

Ministear airson Slàinte Coimhearsnachd agus Cùisean Lagha
Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs

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In 2014 Scotland Welcomes the World



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Dear Ms. Watts,

Thank you for your letter dated 17 March 2014 considering Scottish Government activity around banning or restricting the sale of legal highs or New Psychoactive Substances (NPS).

The impact of New Psychoactive Substances, these so called 'legal highs' poses challenges to Scotland. Without a doubt, the health implications of taking NPS can be just as serious as controlled drugs and this is a local, national and international challenge made more complex by an ever changing market. Working with partners the Scottish Government putting out the message that whilst these substances might be legal it does not mean that they are safe.

As you will be aware under current arrangements, **the treatment and prevention of drug problems is devolved to the Scottish Government, the control of drugs under the Misuse of Drugs Act is reserved to the UK Government.** With independence, responsibility for legislation on the classification of illegal drugs will also become the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament.

The Scottish Government will, however, continue to explore how we can best use devolved powers to tackle the supply and sale of, and demand for, these substances.

I convened a summit in April 2013 that brought together police, health, community and youth organisations to discuss how NPS were affecting people in Scotland. Since then, the Scottish Government has been taking action to address the sale and use of NPS by:

- improving our data collection tools to provide more information about the use of these substances, for example, updating our surveys on drug use among young people, the general adult population and those being admitted to prison and for the first time reporting the number of drug related deaths where NPS were found in the body.



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- raising awareness of the dangers of NPS by updating the prevention messages in our drugs information service Know the Score and funding outreach work at Scottish festivals. The Know the Score website can be accessed at: <http://knowthescore.info/>
- providing funding to Police Scotland and the Edinburgh-based drug service Crew to develop resources for teachers and schoolchildren.
- working with Police Scotland to understand the impact of enforcement activity.
- commissioning Crew and also the Scottish Drugs Forum to provide training and information to drug and youth services in Scotland to help build their capacity to respond.

I called for a debate on NPS to be held in the Scottish Parliament on the 6 February 2014 – the first ever debate in Scotland on this issue. At the debate, I announced the next phase of our work in this area including:

- New advice materials on NPS will be produced for Know the Score to ensure people have credible and factual information on NPS. A Facebook campaign on the dangers of NPS was launched on the 7 February; and
- New research will be commissioned in 2014 to help improve our understanding of who is using these drugs in Scotland and their motivations for use.

My colleague, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, hosted a New Psychoactive Substances Enforcement summit on 25 April 2014, for experts in enforcement to discuss the full range of options available to tackle the sale and supply of NPS in Scotland.

The summit considered:

- what powers can be used – reserved and devolved - to address the supply and sale of these drugs;
- what can be learned from the use of enforcement powers internationally;
- the impact of enforcement action;
- what tactics can be used to dissuade sellers of these drugs;
- how enforcement agencies can work better together; and
- how local areas can share information and practices which could help others.

The outcomes of the NPS Summit on 25 April will feed into the Home Office New Psychoactive Substances Review which is looking at the legislative options for tackling NPS.

I hope you have found the above information useful.

Yours sincerely

Roseanna Cunningham