The Parliament of Australia
Committee of Inquiry

A committee of inquiry into
The Drinking Age Bill
I declare open this hearing of the Committee into the Drinking Age Bill at (insert time) on (insert today’s date).

I welcome all the invited representative groups.

The terms of reference are to determine:

- whether 21 is a more appropriate legal drinking age than 18 in Australia
- whether this bill could have some negative effects in Australia, and if so
- how to avoid or reduce any negative effects of the bill

The committee will now hear from several witness groups who have expressed interest in the inquiry.

After your opening statement, say:

I welcome representatives from (choose a group):

1. Western Australian Centre for Action on Alcohol and Youth
2. National Hotel’s Association
3. Liver Disease Research Centre
4. The Alcohol Education and Awareness Council

Please approach the table.

Please state your names for the Hansard record.

Allow each witness time to say their names

Do you wish to read a statement to the committee?

Allow the spokesperson to read their statement.
After the groups opening statement has been read, say:

💬 Committee members, do you have any questions for the witness group?

Give each committee member a chance to ask a question.

After the questions have finished:

💬 I thank the representatives from (group name) for coming today.

Repeat the above for each witness group.

After ALL the witness groups have been heard, say:

💬 This committee inquiry is now adjourned. The committee will consider the evidence heard here today and will write its report. The report will be tabled in the Parliament.
EXAMPLE COMMITTEE QUESTIONS

These are examples of questions you could ask each witness group. You may start with these questions, and then come up with further questions of your own.

1. Western Australian Centre for Action on Alcohol and Youth Spokesperson

 '// Why do you think so many teenagers abuse alcohol?

What problems are caused by teenagers drinking?

Many teenagers have a drink occasionally. How do you know this is a problem and not just an overblown story?

2. National Hotel’s Association

What do you think should be done to reduce alcohol abuse amongst young Australians?

What is the solution? What would you suggest the Parliament does to reduce binge drinking?

What effect will raising the drinking age have on the hotel industry?

3. Liver Disease Research Centre

What long-term medical problems are caused by excessive drinking?

Previous witnesses have said that education is the key. What are your thoughts on this?

To what extent will raising the drinking age help with the underage drinking problem?

4. The Alcohol Education and Awareness Council

What sort of education do you think young people need to be properly informed about the dangers of drinking at a young age?

While you have said that you think education is important, do you think that raising the drinking age would help with the issue of excessive drinking amongst young people?

Your group says that 18 year olds should be allowed to drink at home with their parents. If this idea became a law, how do you think it could be policed?
When the Committee Chair asks if you wish to read a statement to the committee, you say this:

Every day in Western Australia an ambulance has to be called to help somebody who is under 18 and has caused themselves harm through excessive drinking. Some of these patients are as young as 12 years-old. The age at which people are binge drinking is getting lower and lower.

This excessive drinking culture hasn't just happened overnight, it's been developing over the last couple of decades. This is a major problem in Western Australia and one way of addressing this problem is by raising the drinking age to 21. This will send a strong message to the community that young people should not be drinking.

These are some examples of information you could include in your answers to questions from the committee.

Some teenagers believe that by binge drinking they will be seen as mature, brave and cool. They drink to impress their friends, and be accepted by their peers.

The human brain under 20 years old is more sensitive to harm caused by excessive alcohol. Binge drinking damages the brain and can cause memory and judgement impairment. Depression and anxiety are also more likely in binge drinkers.

Surveys in many Western Australian schools show that 43% of 16 and 17 year-olds admit they drink to get drunk. This is a much bigger problem than most people might realise.
When the Committee Chair asks if you wish to read a statement to the committee, you say this:

Recent calls to increase the drinking age in WA have angered our members in the Australian Hotels Association. This debate has gone on for decades and is fuelled by isolated incidents caused by a minority of underage drinkers.

We do not believe that the community wants the drinking age raised. There are already dozens of laws which determine who can drink alcohol, where it can be served, how it can be advertised and how much people can drink. The liquor industry is already subject to extensive regulation, and further controls are not needed.

These are some examples of information you could include in your answers to questions from the committee.

Mass media education campaigns have often proven effective in reducing problems in society, such as speeding. A comprehensive, sustained and well-funded education campaign can build awareness of the risks of harmful alcohol consumption and drink-driving.

Increasing the drinking age will push drinking into parks, backyards and other unregulated areas. It will create an environment where drinking will be less regulated and the potential for uncontrolled violence will be more evident.

Raising the drinking age will mean less customers in the hotels and clubs. Young people will stop drinking in licensed premises where there are rules about serving alcohol and appropriate behaviour. Instead they will drink illegally in private, unsupervised, less safe environments.
When the Committee Chair asks if you wish to read a statement to the committee, you say this:

💬 As the head of the Liver Disease Research Centre I am concerned the nation will not be able to cope with the long-term effects of excessive drinking.

Australians have a drinking culture in which the consumption of alcohol is a major element of many social events. If this culture does not change we will be faced with enormous problems in the future. Our health system will be overwhelmed by people suffering from the effects of sustained alcohol abuse, such as liver failure.

These are some examples of information you could include in your answers to questions from the committee.

💬 Young people who drink too much age prematurely. They will suffer from a range of alcohol-related diseases much earlier than the previous generation.

💬 Education is not enough to stop underage drinking. Despite years of alcohol awareness campaigns young people still drink to excess. There needs to be a cultural change in Australia.

💬 Raising the drinking age is an effective way of reducing problem drinking in Australia, but it is not the whole solution. The government should consider banning all alcohol advertising and should ban alcohol companies from sponsoring sports events.
When the Committee Chair asks if you wish to read a statement to the committee, you say this:

雹 We are aware that there are issues with binge drinking and underage drinking across Australia. While raising the drinking age may help in some ways, it is not going to educate young people about the dangers of excessive drinking.

雹 We believe that 18 year olds should still be allowed to drink in private with their families. If parents teach their kids how to drink responsibly in moderation it may solve many of the alcohol-related issues that Australia faces today. We also think there should be more education programs in high schools that teach the dangers of binge drinking at a young age.

雹 These are some examples of information you could include in your answers to questions from the committee.

雹 School students should be taught about the serious health effects of drinking too much alcohol. We have also found that when survivors of drink related accidents speak of their experiences to school students it can have a powerful effect.

雹 We think that raising the drinking age would help a little bit, but it would also unfairly disadvantage people who drink responsibly. We believe that 18 year olds are old enough to make their own decisions about alcohol, provided they have the right information.

雹 There will be no need to police 18 to 20 year olds at home, as they will be their parent’s responsibility. The drinkers breaching the law would be the 18 to 20 year olds who were drinking outside their homes, where they would be more noticeable and easier to police.