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What drug problem? Cannabis and heroin in an alternative community

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What Drug Problem?
Cannabis and Heroin in an Alternative Community

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-- 30 November 2001 --
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Finally, to the necessarily anonymous participants in this research: Nimbin's village and rural residents, growers, dealers, injecting drug users, businesspeople, friends, friends-of-friends and welcoming strangers, my deepest gratitude to you all for your trust, your voices, your sharing. Without you this research would not have been possible.

Candidate's Statement
To the best of my knowledge and belief, I declare that the work presented in the thesis is original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

................................................................. 30 November 2001
Carol de Launey
ABSTRACT

Does Nimbin have a drug problem? This tiny village in north-eastern NSW has an international reputation for its alternative community and its street drug market. Ever since the Aquarius Festival thirty years ago Nimbin has fascinated the media, and recurrent headlines about the village's (undefined) 'drug problem' suggested my research topic. My research aim was to investigate the meaning/s of Nimbin's 'drug problem' in the context of Nimbin's 'alternative' culture.

Because the topic of illicit drugs is both ethically challenging and highly sensitive, my research design was strongly participant-focused, with an emphasis on confidentiality balanced by a mixed methodology to cross-validate results. My methods included an anonymous household (door-to-door) survey based on a national household survey; an anonymous mailed-back survey of Nimbin and Lismore drug injectors; taped interviews with health and legal professionals, cannabis activists and drug dealers; semi-structured interviews with 'professional' cannabis crop growers; and participant observation over several years. I found the multi-method research design to be particularly effective for investigating illegal drug marketing and use, and the design provided me with multiple perspectives on a complex issue.

Superficially, there appeared to be two drug 'problems' in Nimbin — one was the (largely cannabis) street market, and the other revolved around heroin users, and included complaints about scruffy-looking people hanging around the main street, or overdosing in the public toilet. However, my research suggested that these issues, while immediately comprehensible as 'drug problems', obscured more complex issues. For example, the village's street drug market was intertwined with the local economy and with the alternative community's values and drug use, while close to half of the drug injectors lacked secure housing (which creates problems that are not related to heroin), and all heroin users were blamed for the actions of few.

Many factors influence the creation and maintenance of what we might call 'problems', and drugs are frequently blamed for broader social problems. What is Nimbin’s drug problem? The answer depends, in part, on the drug of interest, but more importantly it depends on your definition of a ‘problem’. Some useful and meaningful perspectives on this important social issue include quantified indicators such as death, injury, arrest rates, the economics of black markets, the demographics of drug use, and estimates of ‘social costs’. Qualitative perspectives include people’s opinions about drugs, media-generated moral panics, the effects of social marginalisation, and the role of drug cultures.

A number of 'drug problems’ arise as a direct result of drug illegality. They include black markets, corruption, drug-related violence, theft, stronger forms of the drug, and more dangerous using practices (with the risk drug
overdoses and HIV/AIDS), as well as public nuisance issues. Government policy, judicial sentencing and public opinion are moving towards the social reintegration of illicit drug users, but this is almost invariably counterbalanced by a toughening of legal sanctions against supply of the same drug. Most discussions about illicit drugs fail to consider the long-term implications of harsh penalties for, and elaborate and punitive police operations (such as occurred throughout my Nimbin research) against, small-scale independent growers and dealers. The only way to directly engage with drug markets and all the attendant problems, is to legitimise and regulate the supply of recreational drugs.

I discuss several examples of the important role of the drug culture in mitigating problems caused by illegality. One example is the influence of Nimbin's alternative community on the style of the drug market. The village drug scene more closely resembles the many north coast village craft markets, than it does Kings Cross, Cabramatta or New York's Bronx. Buyers are north coast locals, along with national and international tourists (the small village is known to cannabis users world-wide, both through media attention and word-of-mouth). Nimbin offers a 'safe' village market ambience and competitive prices to a mainly cannabis using clientele.

I suggest that there are two major underlying influences on the experience of a ‘drug problem’, regardless of the drug or the place. They are:

1. Political influences — specifically the effects of government policy on black markets, law enforcement practices, and access to services and resources;
2. Cultural influences — particularly the beneficial effects of norms and functional role models for the safe use of a drug, cultural effects on the drug market, and the role/s of the drug in the day-to-day life of the culture.

These influences can operate with, or despite, each other, and can create or ameliorate many ‘drug problems’. In the case of Nimbin’s alternative culture, government policy has created a number of drug problems and the counter-culture has worked to minimise them.

In my research into Nimbin’s ‘drug problem’ I have clarified some issues and raised a number of others. I have examined the notion of a ‘drug problem’ from several perspectives using a range of research tools, and discussed some key influences on the problem associated with drug use. Drawing from the Nimbin research and my reading, I suggest legalising the recreational drugs to bring them under the dual controls of supply legislation and social norms. In conclusion, I suggest that we need to be very clear about what ‘drug problem’ it is that we are talking about, and indeed, whether the problem is really about drugs at all.

* * * * *
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# GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACON</td>
<td>AIDS Council of NSW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIDS</td>
<td>Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIHW</td>
<td>Australian Institute of Health &amp; Welfare</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANAIDUS</td>
<td>Australian National AIDS and Drug Use Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C'lth</td>
<td>Commonwealth</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEMP</td>
<td>Help End Marijuana Prohibition</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIV</td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDU</td>
<td>Injecting drug user</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGA</td>
<td>Local Government Area</td>
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<tr>
<td>LCC</td>
<td>Lismore City Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>MO</td>
<td>Multiple occupancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCADA</td>
<td>National Campaign Against Drug Abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDS</td>
<td>National Drug Strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td>NRPA</td>
<td>Nimbin Ratepayers and Progress Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSEP</td>
<td>Needle and Syringe Exchange Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>OD</td>
<td>Overdose</td>
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<tr>
<td>QJC</td>
<td>Queensland Criminal Justice Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STD</td>
<td>Sexually transmitted disease/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US / USA</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WPUCMP</td>
<td>Working Party on the Use of Cannabis for Medical Purposes</td>
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# ABBREVIATIONS OF AUSTRALIAN (AUS) STATES AND TERRITORIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
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<td>NT</td>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
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<td>QLD</td>
<td>Queensland</td>
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<td>SA</td>
<td>South Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>Victoria</td>
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<td>WA</td>
<td>Western Australia</td>
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION: NIMBIN’S ‘DRUG PROBLEM’

Does Nimbin have a drug problem? This tiny village in north-eastern NSW has fascinated tourists and the media for a quarter of a century; it has an international reputation for two things, the counter-culture and illicit drugs. For example, in 1994 the British Sunday Telegraph observed, ‘You can spot the tourists in Nimbin: they’re the ones wearing shoes’ (Grosset 1994, p. 19), while ten years earlier the Australian Geographic declared, ‘Outsiders have long associated Nimbin with marijuana’ (Hall 1987, p. 107). However, New Zealand Penthouse spoke of ‘Nimbin’s lush green pastures’ running red [with blood] (Farry 1997, p. 104), while ‘drug war’ and ‘drug problem’ were recurrent themes for the media in the nineties. The Mayor of Lismore convened a ‘think tank’ to address Nimbin’s ‘drug problem’, the NSW Police Service engaged in regular large-scale operations to combat it, the Nimbin community debated it heatedly at public meetings, and the print media regularly published stories about it. My research into Nimbin’s ‘drug problem’ was conducted over the nineties, primarily part-time; the design and research phases spanned 1993-1997, analysis and writing 1997-1998, and editing and revision 2000-2001.

In this chapter I will introduce my research topic and discuss the development of the methodology, including a consideration of some ethical and logistical problems; there will be further discussion of the mixed methods employed for this dissertation in Chapter Seven, while the Appendices provide more detail. The politics of illicit drugs are discussed in some depth in Chapter Two, while the history and current use of cannabis and heroin are examined in Chapter Three, along with the role of culture in drug use. In Chapters Four to Six I present the research results. My discussion of Nimbin’s alternative community and its ‘drug problem’ will draw heavily from images in the mass media (which arguably have had a profound influence on public perceptions of Nimbin) as well as from more conventional literature from a range of disciplines.

BACKGROUND

Nimbin is located in north-eastern New South Wales (NSW) in the Lismore local government area. The village of Nimbin lies in a picturesque valley surrounded by darkly forested mountains; it faces the three distinctive volcanic spurs known as the Nimbin Rocks. Queensland’s Gold Coast is less than two hours drive away, and Byron Bay backpackers can visit Nimbin on any one of a number of daily coach tours. Thirty kilometres away is Lismore, the seat of local government, with a university, a Conservatorium of Music, and a vigorous visual and performance arts community. The climate and lifestyle of the region has attracted a mix of older citizens, professional couples, artists and unemployed young people, and the NSW north coast is one of the fastest growing areas in Australia. The region is also well known for its concentration of the counter-culture. For example, John McPherson from the NSW State Library was reported as saying, ‘The so-called hippies ... have
been the force behind a burgeoning music and arts industry which already realises millions of dollars annually for the region’ (*Northern Rivers Echo* 9 January 1997, p.16).

Up until the 1960s the north coast supported dairy and logging industries, but the growth industries since then have been tourism and small specialist farming (such as macadamia nuts and tea tree oil). There is a high level of social disadvantage and unemployment, and the only growth employment opportunities are in service industries and professional positions (*Northern Star* 6 June 1998, p. 3). Around 97% of north coast businesses are small owner-operated enterprises (*Northern Star* 6 June 1998, p. 3), and the region’s open-air village markets provide outlets for locally produced arts and crafts, fresh organic produce and second-hand goods. The NSW north coast is a popular tourist destination, offering surfing beaches, fishing, rainforest, volcanic mountains, and a mild subtropical climate. In the early nineties the NSW Tourist Bureau estimated that the population doubled in some north coast areas during peak tourist periods (NSW Department of Health 1990), and certainly the region relies heavily on the tourist dollar. The NSW Tourist Bureau published a booklet for tourists entitled *Lismore and Nimbin*, although the former is a large city, and the latter is only one of the many small, attractive villages in the area.

As Lismore Councillor Diana Roberts pointed out in an interview for this research, Nimbin holds an acknowledged attraction for overseas and Australian tourists; they arrive daily in cars and buses to photograph the painted shop facades, and the locals, transients, and visitors who gather in the single main street. There is no doubt that tourists are interested in the small township, but what exactly attracts them? The most obvious difference between Nimbin and other north coast towns is the very visible presence of the counter-culture in the village. The wooden shop facades and verandah posts are brightly painted with murals, and the single main street bustles with adults and children colourfully dressed in harem pants, tights, greatcoats, fairy dresses, patched jeans, and medieval clothes; many have dreadlocks or green hair, and body piercing.

Nimbin attracted journalists before it attracted tourists. For example, in the seventies Phil Jarratt wrote in *Australian Playboy*:

> The notion of a new social order borne out of a rock festival is still faintly ridiculous, but the pimply white hordes who greeted the dawn of the Age of Aquarius by fleeing campus and donning gum boots have contributed something which is bound to affect us all ... Nimbin was a dying town when the hippies moved in, a victim of the rural recession. Milk quotas had forced the small dairymen out, and the cattle industry was failing. While tourism boomed along the coast the hinterland was slowly sinking. Then, with the Aquarius Festival of 1973, came the new breed of settlers, fuelled by American dreams of a rural resurgence, a simpler way of life and an answer to the increasingly hectic mental and physical demands of life in the cities ... In Nimbin’s run-down main street they set up a healing centre, a health foods cafe, and a media and information base ... The hospital re-opened and the baker made a killing with a new wholemeal bread recipe the kids had given him (Jarratt 1979, pp. 61, 63).

While in the eighties Lincoln Hall wrote for the Australian *Geographic*:
Nimbin is remembered for demonstrations that brought about legislation in 1983 classifying 70 percent of NSW remaining rainforest as national parks. ... Fourteen years ago it was a dying town. Then came the Aquarius Festival and thousands flocked into this sleepy valley set amid rainforest and extinct volcanoes in northern NSW. Many were so inspired by the festival, whose theme was survival on Earth, that they stayed in the area and transformed it. The moment I drove into Nimbin I knew this was no ordinary country town ... [Buildings] were painted in a riot of psychedelic colours and covered in designs depicting anything from rainbows to Buddha. This was hippy art, celebrating a Utopian dream that has enticed many people to this northern corner of New South Wales. I should not have been surprised by the sight of it: I had arrived at what has turned into a Mecca for Australia’s alternative lifestyles (Hall 1987, pp. 103-104).

