

[REDACTED]

22 March 2019

Office of Drug Control
Department of Health
GPO Box 9848
Canberra ACT 2601

To whom it may concern,

RE: Pilot program to ease restrictions on the importation of kava for personal use

Thank you for the opportunity to address the aforementioned pilot program. I make this note to register my support for the program and for all measures to ease restriction of kava use in Australia.

My interest in this topic comes in two capacities: firstly, as a registered medical practitioner in Australia who has served communities in metropolitan Australia, remote Aboriginal communities and also Polynesian communities in Australia and in Fiji, and secondly as a Polynesian cultural practitioner myself who recognises the centrality of kava use for social purposes and identity amongst Pacific Islander Australians.

Kava has been much maligned as a social ill among certain communities and a potential source of physical harm in instances of misuse where doses have well exceeding those of standard use have been used. Rapid responses to these impressions have resulted in heavy restrictions being placed on kava use in Australia which has been disproportionately affected Pacific Islander Australians who feel that the demonisation of kava, rooted in some fundamental misunderstandings, is representative of wider misunderstandings of Pacific Islanders and their culture.

Processes such as the requirement for licensing or prescriptions in order to consume kava privately in customary manner, such as those in place currently in the ACT, are seen as an onerous barrier to practicing one's culture, and tantamount to policing of the Pacific Islander identity. This has had a negative impact on the sense of belonging and social cohesion for Pacific Islanders seeking to live out and assert their culture while contributing to community life here in Australia.

Increasing the quantity of kava permitted for important for personal use will be beneficial on a number of fronts. Increasing supply will discourage black market sale of imported kava, but will not be sufficient to "flood the market" and incur worse health outcomes in vulnerable communities such as among indigenous Australians. I reiterate my support and avail myself to assist in any way possible.

Sincerely yours,

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