

In writing this submission, I come wearing a number of different hats. I'm a practitioner of Nutritional Medicine (BHSc Nut. Med), Spiritual Guide, Online Retailer & Marketer.

I first came across Kava in the recreational form in Upstate New York in 2014 while travelling. My partner and I were sitting in a circle with a group of strangers, participating in a philosophical discussion, which became argumentative. I'm interested in expanding understanding, not clarifying right and wrong, so a young local man invited the two of us to change the scenery and check out a trendy new Kava bar.

Now the venue was intriguing to me. Picture a typical bar space with stools around the bar, yet the larger space of the room could have been used for yoga, performance art, group workshops and so on. As we sat with our new friend, the bartender who was a white American man, weaved the Kava story. He shared with us the Island Culture of receiving Kava in a ceremony, of giving thanks (Bula!) and the intention of Kava – to relax and connect with friends.

We are all familiar with sitting down for a few drinks with friends. In some countries in Europe where culture is still strong, this is an integrated part of family and social life, almost always centred around a meal. Substance abuse can occur anywhere in the world, however it seems to be more commonplace around alcohol in Australia, and I believe that this is due to an absence of ceremony, identity and meaning. Governments have experimented with control measures such as lockout laws and increased excise in an effort to curb binge drinking culture, and Indigenous Communities have banned alcohol (and kava) all together, as they have the right to do by way of Self Determination. This does not address the root of the problem, which I will address as trauma, and loss of connection (for both First Nations and new Australians)

What I noticed while enjoying 3 or 4 shells of Kava was a deep calmness inside, yet my mind became sharper, I felt a unity between myself, my partner, our new friend, the bartender and the others at the bar. The conversation flowed effortlessly, my partner and I sharing about exciting travel experiences and beautiful connections we've made, and our friend sharing about the depth of his meditation practice and his desire to bring the virtuous qualities that he has found into his community by taking a role of responsibility and running for office in local council. In contrast to drinking alcohol, I left the bar with all of my faculties together, with feelings of love and affinity in my heart and thoughts of altruism inspiring me forward. I felt clear and focused the next morning. I've drank Kava in ceremony with Fijians since that first moment, and the experience has always carried a similar texture.

It seems that the government is keen to go ahead with the Pilot Program for the obvious economic benefit for local economy and strengthening ties in the Pacific. How it will be regulated is in question. I am NOT in favour of Option 2.

My vision for Kava culture in Australia can be felt in what I've already shared. I have colleagues in the wine, brewing and hotel industry who are committed to a healthier social drinking culture in Australia, including consideration for and collaboration with First Nation communities. The stories we tell, the marketing, the scene and setting in which Kava is consumed will facilitate change in the way that we connect with each other. It is always important to recognise the cultural (I would say sacred) element of Kava and to tell the stories. However, Kava won't always be enjoyed in ceremony, and the creative opportunity to design conscious social connection venues such as Kava bars, or to include Kava into restaurants and bars is exciting.

I am in favour of Option 1, which facilitates the most ease for importers, retailers and consumers. If there is regulation, it should come from the Food Standards. Kava, in the recreational form is less controversial than Cannabis, which is regulated by the TGA, while being safer and more socially

beneficial than alcohol, which is not regulated by the TGA. Option 2 would limit the opportunity for small businesses such as bars and online retailers to establish themselves in this economy. While the government may benefit with revenue for charging unnecessary regulation fees annually (up to \$100,000 for importers), such expenses would be passed down the line to retailers and consumers.

We can look to the wine and beer industry for evidence showing that less regulation and lower excise creates the environment for grass-roots economic growth as well as positive social change. Over the last decade we've seen an explosion in micro-breweries and small bars, following the trends in America. Many of these small venues do not require security, as the drinking culture is a positive one, encouraging robust discussion, personal connection in small groups and a social identity has emerged around mutual enjoyment of quality drink and food.

I would like to see similar opportunity for this exciting new and emerging Kava Industry, with the possibility of small business sharing the stakes alongside the large importers. I would also personally be interested in sourcing the highest quality Kava in small quantities from the Islands and fees up to \$100,000 would make this impossible without further investment.