And in the nineties Simon Grosset described to British readers his visit to Nimbin’s ‘notorious’ Rainbow Cafe:

This is where everyone heads as soon as they arrive in town, to score some drugs. Not that you have to buy any. As a cigarette smoker, I have always been slightly sceptical about passive smoking. After half-an-hour in the Rainbow, where you couldn’t see across the room for the purple haze, I was ready to agree to anything. The music was peacenik Sixties, the conversation muted, the atmosphere high. Small children ran around, barefoot but clean and happy (Grosset 1994, p. 19).

To discuss Nimbin is to talk about the alternative community, or counter-culture.

THE COUNTER-CULTURE

I use terms such as ‘alternative’, ‘environmentalist’, ‘green’ and ‘counter-culture’ throughout the thesis. Manuel Castells (1997) provided a definition for ‘counter-culture’ which also may be applied to related representations such as ‘alternative culture’; he said: ‘By counter-culture, I understand the deliberate attempt to live according to norms different, and to some extent contradictory, from those institutionally enforced by society, and to oppose those institutions on the ground of alternative principles and beliefs’ (Castells 1997, p. 116). Castells defines the allied term ‘environmentalism’ (which applies equally well to the common synonym ‘green’) as: ‘all forms of collective behaviour that, in their discourse and in their practice, aim at correcting destructive forms of relationships between human action and its natural environment, in opposition to the prevailing structural and institutional logic’ (Castells 1997, p. 112). I use the terms ‘counter-culture’, ‘alternative culture’, ‘green’ and ‘environmentalist’ interchangeably, because, for my purpose, they all similarly describe the values and lifestyles of those who settled in the Nimbin region following the Aquarius Festival.

The counter-culture established a number of multiple occupancies (some authors refer to them as intentional communities or communes) around Nimbin. Multiple occupancies are tracts of land held in common title by a group of unrelated people; parcels of the land cannot be sold separately. This living arrangement is generally referred to as the abbreviated ‘MO’ (for example, in Lismore Council reports, in local newspapers, and in self references such as in the Pan-Community Newsletter). There is a greater concentration of MOs in north-eastern NSW than anywhere else in Australia (Munro-Clark 1986, p.135).
Introduction: Nimbin's 'drug problem'

In Nimbin MO residents were involved in local politics from the beginning (Munro-Clark 1986, p. 136) and continued this involvement into the nineties. For example, in the nineties Diana Roberts, a Nimbin multiple occupancy resident, served three terms as an independent member of Lismore City Council, while another Nimbin MO resident, Bob Hopkins (calling himself Prohibition End), polled 7.4% of the primary vote in Lismore’s blue ribbon conservative seat at the 1996 state election, and out-polled the sitting National Party member in Nimbin booths (Northern Rivers Echo, 30 March 1995, p. 1). The north coast’s alternative vote has helped to elect Green and ‘alternative’ Independent Richard Jones to the state upper house, and has turned several safe National Party lower house seats on the north coast into marginal seats. In some respects Nimbin was merely a part of a north-coast-wide influx of urban baby boomers with ‘green’ attitudes. Their environmental awareness and alternative views were expressed in building practices and lifestyles that had minimal impact on the environment, alternative medicines and religions, group discussion and decision-making processes, and direct political activism.

In 1973, when the counter-culture arrived in force, the Nimbin area was in decline. Farms were untenanted, property values were low, and the village housed a few struggling businesses. Many who attended the Aquarius Festival decided to stay, and since then more people seeking an alternative lifestyle have settled in the Nimbin area. These environmentally-aware ‘new settlers’ often refer to the economic and ideological effects of their presence as ‘recycling’ Nimbin. While alternative communities existed in the Nimbin area prior to 1973, as elsewhere on the north coast, they were scattered and few in number prior to the Aquarius Festival.

Nimbin came to the attention of the media — and so to the world — for the first time when the Australian Union of Students held the 1993 Aquarius Festival on a private property close to the village. Grahame Dunstan was one of the organisers of the Aquarius festival, in his role as cultural officer with the Australian Union of Students. He described the festival in a taped interview for this thesis:

> About 5,000 students from around Australia came to the Festival and there were about 20,000 day visitors from the Lismore district. The Northern Star covered it with fascination. The locals came to stare at the naked bodies. They’d hang around the sauna and toilet areas, no walls, no central divisions in some of the uni-sex toilets, it was a shock to the local people. The Aquarius Festival was a temporary community with time and space to share dreams ... Nimbin became a focus for resettlement, and lots of people bought land [which] was relatively cheap because of the collapse of the dairy industry.

It is important to recognise that although Nimbin’s counter-culture had its genesis in the Aquarius festival, the community is a contemporary example of ‘new politics’. New politics refers, among other things, to the erosion of the support base of large political parties and the emergence of small, special-interest lobby groups (often acting in loose collectives). According to Crook, Pakulski and Waters (1992, p. 222) new politics crosses occupational, national and class boundaries and are increasingly international, and these authors locate the mass media in a central role: ‘[New politics] affects the young and educated sections of the postwar generation; and its diffusion occurs through the mass media’ (Crook, Pakulski and Waters 1992, p. 222), and ‘The new politics is highly dependent on the mass media. It constitutes a mass spectacle in which appeals combine with symbols and
icons, where images rather than discursive arguments determine outcomes, where captivating drama may be more effective and more important than systematic analysis, and where anxiety may overshadow calculation as a spur to collective actions’ (Crook, Pakulski and Waters 1992, p. 148).

The late twentieth century has produced a record number of interest groups which are loosely grouped under an environmental or ‘green’ banner, with global links and global concerns (Yearly 1992, p. 150).

As Yearly observed, ‘nature conservation and environmental organizations have flourished’, green political parties have been established in around thirty countries, and he concludes that ‘the environmental movement is well established as a social movement’ (Yearly 1992, p. 131). Yearly noted that, ‘At the start of the 1990s it appears that everyone is an environmentalist of some sort, be they politicians, supermarket chains, advertisers, the media or big business’ (Yearly 1992, p. 118). Castells suggested that the environmental movement has created a new culture (Castells 1998, p. 111), and he sees the movement as an important new political group: ‘Collective action, politics, and discourses grouped under the name of environmentalism, are so diverse as to challenge the idea of a movement. And, yet, I argue that it is precisely this cacophony of theory and practice that characterises environmentalism as a new form of decentralized, multiform, network-oriented, pervasive social movement’ (Castells 1998, p. 112). Nimbin’s alternative community is justifiably proud of a number of achievements which spread from northern NSW to the rest of Australia, including rainforest protection through on-site demonstrations (notably Terania Creek in 1979), legislative support for alternative building styles, and the development of alternative energy sources. However these signs of ecological awareness were evident throughout Western society in the sixties and seventies, and north-eastern NSW is the home to one strand of the Australian version (albeit an important one).

The counter-culture in Nimbin undoubtedly is part of a loosely-linked global political movement that emerged in historically unprecedented numbers in the middle decades of the twentieth century, with similar concerns and protest styles, regardless of country. For example, Castells (1998) described how protesters stage media ‘events’, while Yearly (1992) suggested that issues would not arouse widespread interest without ‘actors’ to attract media and community interest (Yearly 1992, p. 148). Yearly believed that: ‘the work of environmental pressure groups is absolutely central to the explanation of continuing environmental concerns since these groups have played the major role in keeping ecological problems in the public eye — in defining some condition (say pollution) as a problem and attempting to do something about it’ (Yearly 1992, p. 133). Yearly continued:

The media are an important resource for green pressure groups. From early in their campaigning, Greenpeace activists saw the virtues of taking filming equipment with them on their ocean protests in order both to document what took place and to ensure that their story was given maximum publicity at home since their footage made very exciting television news. But, if the newsworthiness of their actions potentially favours environmental groups, it is also a constraint on them; they have to bear the needs of the media in mind. Issues which are perceived as “newsworthy” are likely to receive more attention than other issues (Yearly 1992, p. 134).

This media-aware protest style is well illustrated in Nimbin demonstrations and media events (as discussed in the result’s section, Chapters Four to Six).
Western society in the second half of the twentieth century is marked by diversity and affluence, and the influence of the well-educated post-war ‘baby boomers’. Featherstone (1991) has pointed out that western society had anti-establishment groups well before the late twentieth century (such as the Romantics and the Bohemians). However, environmental politics is a baby boomers’ phenomenon, and provides an example of what has been called ‘new politics’. Baby boomers were well-educated, relatively affluent, and frequently concerned with environmental and other social issues. What made them different from earlier alternative groups were their numbers. The sixties and seventies saw the historically marginalised counter-culture assume sufficient numbers to impact on the whole of western society. Featherstone suggested that, ‘we should focus attention on the emergence of a particularly large generational cohort, “the sixties generation” which entered higher education in larger numbers than ever before’ (Featherstone 1991, p. 35). He continued: ‘Clearly the 1960s was a period in which what became known as the “counterculture” developed an attack on emotional constraints and favoured a relaxation of formal standards of dress, presentation and demeanour’ (Featherstone 1991, p. 45).

According to Featherstone the ‘boom generation’ (so-called because of the record number of babies) are those born between 1946 and 1964; and, according to Featherstone, they adopt an attitude of lifelong learning, and exert strong influence as they reach positions of power (Featherstone 1991, p. 44). At the close of the twentieth century the urban baby boomers had the genuine option of constructing their own lifestyles, and in Australia many chose to migrate from southern cities to more northern coastal area, including to the north coast of NSW and its hinterland. The counter-culture in Nimbin has flourished and grown since the Aquarius Festival, and ultimately has influenced the flavour of the whole north coast. In this small eastern corner of Australia the alternative movement expanded, and began to have an impact on the region’s economy, politics and image. In the nineties Nimbin was thriving.

The local economy has doubtless benefited from the arrival of the counter-culture, with their small business ventures and artistic/creative products; in Nimbin the counter-culture appeared to be energetic, innovative and expanding in the nineties. In 1994 property values had increased by 20% to 40% over two years (Lismore Echo 23 June 1994, p. 12), new homes were under construction, parking was a problem, and the number of businesses in the small main street had grown from half-a-dozen to over thirty, including seven restaurants and coffee shops. Locally produced goods were sold in village shops and at the region’s village markets. Among the many local achievements at this time, Nimbin’s Essex Electrics was exporting electricity from sustainable sources to the state power grid, Nimbin’s Rainbow Power Company was exporting alternative energy products to over thirty countries, Paul Tait and Jeni Kendell sold their film Nearly Normal Nimbin to SBS TV (first screened 2 November, 1998), and MO resident Diana Ah-Naid had an Australia-wide hit song with ‘I Go Off’. At the time of my research Nimbin was creative, businesslike, and vibrant notwithstanding widespread social disadvantage and endemic regional unemployment. In counterpoint to obvious signs of prosperity, innovation, and tourist interest, there was a regular theme in the media about Nimbin’s ‘drug problem’ — whatever that might mean.

The purpose of my research was to investigate, define and discuss possible meanings of that term.
The popular media played a prominent role in developing Nimbin’s image and the associated perceptions of a ‘drug problem’, and on occasions the media have been guilty of what Cohen (1980) termed ‘moral panic’. He used this term to describe the sensationalised and misleading media depiction of groups who were different to mainstream society; the ‘moral panic’ reporting style generates fear and hatred among some sections of society, and often results in punitive policing directed against the stigmatised group or culture.

NIMBIN’S ‘DRUG PROBLEM’

Was Nimbin’s ‘drug problem’ merely an example of media exaggeration, or, alternatively, were the journalists performing a valuable role, publicising community concerns for consideration and discussion by a broader audience? The mass media has been very interested in Nimbin for some time, and the focus has tended to be on illicit drugs. Over the years the local Lismore newspaper, the Northern Star, regularly featured front page stories about a drug crisis in Nimbin, for example: NIMBIN BATTLE AGAINST HEROIN: RESIDENTS TO CALL MEETING TO FIGHT DRUG MENACE (Northern Star 20 April 1988, p. 1), and: WAR ON DRUGS TAKES TO STREETS (Northern Star 20 March 1993, p. 1), NIMBIN UNITES IN DRUG BATTLE (Northern Star 25 March 1994, p. 1) and POLICE DENY DRUG DEALERS HAVE FREE REIN IN NIMBIN (Northern Star 24 June 1994, p. 5).

