug-related.
- I realised that NSW residents and Australians increasingly support the use of Cannabis for all of its beneficial properties and are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the legislative framework surrounding Cannabis.

As a professional witness

- I have witnessed that legal proceedings related to use of or dealings with Cannabis overall cause more harm to individuals and society than the use of or dealings with Cannabis
- I have witnessed that prohibition essentially creates and subsidises a black market, which encourages criminal activities, and is in itself a major cause of harm to individuals and society

As a person who works with Aboriginal Communities

- I have witnessed that Aboriginal people are disproportionately affected by Cannabis prohibition laws, which only serve to "widen the gap".

As a person who works in Correctional Centers

- I have become aware of the huge taxpayer-funded costs required to incarcerate people

- I have witnessed that law enforcement and Correctional Centers are under-resourced, and Cannabis legislation places unnecessary burden on these essential services
- I have become aware that people who have faced legal issues or have been incarcerated for their use of or dealings with Cannabis or other drugs are more likely to engage in other criminal activities and to become more antisocial as a result of their experience with the law and the blackmarket.

As a human being and Northern Rivers resident,

- I have formed the belief that Cannabis prohibition laws are based on discrimination, moral indignation and nefarious motivations rather than an intent to protect people from harm.
- I have formed an opinion that Cannabis prohibition laws are a direct contravention of human rights in the same way as recently-abolished laws prohibiting same-sex relations, women from voting, or Aboriginal people from experiencing the same rights as their fellow Citizens. Such laws are no longer acceptable in the 21st Century.
- I am deeply disturbed that Australian law makers have continued to perpetuate Cannabis prohibition laws and enforcement for such an extended period despite the preponderance of evidence that prohibition is a failed policy which causes great harm, diverts resources away from real problems, and subsidises the black market .
- As a result, as a reasonable and educated person, I have formed a disturbing hypothesis that some law makers have become corrupted and seek to perpetuate prohibition laws for their own gain, either through their connection to the black market or because they have discriminatory feelings towards certain minorities which they exploit for political expediency, or because they wish to impose their moral convictions upon others.
- I support laws that prevent people from driving or undertaking other high-risk activities if they are impaired because they put others at risk of harm; however, the current roadside drug tests for Cannabis do not test for impairment and merely act to perpetuate the harm caused by Cannabis prohibition laws.
- I support laws, education and social support structures that prevent or discourage minors from using recreational drugs including Cannabis and alcohol.
- I support the legalization and destigmatization of Cannabis as it will encourage those who are adversely impacted by Cannabis use to seek support.