In my work as a Nutritionist, I support people with anxiety and depression. A large contributing factor to mental health struggle is social anxiety, isolation and disconnection. As a Spiritual Guide, I meet and work with many people in their late 20's and early 30's who have left the party scene. They've spent a decade working full-time and engaging in destructive drinking habits on the weekends. They are burnt out and their mental health is shattered. In wholistic practices like yoga, meditation and clean eating, they have managed to recover to some degree, but what they crave is social connection.

I am pleased to see that the government is motivated to lift the ban on Kava importation and open up trade, business, and social connection opportunities. Kava Culture celebrates people coming together. In the work that I do as a Nutritionist and Health Coach, I see social anxiety and disconnection from community as significant contributing cause as a cause of mental health issues.

In the spiritual communities in Sydney amongst young people, I see people coming together for conscious events such as alcohol free dance parties, eye gazing and intimacy workshops, and sharing circles. Occasionally, lighter psychoactive substances like cacao are used to promote deeper physiological connection to self and others in a consensual way. Kava is another beautiful plant medicine with a rich cultural context of ceremony, which I would personally feel comfortable in facilitating in social groups, though I am not of Island background.

I have enjoyed drinking Kava in bars in America, as it provides a cleaner, lighter, I would say more "conscious" social experience of relaxation and connection compared to drinking alcohol.

I am in favour of OPTION 1, as this would be the most simple way forward for me in helping my clients, facilitating group ceremony, establishing an online retail Kava brand, and potentially importing small quantities directly from producers in the Pacific Islands as well as partnering with Kava bars or already existing Craft Beer bars.

We have seen a boom in the Craft Beer market in the previous decade as regulation and excise has relaxed, paving the way for small producers to enter the market and create a more positive drinking culture – in small venues where security isn't required and punters come to connect with friends over some food and drink. I foresee similar opportunities with Kava.

Option 2 favours the government in the way of revenue collecting, and the big importers and producers. I believe that model that supports grass-roots producers, importers, retailers and venues be incorporated alongside big business. From what I've read, one company plans to supply Woolworths and take a large stake in the market, which is necessary and good, but in my opinion opportunity should not be limited to big business. It will be small groups (including Islander and non-Islander) and people like myself who are leading from the heart who will create a positive Kava culture in Australia. It's important that we lay the foundations from this from the beginning.

Heavy regulation on Kava creates a stigma around a plant that has only positive regard in its lands of origin. I understand that there are concerns coming from Arnhem land. If I was opening a Kava bar and met with resistance from the First Nations community, it would be essential to sit with them, listen to each other and come to a place of collaboration to meet the needs of the community in a way that empowers individuals to make healthy choices. There are endless creative solutions if humans are given the opportunity to explore together. Regulation removes the opportunity for human ingenuity, love, and doing what is best for the higher good. There is more room for positive change in Option 1. It gives the government the opportunity to listen to the people, rather than the other way around (State/Convict Model). I have friends / colleagues who have been through a similar process when planning to open a brewery on Stradbroke Island. Modern day entrepreneurialism has room for profit making AND benevolent action in the community. This should be encouraged and made easy.

As medicine, excess Kava intake can cause hepatotoxicity. So can paracetamol (to the point of fatality), which is available OTC (over-the-counter). Why should this be scheduled by the TGA as schedule 8, alongside morphine, cocaine, ketamine and oxycodone? That's utterly ridiculous.

As a recreational substance, Kava can be addictive. So can alcohol, sex, gambling, football and yoga. These are all widely available with some, but few regulations. Kava fits nicely alongside sex and yoga.

I would like to see Australia grow up, for Australians to be given the opportunity to be self responsible. For this to happen, the government must trust the people, and the people in turn will trust the government.

In closing, it seems right to acknowledge the need for standards to be maintained. Kava should be removed from the PI regulations, making Kava consistent with other foods imported into Australia. Appropriate labelling including information such as Kavalactone content, health warnings should be required, akin to alcohol labeling (% , standard drinks, health warnings). The 18+ age of consent laws should also apply.

I am excited to see how this moves forward, whichever way it goes. BULA!