By 1996 the headlines are beginning to sound familiar: NIMBIN ANGER AT HARD DRUGS. ‘Another overdose in the main street of Nimbin ... has sparked a furious outcry from residents that police have failed to curb the sale of hard drugs in Nimbin’ (Northern Star 20 January 1996, p. 1). The Lismore Echo (later the Northern Rivers Echo) continued this tradition with stories such as: NIMBIN’S DRUG DEALERS COULD BE RUN OUT OF TOWN. ‘The hustle of drug dealing has assumed a new air of desperation on Nimbin’s main street following a surge in heroin addictions funded by drug sales to tourists over the recent holiday season’ (Lismore Echo, 17 March 1994, p. 1). While the print media often used the vague term ‘drugs’, a greater sense of crisis was portrayed by using terms like ‘heroin hell-hole’ and ‘needle park’. For example, a local paper had featured this story, under the headline:

NO REASON FOR PANIC IN NEEDLE PARK. The apparent discovery of twenty discarded hypodermic needles in the grounds of Nimbin primary school should not cause a panic about the local drug problem, according to the health official responsible for the issuing of clean needles. ...[he] was responding to a story in The Echo last week about the delivery of the twenty needles to Lismore MP, Bill Rixon, who then shocked the visiting Minister for Justice, Wayne Merton, by showing them to him. A Nimbin businessman keen to see an end to drug dealing had said in a note to Mr Rixon that the needles had been used. In fact, they were clean and still with their Health Department issued [sticker] (Lismore Echo 26 February 1993, pp. 1-2).

Three weeks later a national magazine proclaimed:

... now the hippy haven has become a heroin hell-hole ... the Nimbin dream of peace and love has become a nightmare of needles and violence ... Heroin dealing is commonplace in the main street, the town attracts psychopathic rejects from all over Australia, the police seem loath to act and local residents who speak out are being threatened with death (Australasian Post, 20 March 1993, p.16).
This sort of media coverage easily gave the impression that Nimbin was awash in a sea of illicit drugs, although the problem in Nimbin may have been a reflection of the differences between longer term and more conservative sections of the community (such as farmers and developers) and the environmentally-aware alternative community. There were many areas for disagreement between the older and newer settlers, including lifestyle differences and a succession of environmental protests. Some community divisions between older/conservative and younger/alternative residents were embodied in the nineties in NRPA (the Nimbin Ratepayers and Progress Association) on the one hand, and HEMP (Help End Marijuana Prohibition) on the other. In 1993 the Lismore Echo reported:

Two rallies prompted by the presence of drugs in Nimbin and scheduled to have been held next Saturday, August 28, have been cancelled because the respective organisers wish to avoid the risk of confrontation. On Monday, claiming that it feared possible conflict with those attending the Reclaim the Park rally of the pro-marijuana lobby group HEMP (Help End Marijuana Prohibition), the Nimbin Ratepayers and Progress Association postponed its Community fun day known as Reclaim the Street. The aim of the Reclaim the Street rally/picnic was to publicise drug dealing ... HEMP’s now cancelled Reclaim the Park picnic on the same day had been aimed at protesting the Council’s decision to allow the Ratepayers access to Alsopp Park but to refuse HEMP permission for a rally in May against the marijuana laws (Lismore Echo 25 August 1993, pp. 1, 3).

Lismore Council was reported to have denied HEMP permission for the Let it Grow rally because the Council’s general manager commented that it could be seen as supporting the current drug problems within the village of Nimbin (Lismore Echo 7 April 1993, p. 2). Nimbin’s ‘drug problem’ seemed to have a number of meanings; in this instance it apparently referred to cannabis. While NRPA represents the interests of some Nimbin business people and some longer-term settlers in the village and rural surrounds on a range of issues, HEMP’s agenda is cannabis law reform. HEMP is clearly identified with the broader environmental movement, membership is not confined to Nimbin residents, and the group does not even necessarily represent local interests. Yet HEMP seemed to provide a rallying point for many people in Nimbin, and in the nineties the village was often the site of ideological struggles which were perhaps only superficially related to drugs (suggested by headlines such as: GREENS REJECT ‘SHIRKERS’ TAG (Northern Star 13 November 1999e, p. 1)).

Probably as a result of the lobbying and publicity generated by the concerns of NRPA and others, in the nineties the police intensified their activities in Nimbin and surrounds. Conversely, local support for HEMP’s objectives may have increased as a result of these police activities. A cafe owner, for example, commenting on police anti-drug activities in the village, told a reporter that, ‘the cafe’s takings had been halved and she had been forced to sack half of her 20 staff in the two months since the police operation El Dockin had begun in the township’ (Northern Star 13 June 1995, p. 3), and a year later a local shop manager complained that, ‘They are busting pot smokers while heroin and speed dealers have open slather’ (Northern Star 20 January 1996, p. 2).

In November 1992 a Mayoral Think Tank was convened under the auspices of Lismore City Council’s Mayor, John Crowther. The aim of the Think Tank was described in a Council report as being ‘to identify the problems
of [Nimbin’s] main street and to generate options for action’ (LCC Main Street Survey 1993 p. 67). Despite a broad investigative brief, the Think Tank’s aims were associated with illicit drugs from the beginning, although which drugs were not always clear. The *Northern Star* specifically referred to the ‘village’s hard drug problem’ (*Northern Star* 9 June 1993, p. 5) and the *Echo* to ‘the drug crisis in Nimbin’ (*Lismore Echo* 7 July 1993, p. 2).

Injectable drugs were often equated with Nimbin’s ‘drug problem’, and the Mayor of Lismore was reflecting the opinion of at least some local citizens when he was quoted as saying: ‘The sooner these people die of AIDS the better’. The *Echo* reported that, ‘A Nimbin doctor who walked out of a Mayoral Think Tank meeting at Nimbin on Friday, has announced his resignation from the group ... Dr David Helliwell told the *Echo* that he had left the meeting in disgust during a discussion about intravenous drug users, when the Mayor ... had said: “The sooner these people die of AIDS the better” ’ (*Lismore Echo* 19 May 1993, p. 1). The local media reported differences between members of the Think Tank from an early stage. However much of the time the issues seemed to parallel the ideological differences between the NRPA and HEMP over cannabis. One newspaper article said:

**NIMBIN THINK TANK FORCED TO RETHINK.** Nimbin’s Mayoral Think Tank will be re-structured because of growing doubts that the group has been able to take decisive action on issues like the village’s hard drug problem ... Lismore Mayor Ald John Crowther’s role in the group has also come in for criticism because of his hardline stance on the drug issue. Mr Bob Hopkins, of the Nimbin Help End Marijuana Prohibition (HEMP) organisation, claims Ald Crowther has become one of Nimbin’s drug-related problems (*Northern Star* June 1993, p. 5).

One month later Lismore’s other paper, the *Lismore Echo*, also referred to problems within the Think Tank:

**HEMP DIVIDES DRUG THINK TANK.** Correspondence made available to *The Echo* has revealed deep divisions between key members of the Mayoral Think Tank set up to examine the drug crisis in Nimbin. Sparking a major rift between the Mayor himself and the Think Tank’s facilitator, Councillor Diana Roberts, is the issue of decriminalising marijuana and the impact this could have on hard drug consumption ... Mayor John Crowther ... has indicated that he would withdraw from the Think Tank if decriminalisation was on the agenda. According to Cr Roberts, police representatives in the group are committed to behaving similarly: ‘They have been instructed to resign if it occurred’. ... HEMP’s response has been to plan a public lecture in the Nimbin Hall on August 26, the anniversary of the infamous pre-dawn police raid by over 80 officers on Tuntable Falls community in pursuit of marijuana (*Lismore Echo* 7 July 1993, p. 2).

It appeared that the media (and others) automatically assumed that where Nimbin was concerned, problem inevitably meant drug problem.

In fact other important issues were swamped by the ‘drug problem’; they included more community services, improved amenities (such as children’s play equipment) and improved traffic management — all of which were raised by residents during Council-sponsored community consultations in the mid-nineties, as well as in the Lismore City Council’s (LCC) 1993 Main Street survey. The LCC’s survey of Nimbin residents was conducted on behalf of the Mayoral Think Tank between February and March 1993. Its aim was to ‘find creative options for enhancing the main street of Nimbin and addressing some of the problems that exist in the main street’
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(Lismore City Council 1993, Appendix 2). It was designed and analysed by Diana Roberts and Rob Harle, and the results were tabled as an appendix to a report to Lismore Council.

One thousand surveys were distributed variously, 450 were mailed to residents within an area similar to the ‘Nimbin’ I defined for my research (as described in 1.5 Design Problems at the end of this chapter), 250 were circulated to the parents of children at Nimbin central school, 30 students were interviewed at school, and 270 were distributed at locations around Nimbin. Questionnaires were returned by pre-paid post or returned to the Post Office or Neighbourhood Centre. The response rate was around 29% (with 287 returned), made up of mostly rural, predominantly younger residents who were frequent visitors to the village (1% visited less often than weekly). It is difficult to assume representativeness of the survey given the distribution methods and low response rate, but the survey did provide, for the first time, some information about community perceptions of Nimbin’s ‘problems’.

The things that residents valued about the village was the ‘ambience’, particularly the murals and street art, and the character of the buildings, and greening the street was the most favoured suggestion for street improvements. Specific shops or services were valued by 23%, and the tourist potential by 0.6%. The report (Lismore City Council 1993, Appendix 2) stated that 37% disliked the visible evidence of drugs, slightly fewer disliked drug dealing (32%) and similar proportions cited parking (30%) and loitering around the Rainbow Cafe and Museum (30%).

There was minimal community support for removal or review of the methadone program (8%) and needle exchange (5%), despite particularly negative publicity about heroin and needles at that time, with headlines such as: NO REASON FOR PANIC IN NEEDLE PARK (Lismore Echo 26 February 1993, pp. 1-2) and JUNKIES EVERYWHERE SAYS WOMAN ‘ (Northern Star 11 May 1993, p. 5). There was also minimal support for increasing police numbers, and less support for the removal of ‘drugs’ off the street than the report suggested. Where the figures given in the report sum to well over 100% it indicates that the responses were multiple choice; this means that some respondents gave more than one answer, and in some cases perhaps one person gave many answers, while others may not have answered at all. It should be borne in mind that, in fact, no response category of ‘likes’ or ‘dislikes’ actually achieved support from a majority of residents, despite the authors’ inappropriate addition of categories to achieve majority views (see also Lismore Echo 21 July 1993, p. 2). For example, the authors mention that 69% of respondents disliked drug-related issues, but there are two errors in this statement, firstly 69% of respondents should read 69% of responses (a very different thing) and secondly 69% of responses is not a correct presentation of the data.

As a simple example, if six people take part in a single choice (that is, only one answer permitted) survey and five of them want ‘drugs off the street’, it may be said that most residents (over 80%) wanted it; if, however, the survey was multiple choice (people could choose as many answers as they liked) and two people choose ‘drugs off the street’ and the same two people also chose ‘more police’, and one of those two people also choose ‘reintroduce national service for drug users’, it could not be correctly said that most (over 80%) disapproved of
drugs — in fact only one third did. The correct way to present this type of multiple choice data is in separate 
categories in order of popularity, with the assumption that there will be a strong overlap of people in the similar 
response choices; in the Main Street survey this gives a potential maximum of 37% who wanted ‘drugs off the 
street’, not 69%. The report’s authors erroneously add multiple choice categories to claim majority opinions in 
several parts of the report. Another example is where 31% of respondents are reported as identifying ‘changes to 
policing’ as solutions for improving the main street’ but it appears that the highest proportion was 18% for more 
community integrated policing, while 10% wanted ‘more appropriate policing’ (presumably focussing on ‘hard’ 
drugs rather than cannabis) and only 3% actually listed more police.

The *Lismore Echo* (21 July 1993, p. 2) also ignored these incorrect additions in the survey report, and pointed out 
to its readers that while 37% objected to the visible evidence of drugs, only 3% wanted more police. This point is 
important because the Main Street survey is the only source of information about the views of Nimbin residents 
(assuming that only residents answered it), aside from my own research, and the results provide some support for 
my contentions later in the thesis about the proportion of residents who worry about illegal drugs and about drug 
services, along with residents’ views about policing.

