

# Time to get tougher



fact, worse, three quarters of them are driving at more than double the adult legal limit.

When your Association looked at this issue three years ago, we recommended the focus be on high-risk drink-drivers: recidivist offenders who drink to excess, see no problem with driving under the influence and repeatedly face charges in court. It seemed logical to attack the challenge of drink-driving by getting these repeat offenders off the road. We called for doubling the penalties for causing death and serious injury while driving drunk; we called for a zero limit for drivers aged under 20; and we called for action on the rehabilitation and treatment of recidivist drink-drivers.

There has been progress – penalties were doubled, zero limits were introduced for those under 20, and the Ministry of Justice is trialling drug and alcohol courts. And we have seen progress in rehabilitation programmes, the adoption of intelligence-led road policing, and the introduction of alcohol interlocks as an option for sentencing. But the truth of the matter is that the problem still exists. Drinkers choosing to get behind the wheel have not changed their behaviour, despite these initiatives.

What has changed, however, is the public attitude towards those who drink to excess and then drive. Our Member surveys reveal less tolerance of this behaviour now than ever before.

So, how do we tackle this problem? How do we get the importance of this message across? Maybe it's time to consider new measures to make sure that every driver is truly mindful of their responsibility and everyone understands that alcohol and driving don't mix.

For example, it would send a very clear message if the Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) level were lowered. Maybe that could go hand in hand with a new penalty regime that graduates from a fine for lower levels of infringement, to more serious repercussions for the higher end of offending.

I suspect that any administration that introduced a harsher regime would be applauded by most New Zealanders. The fact that our Members, who represent the majority of motorists in New Zealand, are in favour of a fresh focus on this issue is significant and I believe a proactive decision would be accepted as a very positive one.

Perhaps it's time for all of us to be brave and draw a new line in the sand. We're on the road together, we agree there needs to be changes made for the better.

So, as we approach the time of year when Christmas and New Year are celebrated, let's agree on this: drinking and driving are not a good mix and it's time to encourage a stronger approach. 🚗

**Brian Gibbons**  
Chief Executive

**O**NE WOULD THINK that after decades of advertising, the message on drink-driving would have

sunk in and people would avoid combining driving and alcohol. I raise this observation in light of statistics from the Police showing that, in random roadside breath testing, 30,000 drivers are caught over the limit each year. It seems that there is still a serious problem with drink-driving in this country.

A sad statistic – not widely talked about – is that every year, roughly a third of those drivers killed on the roads are driving with a blood alcohol level over the legal limit. In

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

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