By 1994 the Mayoral Think Tank had disbanded. Over the next two years Nimbin was subject to intensive police 
activities, culminating in the 1995 *El Dockin* operation, which lasted several months and was criticised widely for 
violations of civil liberties (for example, Heilpern 1995). Not surprisingly in this climate, the protest-celebratory 
Nimbin Mardi Grass continued to grow in popularity throughout the nineties. Bob Hopkins became a prominent 
cannabis advocate, associated with the symbolic Nimbin icon The Plantem (‘the Ghost who Tokes’), dressed in a 
green body suit festooned with cannabis leaves and derived from the comic book character the Phantom (‘the 
Ghost who Walks’).

Throughout the nineties the attention of the mass media remained focused on Nimbin’s drug problem. For 
example in mid 1998 the *Northern Star* newspaper featured the village in a six part series which culminated in a 
Around the same time a national commercial television network featured a hidden camera exposure of small-time 
dealers on the streets of Nimbin (*A Current Affair*, NBN 9, 29 June 1998), and Quantum’s *What’s Your Poison* 
showed Nimbin’s Mardi Grass parade at the beginning and end of a program on cannabis (ABC television 16 
July 1998). An ABC radio interview about proposed refurbishment of Nimbin’s unique building art (most of the 
village buildings are National Heritage listed) diverted from the subject to ask about Nimbin’s drug problem 
(ABC Regional Radio, 2 December 1999). While other newsworthy events in Nimbin do receive media 
attention, the ‘drug problem’ is irresistible.

The ‘drug problem’ in Nimbin may refer to drugs, it may exist largely in the minds of journalists, or it may refer 
to the drug users, that is, Nimbin’s alternative community; they were, according to Margaret Munro-Clark (1986, 
p. 138), a source of ‘cultural shock’ to the established locals. While the term ‘drug problem’ is widely used (not 
only by the media), there is only anecdotal information about the extent and type of drug use in Nimbin, and it is
not clear whether a consensus exists on exactly what the words refer to. What is myth and what is reality? Is Nimbin’s drug problem a media ‘beat-up’, or perhaps an expression of a continued underlying tension between the established farming community and the more recently arrived counter-culture? My research was designed to clarify Nimbin’s ‘drug problem’.

AIM AND METHODS
The aim of the research is to investigate the so called ‘drug problem’ in Nimbin, focussing on the two illicit drugs, cannabis and heroin.

Most research into illegal drug use focuses on problematic drug use, but the addiction/deviance perspective is inadequate for a community’s drug use. Aside from the fact that models of addiction and dysfunction cannot accommodate critical factors such as peer drug use, incentives/disincentives to use, social support systems, government drug policies, economic factors and drug availability on the expressions and experiences of illicit drug use, they focus on the ‘disturbed’ individual. However, recreational use of illicit drugs in western society in the latter half of the twentieth century is a widespread cultural phenomenon— for example, a little over half of all teenagers have used illicit drugs (AIHW 1999) — rather than an activity limited to a small number of problematic drug users.

The World Health Organisation (WHO 1980) expressed concern over the disproportionate allocation of resources to people with drug problems, pointing out that health care in poorer nations was taken up by treatment programs for the very small minority of the population who were chronic drug abusers, and my research focus is on recreational use of illicit drugs, as it occurs within, rather than outside of, contemporary western society. I will approach the investigation of Nimbin’s ‘drug problem’ from a contextual perspective; that is, I am more interested in the usual rather than the unusual, in the group rather than the individual). The politics of recreational drug use are discussed further in Chapter Three.

I decided to investigate illicit rather than licit drug use because it was a socially relevant subject that had stimulated widespread interest and research, aroused passions, and generated intense debate. There has been an ‘epidemic’ of reports on illicit drugs tabled in Australian parliaments since the 1970s (Wodak & Owens 1996, p. 13). In the nineties important government reports included the Queensland Justice Commission reports in 1993 and 1994, the five National Cannabis Task Force reports in 1994 (Ali & Christie; Donnelly & Hall; Hall and associates; McDonald and associates; and Bowman & Sanson-Fisher), and the Pennington Report in 1996, all of which I cite extensively throughout the thesis. Most of the reports focussed on cannabis. Such widespread interest on the part of governments and the general public may be attributed to the widespread use of cannabis, but probably also to the recognition that there are more drugs available today than ever before in human history.
Today legal and illegal drugs are used for pleasure and sold for profit by substantial numbers of people worldwide. The distribution of illicit drugs is increasingly a global activity (Castells 1998; McCoy & Block 1992), and today new synthetic drugs are regularly created for the illicit drug market, both so-called ‘designer’ drugs and performance enhancing drugs for sports people.

The subject of drugs also interested me because I had done some research into illicit drugs for my undergraduate psychology degree, and, like most urban baby boomers, I had personal experience with both licit and illicit recreational drugs. I have used cannabis enthusiastically since my undergraduate university days; I have never used heroin or injected drugs, and I’m mildly phobic about needles. Cannabis and heroin were the drugs most often associated with Nimbin’s ‘drug problem’ in media reports, and I became interested in the stereotypes and symbolisms attached to these two drugs — to me they seemed to epitomise notions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ drugs. So Nimbin’s putative drug problem offered a tantalising and relevant research subject for a number of reasons. I hope to make a contribution to the public and academic debate about, and to future policy responses to, recreational use of illicit drugs in Australia.

The reason I was interested in research in Nimbin seems to be self-evident; Nimbin was prominent in local and national media stories while I was looking for an interesting thesis topic. The village fascinated me. The town’s incredibly colourful people and buildings, the community’s sense of the absurd, the media obsession with the town, all these things made Nimbin intrinsically interesting to me. One day, following yet another media reference to ‘Nimbin’s drug problem’, I exclaimed aloud, ‘What drug problem? What does it mean?’ Surprisingly, further investigation revealed that no research had (or has) been published about illicit drug use in this famous village, despite the on-going publicity and police attention.

The centrality of drugs to western society is indicated by the range of academic disciplines that contribute to our understanding of them (for instance, anthropology, cultural studies, education, epidemiology, ethnography, history, law, mathematics/statistics, media studies, medicine, pharmacology, philosophy, political economy, psychology, public health, and sociology), and my reading was multi-disciplinary, and was influenced by the complexity and the sensitivity of the subject.

My research design had to strike a balance between the ideal of a full and accurate picture of Nimbin’s drug world and the practical constraints of available time, budgetary limitations, my own skills and inadequacies, and what was actually acceptable to Nimbin, the wider community, and academic standards. Confidentiality issues had to be addressed to capture valid and meaningful information while addressing ethical, personal safety, and feasibility issues. Decisions based on these key considerations inevitably shaped my research design, which is participant-focussed with an emphasis on confidentiality balanced by a mixed methodology.

Research into illicit drug use has tended to be either ethnographic or survey-based. The work of Grund and his associates (1991, 1992a) with Dutch injectors, and of David Moore (1993) with injecting drug users in Western Australia, provide good examples of ethnographic research. Ethnography has been defined as ‘An empirical and
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theoretical approach which seeks detailed holistic description and analysis of cultures based on intensive, participative fieldwork. Qualitative small-scale and detailed exploration of the norms, values and artefacts of culture as they are connected to the wider social processes of a “whole way of life” ’ (Barker 2000, p. 384). However, David Moore’s (1993) ethnographic research among young illegal drug users in Peth, Australia, focussed on the simpler goal of describing the social interactions and main controls (rules) which injectors employed to minimise harm associated with their drug use. Vidich and Lyman (1994) suggest that ethnographic research has changed over time: ‘No longer linked to the values that had guided and focused the work of earlier ethnographers, the new ethnography ranges over a vastly expanded subject matter, limited only by the varieties of experience in modern life; the points of view from which ethnographic observations may be made are as great as the choices of lifestyle available in modern society’ (Vidich & Lyman 1994, p. 41).


The NCADA methodology has improved over the years with larger samples and better response rates, but some groups who may be heavy drug users are excluded, such as residents of boarding houses, caravan parks and other ‘temporary’ accommodation, people in prison (including those on remand), and people who are not at home, or who refuse to participate. Furthermore, Donnelley and Hall (1994) provide a number of reasons why surveys will underestimate illicit drug use in the population: illicit drug users are likely to be under-sampled (absent from home); if contacted they are more likely to refuse to participate; if they agree they are less likely to be truthful; and if they respond truthfully they are still likely to underestimate the frequency and quantities they have used (Donnelley and Hall 1994, p. 3). Further, socially desirable responses are particularly likely for questions about illicit drug use, heavy use of legal drugs, and other socially sanctioned behaviours.

Surveying illicit drug use is difficult, and there is general agreement that estimates based on surveys are conservative. For these reasons it is generally assumed that ‘population’ surveys underestimate population drug use (eg Donnelly & Hall 1994). Despite concerns over the reliability of self-report data, the self-report questionnaire is the most widely used instrument for measuring drug use, and surveys are the most widely used method of estimating population drug use, whether administered face-to-face or by telephone. Although there were a number of methodological differences between earlier and later surveys, and similar questions were worded differently over the series, the NCADA results are probably the best available indicators of Australian
drug use, just as the ANAIDUS (1991) and KeysYoung (1991) surveys provide some information about Australian injectors.

Both qualitative and quantitative methods have their strengths and weaknesses. Qualitative research focuses on the individual experience, and it is generally participant-centred; the researcher may be an interactive participant in the process, and the aim is to capture richness and detail at the expense of generalisability. Quantitative methods aim to quantify, or measure, clearly defined and delimited phenomena, and to exclude information outside those parameters; its aim is generalisability. I decided that a mixed method would provide more relevant and complete information about the complex topic of illicit drug use than either method used singly, and that multiple methods would provide cross-validation for results from individual methods.

My multi-faceted research design employed a structured door-to-door (‘household’) survey of Nimbin residents based on the NCADA surveys; an anonymous mail-back survey of drug injectors in Lismore and Nimbin; a series of unstructured, in-depth taped interviews with prominent and key people in the community; a small semi-structured survey of cannabis crop growers; and participant observation over a number of years. Details about each method are provided next, and the Appendices provide more information on methods, response rates, questionnaires, transcripts and tables of results.

The major barriers to accurate data from household surveys are a perceived lack of confidentiality, and unrepresentative samples (through refusals, excluded groups, and those absent from home). Perceived confidentiality is probably the single most important determinant of truthful responses to questions about drug use, and more recent NCADA surveys have addressed confidentiality more effectively than earlier ones. They have changed their method from interviewer-administered questions to a self-completed drug use section which the respondent then seals in an envelope. There was a higher rate of reported drug use with the more confidential method when both were trialed in tandem in 1991 (McAllister & Makkai 1991). In 1993 and 1995 only the respondent-completed method was used, although the interviewers continued to ask for respondent’s’ first names and phone numbers (for supervisor verification).

The quantitative phase involved structured surveys of drug injectors in 1993 and Nimbin households in 1994 and 1995. My 1993 injecting drug user survey employed a self-completed questionnaire which was distributed by needle exchange workers along with a prepaid envelope addressed to me at the university. Following a pilot study of 20 injectors I added some questions and clarified many other to ensure that the questions made sense to injectors and permitted meaningful answers. More details about this study are provided in Appendix I. I provided copies of my report to health workers and a shorter version was available to injectors who used the needle exchange service.

The questions were developed in consultation with local health workers as well as injectors, and included some questions from ANAIDUS 1991 (see also Darke, Tebbutt, Ross, Thomas, Larson & Hall 1992). I asked about drug use, use of services and unmet needs, and risky or problematic habits (questionnaires are provided in Appendix V). The survey was distributed in Nimbin (marked ‘Nimbin’) and in Lismore (marked ‘Lismore’),
although local health services (including the needle exchange) did not discriminate between the two, so no separate statistics were available. A total of 73 out of 274 distributed questionnaires were returned to me for a combined Nimbin-Lismore response rate of 26%. Less than half (44%) were mailed back, and the remainder were handed back to staff (which apparently required less effort). Most (50 out of the 72) were marked ‘Nimbin’ and this particularly good response rate is due to the confidence and trust enjoyed by the Nimbin outreach exchange worker. The study was conducted during police surveillance and arrests; it was also concurrent with a survey by NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA) which was a shorter survey that focused on AIDS knowledge and sources of information.

In 1994 I conducted a household (door-to-door rather than volunteer) survey of Nimbin ‘village’ (as defined by Lismore City Council); and in 1995 I interviewed a random sample of rural households in blocks of ten, and a volunteer sample of multiple occupancy residents; there were three different methods of delivery of essentially the same survey (whole population, random sample, and volunteers), although my reasons were logistical, as knocking on every door was not feasible for the whole rural hinterland or for MOs. Methods and tabulated results for the household surveys are provided in Appendix III, and questionnaires are provided in Appendix I.

Although I based my household questionnaire on the national household surveys of 1991 (Porritt 1991) and 1993 (Commonwealth of Australia 1993), I made some minor changes and additions. My questionnaire was in two parts with matching codes: (a) an interviewer-administered section which covered demographic information and attitudes to drugs, including questions about community and personal concerns, definitions of the ‘drug problem’, and the effectiveness of various government policies; and (b) a self-completed questionnaire about personal drug use, some cannabis-related issues, and opinions about adult drug use. In the self-completed drug use section respondents were asked about their lifetime and recent use of nine drugs, as well as questions about binge drinking and problematic alcohol and cannabis use.

The strategies that I employed for transparent confidentiality for the drug use section of the household survey were: (1) respondents completed it themselves; (2) they then inserted it into an unmarked envelope and sealed it; (3) they then put the envelope in among many others in a satchel; (4) I physically distanced myself from the respondents’ immediate vicinity while they completed the section; and (5) I was willing to discuss and support concerns about confidentiality, and I emphasised the respondent’s right not to answer any or all questions; on one occasion I wiped the drug use section for the respondent, folded it, and inserted it into the envelope (they were concerned about fingerprints because they were engaged in a child custody case at the time).

The rural questionnaire was identical to the village questionnaire aside from three additional questions about police activities (the rural survey was conducted at the end of the El Dockin police operation); as well, I divided hallucinogens into two separate questions on organic and synthetic hallucinogens (a practice adopted in later NDS surveys).

The multiple occupancy questionnaire is the same as the rural questionnaire, with six additional questions about life on a multiple occupancy, for example the open-ended: ‘Why are you living on a multiple occupancy?’ and
the closed choice: ‘Do you feel that your beliefs or ideals are realised (or met) here?’. There are a number of multiple occupancies close to the village, with a corresponding concentration of members of the counter-culture. However it was not practical to conduct a household (door-to-door) survey of multiple occupancies (MOs) given the rugged terrain of the region, inaccessible dwellings, and unintentional violation of privacy (I was particularly worried about stumbling on someone’s cannabis crop if I had to wander through the dense rainforest looking for houses).

Therefore, I decided to attend tribal meetings to explain my research and call for volunteers. An example of post-design research decisions made in the field, was my decision (following concerns expressed by some MO residents) to not report MO drug use because a small voluntary sample would not be representative of MO residents, and may be misleading. Given the different methods between the household and MO surveys (door-to-door versus volunteers), I decided that MO drug use could not be combined with the village and rural drug use results, and so it is not reported at all. Also because of the different methods, the attitudes of MO residents (eg towards drug use) are always presented separately to village and rural household results.

I interviewed a total of 119 householders and 29 MO volunteers. My household survey provided a profile of drug use (licit and illicit) in Nimbin, and an indication of the whole community’s attitudes towards illicit drugs, particularly perceptions of the ‘drug problem’. The household surveys achieved excellent response rates: 71% for the village and 89% for the rural sample, calculated as: \( \frac{n \text{ participants}}{n \text{ participants} + n \text{ refusals} + n \text{ not available}} \times 100 \). As noted, methods, results and questionnaires are provided in the appendices.

The injectors’ and household questionnaires, while based on national surveys and so allowing national comparisons, did not provide any sense of the people who comprise Nimbin’s alternative community, nor provide any information about the drug economy. I used qualitative methods to fill in the gaps. The qualitative research was comprised of unstructured and semi-structured interviews and participant-observation. During 1994 and 1995 I taped 16 interviews with members of the counter-culture to investigate community issues, including the ‘drug problem’ and the ‘street scene’. These interviews with dealers, runners, prominent community spokespersons, local health professionals, long term residents, and transients, provided me with a stronger sense of Nimbin’s alternative community; transcripts.

The taped interviews were unstructured, but all participants were asked if they thought that Nimbin had a drug problem. Participation in the taped interviews was voluntary and fully informed. Recruitment was opportunistic although I often sought particular people, including public figures and community spokespersons (to the media and at rallies), young people, residents of multiple occupancies, health service providers, and people involved in drug marketing. People were approached, sometimes through third parties, and invited to participate. If they were interested, I explained the nature and purpose of the research, and emphasised that they were under no obligation to answer any particular question/s and that they could stop the interview at any time; I also explained that they would have control of the tape recorder throughout the interview, to erase or change anything they had said.
Introduction: Nimbin's 'drug problem'

Some time after their interviews participants were given a transcribed copy of their (superficially edited) interview to alter, add to, or clarify, as they wished. In general there was little editing, but some respondents edited their interviews several times before they were satisfied, and their final transcripts do not match the original tape transcripts. However, the quality of the interviews was greatly improved by giving people this opportunity, as errors were corrected, ideas expanded and/or clarified, and readability was improved. This process also assured participants that I was genuinely interested in their voices, their views.

Based on my own concerns and those raised by my university ethics committee during the research design phase, I decided not to attempt to investigate heroin supply or marketing. Cannabis appeared to be the major illicit drug sold in Nimbin, and I believed it to be easier and safer to confine my investigations to cannabis marketing through trusted contacts, and not attempt a similar investigation of heroin production and marketing. I think my thesis somewhat neglected the local heroin supply lines (although I do not regret this omission); other researchers may take this equally important subject of ‘hard’ drug marketing further.

I also surveyed eight cannabis crop growers for information about cultivation for profit; the method and results are provided in Appendix IV. I conducted semi-structured interviews with large-scale crop growers (generally in the form of interviewer notes, but including two anonymous mailed back questionnaires), and queried risks, profits, average weight and value of a plant, and other information about cannabis cultivation for the market.

In acknowledgment of the fact that any investigation into crop cultivation would be difficult, my modest aim was to survey a small number of growers (12-16) using a design that paralleled my 1993 injectors’ anonymous mailed back survey. Initially I asked three key people in the community to distribute a total of sixteen questionnaires with stamped return envelopes. Only two of the sixteen questionnaires were returned to me by mail, perhaps because at the time there was a large scale and particularly punitive police operation in Nimbin. Given the poor response to the mailed survey, I recruited growers for face-to-face interviews through trusted third parties. I conducted six face-to-face interviews, based loosely on the mailed-back questionnaire, with answers and comments noted down in abbreviated form. Participation was voluntary and informed. I did not formally interview small-scale or occasional cannabis crop growers, although it is an extremely widespread practice in north-eastern NSW and I did speak informally (no notes were taken) with many people who grew small crops.

An obvious problem with interviewing crop growers is that it is difficult to establish the veracity of the information. This is an integral problem with research into serious illegal activities, and validating the information will always be a difficult task. I compared my results with the QJC reports (1993, 1994) which had some information on weights (albeit from sources equally difficult to verify, such as prison inmates). My results also were checked by a number of contacts in the Nimbin community (including cross-checks by two of the interviewed growers), and there was agreement among those who were consulted that the main details (weight and price ranges, problems, etc) were correct. Because large scale cultivation is both dangerous and secretive,
and given the paucity of information, the current research provides useful and original information in a little-researched area.

My research design also included participant observation. I participated in, or attended meetings, protests, festivals and daily activities, and informally chatted with members of the alternative community in social activities between 1993 and 1997. Based on my notes (of varying detail), short ethnographic pieces or ‘stories’ present my perceptions of the trial of the activist Prohibition End, an afternoon with the street drug sellers, a tribal meeting, Nimbin’s Mardi Grass and the judging of the Growers Cup. The topics were chosen to illustrate particular aspects of Nimbin’s counter-culture. For example, the trial of Prohibition End describes how Bob Hopkins, dressed in a jester’s costume, presented himself to the Nimbin police station waving what appeared to be stalks of cannabis and claiming that he was smoking a joint. This style of protest illustrates the irony, the staged ‘media events’, and the playfulness intrinsic to Nimbin’s cannabis protests. The judging of the Grower’s Cup (a semi-secret annual event held during Nimbin’s Mardi Grass) illustrates the level of sophistication that cannabis cultivation has reached in the area and the intersection between the economic and the social in Nimbin.

An afternoon with the street sellers in a ‘pot shop’ provides a glimpse into the day-to-day life of drug sellers in Nimbin’s main street, and illustrates the often privileged social position that sellers occupy. I also briefly describe a Tuntural tribal meeting I attended, to illustrate that the members of the counter-culture make decisions and generally interact with each other in ways that are very different to mainstream society.

Thus the research design incorporates structured surveys (both face-to-face and self-completed and mailed back), lengthy taped interviews, brief semi-structured crop grower interviews, and stories based on very limited notes. Ultimately the research design (including the mixed methods) represents my attempt to unravel and understand the experiences masked by the term ‘drug problem’, while respecting the dignity and basic rights of Nimbin’s colourful and diverse alternative community. The overriding considerations which shaped the final methodology for this thesis were issues of confidentiality, accuracy, and feasibility, within a participant-focused ethos. Some design and ethical problems are discussed next.

DESIGN PROBLEMS

One of my earliest research problems was defining ‘Nimbin’. I had expected the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to have a region called Nimbin with accurate boundaries and population data, but this assumption proved to be incorrect.

In fact, both the ABS census data and local government boundaries do not recognise a ‘Nimbin’ bigger than (most of, but not all) the village, while police and postal districts extend from Lismore to Mullumbimby and the Health Department did not discriminate between Nimbin and Lismore. The Lismore local government area (LGA) boundaries for the village excluded some dwellings (Lismore City Council 1994b), and new houses were under construction throughout the research. Thus there is no pre-packaged site called Nimbin; like the drug
problem, the region referred to as ‘Nimbin’ by so many people is, to a large extent, immaginary, dependent on the beholder.

In 1993 I obtained a special data extract for Nimbin village from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) for the 1991 census. This (truncated) village had a population of 211 people aged 14 and over (ABS 1994b), which is the age group I intended to interview in my household survey, following the NCADA methodology. While it was obvious to me that the region commonly referred to as ‘Nimbin’ had a bigger population than that part of the village covered by council maps and the ABS census data, estimates varied widely; the Main Street survey report estimated 2,000 (Lismore City Council 1993, Appendix 2), Hall’s (1989) *National Geographic* article contained an estimate of 3,000, Munro-Clark (1986) cited a 1984 estimate of 4,000, and a local paper estimated 5,000 (*Lismore Echo* 10 November 1994, p. 7). As one of Hall’s informants put it, ‘It is impossible to find out how many people are living in the bush. You might know there’s a dozen-odd houses somewhere on a particular hillside, but you can’t even find the track. They have no electricity or running water, and little interest in the world beyond the rainforest’ (Hall 1989, p. 111).

Defining the ‘village’ posed some difficulties for me, but defining the rural hinterland was a greater problem. There was no pre-existing demographic data for the rural surrounds from any reliable source, so I defined an area as ‘Nimbin’ with a radius of 10 to 15 km from the village as determined by natural boundaries; my ‘Nimbin’ is bounded by the Nightcap Range and Nightcap National Park, by the Kyogle-Murwillumbah Road (which lies close to the Range and to Lodge Rd), by Lodge Road (which runs behind a natural landmark, the Nimbin Rocks) to the Lismore-Nimbin road, and by Tuntun Creek, which flows south from the Nightcap range almost to the Nimbin-Lismore road. A rough sketch of the area is provided at the end of Appendix III.

I obtained a number of special data extracts from the ABS for the region around Nimbin village to estimate the population inside the boundaries that I had defined; however, I found that most of the ABS sub-regions surrounding the village stretched almost to Lismore and appeared to be more densely populated closer to that city, so my estimates are not particularly reliable. Derived from a larger area (ABS 1994c, 1994d) that excludes Kyogle shire, and taking around one-third of the strips’ populations as part of ‘Nimbin’ (leaving two-thirds as part of Lismore), I estimate the resident ‘rural’ population at the time of my research to be between 2,000 and 3,000, with a seasonally fluctuating and unknown number of transients and visitors. My research population would be smaller than my estimate, as I surveyed and interviewed people aged 14 and over.

One critical problem with my research design was gathering and checking the accuracy of any information I obtained. I compared data from the injector and household surveys with external sources such as local and national research results and local census and other data, and I cross-checked the qualitative results with contacts in the Nimbin community and with my own perceptions as a participant observer; further, I exposed results to review by the general public through local and national media releases, and to academic peer review through journal publications and presentations to international conferences.
Research into a small community’s illicit drug use raises a number of ethical issues which influenced the research design, in particular legal and confidentiality issues. Questions that I raised and answered with my design included: Where do I stand legally? What are the risks to my personal safety? What exactly are my obligations to participants? How can I ensure confidentiality? And how will this promised anonymity be safeguarded in practice? Given the nature of the research it was not even possible to address all the ethical issues during the design stage, and many decisions were made ‘on the run’, as I discuss in Chapter Seven when I review the effectiveness of my design.

Nimbin is a small rural community which receives intense police scrutiny and sensationalised media attention, so that accuracy, respect and sensitivity were critical to the research. Researchers who conduct ethnographic research do not always inform people that they are participants in a study. My research ensured informed consent at all times by the following methods: all potential participants were told about the nature and aims of my research; in all instances (aside from casual conversations, where I made a point of mentioning my research), people were assured that they were not obliged to participate, to continue, or to answer any particular question. I tried to show respect and sensitivity for the community by impartial and supportive interest in people’s viewpoints, by clear acknowledgment of people’s right to privacy and to refuse to participate, and by providing members of the community with drafts, transcripts, and publications derived from the research for their information, comment and criticism; this consultation and participant feedback also reinforced my assurances of confidentiality as people saw what I was ‘doing’ with information, and it provided cross-checks for me on data accuracy. A copy of this thesis will be given to the Nimbin Museum for the Nimbin community.

For me, the single most important ethical issue was confidentiality. Specifically, I deemed that it was essential to address the relationship between confidentiality and representative participation. Recruitment was a problem throughout the research period, and police operations certainly made things more difficult than they would have been otherwise. These large scale operations involved undercover police, video surveillance, road blocks with body and vehicle searches, and commando-style raids on MOs. Given the nature of the research and the necessity of establishing trust with the community, I decided not to have any contact with the NSW police service, and did not notify local police that my research was in progress. Nevertheless, media coverage and local knowledge of the research project ensured that there was widespread awareness of the study, and I interviewed one local police officer as part of the household survey. Understandably, in this climate and with this topic, recruitment was heavily dependent on establishing trust and maintaining credibility with the community, which in turn relied on effective and continuously reaffirmed confidentiality.

In this chapter Nimbin’s ‘drug problem’ has been outlined and I have provided some background to Nimbin’s colourful alternative community and located it socially and culturally. I have described the research aim and design, and discussed ethical and logistical research problems. In Chapter Two I will attempt to unravel the cultural, legislative, demographic, and socio-economic strands of a ‘drug problem’ in western society in the late twentieth century, to provide the broader socio-political context for my research.
While some might consider the issues around Nimbin’s drug problem to be unique to this unusual village, it can be argued that wider social forces influence the perceptions and the realities of drug ‘problems’, and these will be examined next.

* * * * *
CHAPTER TWO
THE POLITICS OF ILLICIT DRUG USE

Drugs are blamed for many of society’s ills. For example, a Lismore District Court Judge was reported as saying that drugs were ‘destroying society’ and were linked to a decline in morals and in living standards (Northern Star 3 December 1993, p.1). A considerable amount of time, money, and human resources have been expended investigating the aetiology of, and behaviour associated with, drug addiction/dependence/abuse, and one might expect some sort of consensus on drug ‘problems’ by now. Unfortunately, there is an abundance of definitions. This chapter describes my investigation into what might constitute a ‘drug problem’, from a consideration of the individual drug-taker to the political economy of illicit drugs. I will examine the drugs themselves in Chapter Three.

Humankind has always used psychoactive drugs (that is, those that affect the psyche or mind). Psychoactive drugs include the illicit drugs like cannabis and heroin, but also the popular legal drugs such as alcohol, tobacco and coffee. Rimm and Somervill (1977, p. 407) pointed out that, ‘Since prehistoric times, humans have used various substances to reduce pain and suffering, to alter their feelings, and to achieve euphoria or sedation’. Andrew Weil (1972, p. 13) believed that drug use is merely one expression of ‘an innate human drive to experience episodes of non-ordinary consciousness’. He observed that humans had a number of ‘natural’ avenues to altered states of consciousness, including meditation, sleep, daydreaming, trance, delirium, psychosis, and mystic rapture (Weil 1972, p. 31; see also Bourguinon 1977, p. 8). Weil pointed out that even young children sought altered consciousness through activities such as spinning around, hyperventilation, and throttling each other (Weil 1972, p. 19). Weil’s viewpoint goes a long way towards explaining humanity’s drug use, although it doesn’t account for animals’ predilection for fermented fruits, and the drug-seeking behaviour of laboratory animals and domestic pets.

Phillip Robson (1999) observed that:

Some animals in their natural habitat seem interested in intoxication, seeking to experience it repeatedly. Dogs have been observed snuffling the fumes from rotting vegetation to the point of incoordination, and an acquaintance of the writer had a cat which confounded its carnivorous nature by gobbling up any marijuana she inadvertently left lying around (Robson 1999, p. 8).

However, if all creatures enjoy a change of consciousness, humanity has exhibited exceptional enthusiasm for it, and invented an astonishing range of mechanical stimuli such as swings, merry-go-rounds and, more recently, the heart-stopping fun rides, to achieve it — along with an extensive pharmacopoeia of intoxicating drugs. Peter Nelson (1993) declared that: ‘Altered states of consciousness ... appear to be part of a growth process which has the power to bring about personal renewal and relieve psychological suffering ... without the ability to enter
wholly into these experiencing altered states, we may fail to fully actualise our human creative and cultural potentials’ (Nelson 1993, pp. 144-145). Granted that people have always sought altered states of consciousness through drugs, it is difficult to justify a claim that drug use per se is automatically a ‘drug problem’, although some consequences of drug use might be.

**WHAT IS A DRUG PROBLEM?**

In the early twentieth century the notion of a ‘drug problem’ was generally equated with ‘addiction’. This medical model of problematic drug use was derived from observations of alcohol and opiate users, and was defined in terms of tolerance, dependence and withdrawal. ‘Tolerance’ occurs when higher doses of a drug are required for the same effect, and ‘withdrawal’ describes a physical response to the sudden withdrawal of a substance after the body has adapted to particular levels (eg Robson 1999; Rimm & Somervill 1977). Under this definition, drug ‘dependence’ is inferred from physical withdrawal symptoms — unlike more recent, broader definitions. Tolerance and withdrawal symptoms, which are required for a diagnosis of addiction, are observable physical responses to some drugs, but they vary with the individual as well as with the drug, and even the physical symptoms of tolerance and withdrawal have been demonstrated to be influenced by expectation (Peele 1998; McAllister, Moore & Makkai 1991; McCusker & Brown 1991; Heather & Greeley 1990; Goldstein 1986).

Ian McAllister and his associates note that, ‘despite an array of theories, none are particularly accurate in predicting who will become an addict’ (McAllister, Moore & Makkai 1991, p. 2). Addiction is a slippery notion, and what was deemed by medical practitioners to be predictable physical symptoms of addiction were, in fact, profoundly influenced by personal and cultural factors. Further, the medical view of addiction, which required total abstinence from the drug (to avoid loss of control and relapse), was challenged by well-documented ‘controlled’, or ‘functional’, use of alcohol by alcoholics (eg Heather & Robertson 1981; Orford & Edwards 1977; M. Sobell 1977) and functional use of heroin by addicts (W. Harding 1998; Sharp, Davis, Dowsett, et al. 1991). Stanton Peele (1998; 1983) does not believe that any drug is inherently ‘addictive’. He has argued that addictive behaviours, including withdrawal symptoms, were learned from one’s culture, parents and peers. He based this argument on research findings such as the absence of addictive behaviour among discharged hospital patients who had been on quite high doses of heroin (‘diamorphine’) for pain management; on the different clusters of heroin withdrawal symptoms in different American battalions in Vietnam; and on various cross-cultural studies, where some cultures had significantly lower rates of alcoholism than others despite similar demographic profiles. Further, although affluent Americans tended to drink more alcohol individually than poorer Americans, they were less likely to be classified as alcoholic (Peele 1998, p. 45). According to Peele the best predictors of alcoholism were social and ethnic variables rather than an individual’s predisposition to addiction, or something intrinsic to the drug (Peele 1998, p. 47). Thus culture appears to have an important role in drug ‘problems’, as explored further in this chapter and the next.
Even among health professionals there is no consensus about what constitutes a ‘drug problem’. Different scales designed to measure ‘addiction’ regularly produce different results (Didcott, Reilly, Swift & Hall 1997); and Lettieri (1985), in a review of the literature, counted 45 different explanations for drug ‘dependence’. There have been many attempts to define and measure harmful drug use, but terms such as addiction, abuse, misuse, dependence, excessive use, and problematic use, continue to be used differently by different people.

Not only is the terminology for dangerous drug use indeterminate and changeable, but even an individual’s engagement with drug treatment services does not provide a useful definition of problematic drug use. For example, Peele asserted that while (pure) alcohol consumption per capita is decreasing in America, use of alcohol treatment facilities is increasing (Peele 1998, p. 43), and Parloff (1980) reported over 280 different treatments for drug ‘addiction’. Yet despite an array of choices and increased uptake of services, research has demonstrated that treatment often is less effective than no treatment at all (eg Peele 1998; Miller & Hester 1986a; Orford & Edwards 1977). For example, in a report on drug treatments prepared for the Australian government’s National Campaign Against Drug Abuse (NCADA), Heather and Tebbutt (1989) stated that, ‘it is difficult to establish that a treatment is, in fact responsible for any recovery observed. Further, most people relapse regardless of the drug they use or the treatment they receive’ (Heather & Tebbutt 1989, p. 4; but see also Heather 1992; Hawks 1991; Annis & Davis 1988; Miller & Hester 1986).

There was a general shift in notions of drug ‘problems’ over the latter part of the twentieth century, from a focus on medical-physical definitions of ‘addiction’, to looser definitions of ‘dependence’. Tolerance and withdrawal were no longer necessary, and the definition of a ‘problem’ had broadened to include the social context as well as the individual. For example, the World Health Organisation (WHO 1973) defined ‘drug dependence’ as primarily a ‘psychic’ state (rather than a physical one), and declared that dependence-producing drugs may cause individual or social problems. Moving from the early equation of a drug ‘problem’ with ‘addiction’, in the second half of the twentieth century definitions of a ‘problem’ were continually updated in response to a growing body of research into the many aspects of drug use. Many commentators viewed problematic drug use as just one example of ‘obsessive’ behaviour that also included over-eating and gambling (McAllister, Moore Makkai 1991; Donovan 1988; WHO 1973). Stanton Peele (1983) likened drug ‘dependence’ to compulsive love, television viewing and exercise. Thomas Szasz described drug abuse as ‘a bad habit’ (Szasz 1998, p. 156) and complained that the ‘War on Drugs’ has taught [people] that they are like (undisciplined) children, unable to resist the temptations of alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, food and gambling, and that their inability or unwillingness constitutes a bona fide medical disease, requiring medical treatment’ (Szasz 1998, p. 157). Thus by the nineties, problematic drug use was demystified (at least partially), as illicit drug use was moved from an exclusively medical-physical model of individual deviance into the broader social domain; that is, drug use was normalised, or made normal — abusive or problematic drug use was only a bad habit, like too much TV.

Over the second half of the twentieth century perceptions of a ‘problem’ broadened to include more drugs and more ways of using them, and new ways of defining dangerous drug use were needed. There was a link made between alcohol and traffic accidents, increased concerns about the dangers of tobacco use, and the emergence of
Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), all of which required a definition of drug ‘problems’ that included more drugs and once-only risks (such as a single instance of drink-driving as opposed to decades of heavy drinking). Unlike earlier models of drug dangers that were linked to heavy use of particular drugs, the actual drug and the drug dose became completely irrelevant; for example a primary danger for drug injectors is that the AIDS precursor, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), is transmitted by needle sharing — the drug and the dose are incidental. So, in the nineties definitions of dangerous drug use focused on the harm arising from the use of any drug (eg McAllister, Moore & Makkai 1991), and the basic aim of the Australian National Drug Strategic Plan (1993-1997) was to ‘minimise the harm’ associated with drug use. This framework for viewing all drug use was to stand in sharp contrast to the earlier prohibition framework, which was based on the medical model of addiction and inevitable risk attached to the drug.

‘Harm’ associated with the use of (any) drug is typically measured in terms of mortality and morbidity rates (that is, death, illness and accidents), which are derived from death certificates and hospital records, or in terms of socio-economic effects, which attempt to quantify ‘harm’ to the whole society in dollar terms, and are based on models which make particular assumptions and exclude other important factors. These two ways of measuring drug problems arrive at very similar results, as I briefly discuss, before moving to a consideration of public opinion as a different way of defining a ‘drug problem’.

Most people are aware that the legal drugs are more harmful than the illegal drugs in terms of deaths. In the nineties tobacco and alcohol accounted for around 20% of all deaths in this country, while all other drugs, licit and illicit, account for about 1% (Commonwealth of Australia 1994b), and no deaths were attributed to cannabis (Robson 1999; Commonwealth of Australia 1994b).

Throughout the late twentieth century in Australia there have been small but steady reductions in the number of deaths attributed to the legal drugs. For example, between 1982 and 1992 both tobacco- and alcohol-related deaths decreased, and per capita consumption of tobacco and pure alcohol also decreased, along with a decline in alcohol-related road fatalities (Commonwealth of Australia 1994b). This trend continued in the nineties, with a marked decline in population use of pure alcohol, coupled with a trend away from spirits and towards drinks with a lower alcohol content (so that alcohol use by volume increased), and a corresponding reduction in associated health problems (such as cirrhosis) and alcohol-related road deaths (Laslett & Rumbold 1998, p. 27). However, aside from death and injury, alcohol also has been implicated in a variety of crimes, including domestic violence, criminal assaults, and a range of public order offences. The National Drug Strategic Plan (Commonwealth of Australia 1993a) cited NSW Police Service estimates of a range of alcohol-related offences, which included 73% of all assaults and 84% of offensive behaviours.

Not surprisingly, the leading causes of death in Australia are the illnesses of old age, cardiovascular diseases, cancers, and respiratory diseases, while accidents, suicides and drug-related deaths primarily claim younger lives (Commonwealth of Australia 1994b). The biggest killer, tobacco, is associated with around three-quarters of all drug deaths, although this high proportion is due in part to the fact that diseases of old age are used to derive
estimates of tobacco-related mortality; that is, tobacco is assumed (based on estimates of population use) to account for a large proportion of cardiovascular disease, cancers, and respiratory diseases (eg 61% of all deaths from cancers and heart disease were attributed to tobacco in the early nineties) (Commonwealth of Australia 1994b). As tobacco use declines in the population so do the deaths attributed to tobacco drop (for example, by 7% over the decade to 1992) (Commonwealth of Australia 1994b). In fact, a range of behavioural, dietary, health care, environmental and genetic factors contribute to the diseases of old age, along with drug use. Of more concern may be drug related deaths among younger people (under 35), which are partly obscured by the major population killers such as coronary diseases and cancers.

Alcohol accounted for over six in ten drug-related deaths among younger Australians, and illicit drug use has been blamed for one third of all drug-related deaths among 15-34 year olds, compared to 1% of those aged 35 and over (Commonwealth of Australia 1994b). Further, young women are using a wider range of drugs than older women, and more women than men aged 14 to 19 have tried a range of drugs including tobacco, alcohol, cannabis, tranquillisers, analgesics, amphetamines, heroin and ecstasy (AIHW 1999; Commonwealth of Australia 1994b), although the gender differences are small.

Drug injectors face a range of health problems, but the most serious are the risks of overdose, HIV and hepatitis. Opiate-related deaths (‘overdoses’) accounted for around one quarter of all drug-related deaths in the 15-34 age group in the early nineties (Commonwealth of Australia 1994b), and at that time estimates of hepatitis C among Australian injectors suggested that around 60% of injectors already had hepatitis C (Commonwealth of Australia 1993a). On the other hand, prevalence of HIV/AIDS remains low compared to most overseas experience (Commonwealth of Australia 1994b, 1994c); in 1994 the majority of AIDS cases in Australia were men (85%) and only 6% had reported injecting drugs (Commonwealth of Australia 1994b). However, the Victorian Drug Advisory Committee’s report (1996) noted that deaths from drug overdoses were increasing in Victoria (Premier’s Drug Advisory Committee 1996, p. 86), and there were the same number of deaths from drug overdose as for traffic accidents (Premier’s Drug Advisory Committee 1996, p. 69). The authors noted that intravenous drug use was high compared to other countries, particularly of heroin and amphetamines (Premier’s Drug Advisory Committee 1996, p. 69).

Economists Collins and Lapsley were commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Community Services and Health in 1990 to develop a methodology to estimate the ‘social costs’ of drug abuse in Australia. Among other things, they excluded from the model the effects of passive smoking, pharmaceutical abuse, and HIV/AIDS related to drug use (Collins & Lapsley 1991). Their second commissioned work (Collins & Lapsley 1996) refined the earlier model in a number of respects; for example, the new model included the beneficial effects of moderate use of alcohol, and an economic value for unpaid work such as home duties and voluntary work. They also separated harm associated with illicit drug use from law enforcement costs, which are incurred, they pointed out, because the drugs are _illegal_ rather than _harmful_ (Collins & Lapsley 1996, p. 6), an important distinction.

Collins and Lapsley concluded that tobacco accounts for 67% of the total social costs of drug abuse, alcohol for 24% and illicit drugs for 9% (Collins & Lapsley 1996, p. 63). Thus alcohol and tobacco together accounted for
The politics of illicit drug use

about 90% of the total social cost of drug abuse, and illicit drugs accounted for a little under 10%. Estimates of death, injury or social damage are models for the harm associated with particular drugs. Tobacco and alcohol contributed most (97%) to drug-related deaths, and most (91%) of the social costs of drug abuse; and conversely, illicit drugs accounted for an estimated 3% of deaths and an estimated 9% of social costs, excluding law enforcement costs. Thus in terms of conventional measures of harm, a ‘problem’ generally refers to legal drugs, and particularly to tobacco, although these ‘problems’ appear to be declining. In terms of death and injury, the biggest drug-related problems for younger Australians were traffic accidents and risks associated with drug injection. These are the major health-related concerns, but what ‘problems’ do ordinary people associate with drugs?

PUBLIC OPINION

I decided that the most credible source of information about Australian viewpoints on drugs was the National Campaign Against Drug Abuse, or NCADA national household surveys. I based my household survey of Nimbin on the NCADA surveys, and I refer to their results throughout the thesis.

The regular nation-wide surveys conducted by the NCADA (later called the National Drug Strategy or NDS), are face-to-face interviews of one or more members of Australian households, with the results weighted to represent the Australian population. The results I present here may vary slightly within tables and between publications, because of rounding and/or different weighting estimates; these differences will only vary by around 1%.

The 1993 and 1995 surveys most closely match the time frame for my Nimbin household surveys (1994 and 1995) and so these will be cited most often, while results from other surveys are provided occasionally to indicate trends. Over successive NCADA surveys, people were asked about the drugs that they associated with the ‘drug problem’, although in 1998 people were provided with a list of drugs to choose from, while in earlier surveys the question was open-ended (for unprompted, or ‘top of the head’ answers). It is notable that there is no consensus about the term, but heroin and cannabis are the drugs most likely to be associated with the ‘drug problem’ by Australians in the nineties.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>1998a)</th>
<th>1995b)</th>
<th>1993b)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heroin</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamines</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocaine/ crack</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>&lt; 1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1
First drug mentioned as the ‘drug problem’ in Australia (%).
The pattern of public opinion is the reverse of the mortality and social cost estimates; alcohol was considered to be the ‘drug problem’ by a small proportion of the population (14%), and tobacco by even fewer people, while cannabis and heroin were associated with the idea of a ‘problem’ by between 20% and 40% of the population.

However, the answers depend on the question. For example, the NCADA surveys also asked people about ‘community’ and ‘personal’ drug-related worries. The legal drugs alcohol and tobacco, along with needle sharing, were most often named as the ‘greatest concern to the community’, while tobacco was overwhelmingly the most common personal concern. While the illegal drugs cannabis and heroin most often are associated with the ‘drug problem’, the legal drugs alcohol and tobacco are the drugs of most concern to people, which suggests that the ‘drug problem’ is not necessarily the same as the drug/s people worry about in their own lives.

Table 2.2
First mentioned drug of most concern to community and to self (%)
(source: C’lth of Aus. 1993d)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug: %</th>
<th>Most concern to community</th>
<th>Most concern to self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excessive use of alcohol</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco smoking</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needle sharing</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of heroin</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of marijuana</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other + None</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another question provided a different perspective on the Australian population’s attitudes towards drugs. People were asked if the ‘regular adult use’ of each of the following drugs was ‘OK or not OK’ (‘regular’ was defined as once a month or more often). A clear majority of Australians approved of regular use of alcohol, followed by support from four in ten for tobacco and from one quarter for regular use of cannabis. The remaining (illicit) drugs had very little support for regular adult use throughout the nineties.

The phrasing of a survey question obviously influences the results. For example, as Table 2.3 indicates, the drugs that most ‘concern the community’ (ie alcohol and tobacco) are also the drugs most likely to be approved for regular use.

Table 2.3
Percent of population supporting ‘regular’ adult use of drugs (%)
(sources: a) AIHW 1999; b) C’lth of Aus. 1993d)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug: %</th>
<th>1998a)</th>
<th>1995a)</th>
<th>1993b)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tobacco | 40 | 40 | 36
Marijuana | 26 | 24 | 26
Hallucinogens | 3 | 2 | 5
Amphetamines | 3 | 2 | 2
Ecstasy/designer drugs | 3 | 2 | 2
Heroin | 2 | 2 | 2

In the 1991 NCADA survey (Porritt 1991), before the above series of drug-related questions, people were asked an open-ended (unprompted) question about what ‘social issues’ bothered them. It is unfortunate that this question was not asked subsequently, because responses clearly indicated that Australians were not particularly concerned about ‘drug problems’ unless and until they were specifically prompted. People were most likely to worry about unemployment (27%), lack of money (19%) and the economic situation (16%), while any drug issue (including legal drugs) was of concern to only 13% of those interviewed (Porritt 1991, p. 29).

Yet another way of asking people for their opinion about illicit drugs is to ask them if such use should be legalised. Over the nineties support for the legalisation of most illicit drugs remained very low and relatively stable. For example, total support for legalised personal use of heroin in 1991 was 8%, and for amphetamines 6% (Commonwealth of Australia 1993d), while in 1998 support for legal heroin use was 7%, and for amphetamines it was still 6% (AIHW 1999). However support for cannabis legalisation apparently fluctuated markedly over the same period. The 1991 NCADA reported 38% support (Porritt 1991, p. 142), the next survey, two years later, reported 25% (Commonwealth of Australia 1993d), and the 1995 national survey reported support from 29% of the population (Commonwealth of Australia 1996), and in 1998 the reported figure was 30% (AIHW 1999), which is lower than the level of support at the beginning of the decade.

In contrast to NCADA results, other surveys using a different methodology found higher population support for cannabis legalisation; people’s responses tended to be less conservative over the telephone than face-to-face. For example, in 1993 a telephone survey of the WA population was conducted by Simon Lenton (Lenton 1994); the question in this case was ‘Do you think that cannabis should be as legal as alcohol?’. Support for legalisation (37%) was much higher than the NCADA results for the same period (25%) and was similar to the NCADA 1991 results (38%) rather than the later national surveys. The Lenton study highlighted the importance of terminology with much higher support for ‘decriminalisation’ compared to ‘legalisation’, and support increased significantly from 64% to 72% of the sample when decriminalisation was explained using an example. In the same year another population survey (Bowman & Sanson-Fisher 1994) also found a much higher rate of support than did the national NCADA surveys. Bowman and Sanson-Fisher were commissioned by the National Task Force on Cannabis to assess Australian opinion on changes to cannabis laws. Like Lenton, they conducted a telephone survey, and, like Lenton, they found a higher level of support than found by the NCADA surveys, with a little over half of those surveyed supporting legal possession and use of small amounts of cannabis (Bowman & Sanson-Fisher 1994, p. 35).
So different surveys obtained quite different results to questions about legalising cannabis, with support ranging from one quarter of the population to one person in every two. Even similar questions can, apparently, produce very different results depending on the interview technique, the perceived confidentiality of the survey, and the phrasing of the questions. Such differences in results underscore the need for caution when citing ‘public opinion’ on drug-related questions; opinion surveys may not provide a useful indication of what the community is actually interested in or worried about. As well as methodological influences, drug experts may help to shape the public’s views on drugs. The Premier’s Drug Advisory Council (1996, p. 66) was critical of ‘experts’ as sources of information: ‘Illicit drugs and their effects on the community, and especially on the young, seem to promote views that are not always well grounded in factual information. This tendency is not confined to the general public, as many people claiming to be expert in the area of illicit drugs are not always well informed’.

Media stories may be an even more important influence on public perceptions of a ‘drug problem’ than drug experts. The Premier’s Drug Advisory Council (1996) noted that the media is the main source of drug information for the Australian community, and cites an Australian Drug Foundation evaluation of media reporting, which found that stories about illicit drugs were reported excessively, the coverage often was inaccurate, and the issues usually were sensationalised (Premier’s Drug Advisory Council 1996, p. 41). Coomber (1998) also describes the excesses and exaggerations which often characterise media reporting on drugs, but he cautions against an unfair, ‘blanket’ condemnation of the popular media (Coomber 1998 p. xiii). There is no way to evaluate the relative accuracy or sensationalism of the media depiction of Nimbin’s ‘drug problem’, without information about residents’ drug use, and their opinions about what constitutes a drug problem in their village; my household survey, based on the NCADA surveys, was designed to provide that information.

Drug use patterns and public opinion offer insights into possible ‘drug problems’ but there are broader influences on the creation and maintenance of drug ‘problems’ as well, which I will discuss in the remainder of this chapter and the next. One such factor is drug policy at the international, national and local levels.

**DRUG POLICIES**

In very general terms, contemporary drug policies may be described as prohibitionist (abstinence based, or ‘drug-free’) or harm reductionist (a policy that acknowledges illicit drug use and seeks to minimise the harms associated with it). There is evidence to suggest that the two policy stances can have very different effects on people’s everyday lives. There was widespread criticism of abstinence-based policies throughout the late twentieth century. Ali and Christie (1994), in their report to the National Task Force on Cannabis, pointed out that, ‘the total prohibition policy implemented in the United States and most Australian states has not been successful in eradicating or substantially reducing drug use despite increased resources directed towards this goal’ (Ali & Christie 1994, pp. 22-23).

Many authors have suggested that policies are the ‘problem’, rather than the drugs or the drug users (for example, Wodak & Owens 1996; Donnelly & Hall 1994; Block 1992). The report to the Australian National Cannabis Task Force on legal options for Australia by McDonald and his associates (1994), stated that ‘the harms caused
The politics of illicit drug use

by the control regimes outweigh the harms caused by the drug itself’ (McDonald et al. 1994, p. xii), and this statement is echoed by the Premier’s Drug Advisory Council (1996, p. 106): ‘Prohibition laws and their enforcement create more harm and costs for the community than the known harms of drugs themselves’. If this is the case, what justification is there for current drug policies, and what are they? As Coomber (1998) explained (with reference to U.K. politics), ‘Individual politicians may feel the need to debate drug policy but this is widely perceived to be a political liability across the major political parties, potentially leaving the party vulnerable to the dreaded accusation of being “soft on drugs” ... [illicit] drugs are bad and dangerous and therefore little debate is needed except to agree to newer and tougher measures’ (Coomber 1998, p. xi).

Support for harm reduction-based or prohibition-based policies tends to polarise around younger and/or liberal, or older and/or more conservative groups and individuals. For example, Verthein, Kalke and Raschle (1998) said of German drug policy, ‘When it comes to illegal drugs, Germany has a cleavage line of conflict here between left-wing liberals, that is, in the German case, the Social Democrats and the Green Party, and right-wing conservatives, being the ruling coalition. The Social Democrats and the Greens are in favour of reforms, whereas the government insists on a drug policy based on abstinence and repression’ (Verthein et al. 1998, p. 72). However such a clear division between left and right wing political parties does not always apply.

In Australia, conservative ACT and Victorian governments have supported a number of drug law reforms (such as a trial of heroin on prescription and the decriminalisation of cannabis use) while their federal conservative colleagues remained firmly on a prohibition platform. The trial of a safe injecting facility in Sydney’s Kings Cross was delayed for two years by a lengthy Supreme court action by local businesspeople. Apparently, the concerns of business operators in a notorious red light district of Sydney (where prostitution was illegal for many years) were concerned about attracting the ‘wrong sort of person’, and so, presumably, discouraging tourists. Others (including the Prime Minister at the time) were concerned about ‘sending the wrong message’ (that is, appearing to endorse illegal drug use). Conservative opposition to drug initiatives is often expressed in terms of ‘sending the wrong message’, while business opposition understandably revolves around ‘scaring away the customers’.

While Hartnoll’s (1998) description of three tiers of drug policy — the local, the national and the international — makes sense, it is often difficult to differentiate between the national and the international when discussing drug policies. American federal governments have aggressively promoted a prohibitionist policy on both the domestic and international levels for many years. For example, American policy has often been called the ‘war on drugs’ and has had a profound effect on the nature of, and responses by other nations to, illicit drug marketing.

America promoted its abstinence-based drug policies across the international stage, and has been credited as the main driving force behind the international drug treaties of the twentieth century. The first international meeting about drugs was held in Shanghai in 1909. It was attended by thirteen countries and focused on Britain’s opium trade with China (McDonald, Norberry, Wardlaw & Ballenden1994). McDonald and his associates comment:
The politics of illicit drug use

‘At the Shanghai Conference the United States argued for a total prohibition on opium, and was opposed by the United Kingdom’ (McDonald et al. 1994, p. 14). The U.S. was more successful at the 1911-1912 Hague Convention, and opiates were outlawed (McCoy 1992, p. 248). The 1925 Geneva Convention added cannabis to the list of banned substances (McCoy 1992, p. 15), and also created a process for monitoring and controlling drugs world-wide, the Permanent Central Opium Board, which later became the International Narcotics Control Board (McCoy 1992, p. 15).

America’s prohibitionist policy has been blamed for diversifying and strengthening the international heroin market (McCoy 1992, p. 262) and for markedly distorting US-Latin American relationships (Castells 1998, p. 195). For example, Wodak and Owens (1996, p. 23) point to Operation Just Cause, which saw American troops invade Panama in 1989 to arrest, try and sentence General Manuel Noriega on drug charges. These authors note that, ‘Much of the evidence against the former head of State came from major drug traffickers provided with a reduced sentence if they agreed to testify’ (Wodak and Owens 1996, p. 23). According to Wodak and Owens, that invasion cost American and Panamanian lives, and cost Panama hundreds of millions of dollars ‘without any evidence that it reduced the transport of cocaine into America or affected the movement of drug profits’ (Wodak and Owens 1996, p. 23).

While the United States is well known for its vigorous promotion of prohibition, The Netherlands has an equally widespread reputation as a model of the more liberal ‘harm reduction’ approach to illicit drug use. The Netherlands is a small country (a little over 16,000 sq. miles) and, like Australia, has a small population (around 15 million people). The Dutch have had harm reduction policies in place for over twenty years, and the extent of overseas interest eventually forced their Health Department to create a special section, the Bureau of International Affairs, to handle visits and requests for information from politicians, health professionals and scientists from around the world (City of Amsterdam 1992). The Dutch policy exemplifies harm reduction principles. Dutch policies on the use of cannabis and heroin are explained clearly in two Health Department publications. It should be remembered that use of these drugs is not legal in The Netherlands, but police activities are focused (primarily through Ministerial directives) on particular aspects such as smuggling across national borders and disturbance of the peace. On cannabis, the Netherlands Institute for Alcohol and Drugs (1995a) states:

Dutch drug policy aims to maintain a separation between the market for soft drugs and the market for harder substances (heroin and cocaine) ... Investigation and prosecution of possession of hard drugs for individual consumption (normally 0.5 gram) and soft drugs to a maximum of 30 grams carry the lowest priority. In practice, possession and selling of a maximum of 30 grams of hashish and marijuana will not be investigated and are usually not prosecuted (Netherlands Institute for Alcohol and Drugs 1995a, p. 1).

The Netherlands has withstood pressure from other countries to adopt prohibition, as Farrell (1998) observes:

The INCB [International Narcotics Control Board] states that, in the opinion of the Board, the [Dutch] cannabis policy transgressed the parameters of the international conventions (INCB 1993). In response, the Dutch prime minister stated that the policy had been successful and would be maintained (Farrell 1998, pp. 22-23).
During a visit to Amsterdam in July-August 1996, I asked Ernst Buning, Director of the Bureau of International Affairs, why the Dutch did not simply legalise cannabis, and he replied that the Dutch had few industries and relied heavily on trade with their prohibitionist neighbours, so that it was difficult to pursue further legislative changes to domestic drug laws; in particular, he explained, Germany and France were concerned (probably with some justification) that illicit drugs were entering their countries from The Netherlands. However, smuggling routes will always be found for profitable commodities, be they high-priced legal goods or popular illegal ones. For example, in 1985 I travelled by train from Portugal to France in the same carriage as a wine smuggler, who shared some lovely home-made claret with me during the journey (France restricted the importation of cheap Portuguese wine), while later that year I shared a train carriage from France to Rome with a hash smuggler travelling from Amsterdam, who offered me a sample as he explained the unemployment situation in Italy: ‘You can either work for the government or the Mafia’, (or, presumably, become a hash smuggling entrepreneur).

Unlike most countries which have heavy penalties for supplying illicit drugs, Dutch policy has directly addressed the supply of cannabis. The Dutch have estimated that there are between 2,460 and 4,760 cannabis outlets in The Netherlands, including coffee shops, home dealers, and community centres, but in the major cities most sales are from coffee shops (Netherlands Institute for Alcohol and Drugs 1995a, p. 2). Estimates of the turnover in cannabis sales was around 2 billion Dutch Guilders per year (Netherlands Institute for Alcohol and Drugs 1995a, p. 2) which was roughly the same in Australian dollars.

Despite an abundance of cannabis outlets, there is no evidence of widespread use of cannabis among young Dutch nationals; for example, in the mid-nineties, around 5% of the Dutch population aged 12 and over regularly use cannabis (Netherlands Institute for Alcohol and Drugs 1995a, p. 3), compared with around half of the Australian population aged 14 and over. The Dutch policy on cannabis has significantly boosted the economy of this small European country, it has provided a strong disincentive to criminal involvement in the cannabis market, and has not increased population levels of cannabis use.

Cannabis users have been diverted from the black market in The Netherlands, but how have heroin users fared under The Netherlands’ harm reduction policy? The Netherlands Institute for Alcohol and Drugs explains the country’s policy clearly:

Dutch policy on hard drugs is based on the principles of harm reduction. This means that the assistance to drug users is aimed at minimising health risks without solely striving for drug abstinence. ... In comparison to other hard drugs, the use of heroin is associated with the most serious problems such as visible deterioration, poor health and criminality ... [and so] a large number of care and treatment programs have been specifically developed for opiate addicts (Netherlands Institute for Alcohol and Drugs 1995b, p. 3).

In The Netherlands there are an estimated 130 needle exchange outlets in 60 different cities, with face-to-face counselling, information, social support, and low threshold methadone programs which include outreach methadone and needle exchange buses (Netherlands Institute for Alcohol and Drugs 1995b, p. 3). As well, the
Dutch social safety net includes assistance with housing, income, education, leisure activities and employment; for example, in 1992 the Institute developed the National Job Project to assist former drug addicts in finding a job. According to the Institute ‘The pragmatic Dutch drug policy has been relatively successful and serves as an example for several other countries today’ (Netherlands Institute for Alcohol and Drugs 1995b, p. 3).

The Netherlands is not the only country with the so-called ‘harm reduction’ approach to illicit drugs. In fact it lags behind Switzerland in addressing the issue of drug supply for heroin users. Switzerland has been conducting a trial of heroin on prescription for over ten years (Nelles, Bernasconi, Dobler-Mikola & Kaufman 1997). The opiate trial started in 1990 to investigate the long term effects of medical prescription of various opiates to ‘long term, socially marginalised addicts’ who had failed in other treatments. The trial was so successful that it was expanded in 1995, including into the Swiss prison system (Nelles et al. 1997, p. 48). Reinarman (1997) reports that the Swiss trial is an acknowledged success, with a 60% decrease in crime among participants, full time employment rates have doubled and unemployment has fallen from 44% to 20%, despite the fact that the sample was composed of users with severe problems. There have been no fatal overdoses from hundreds of thousands of injections during the evaluation period, and one cost benefit analysis estimated a net benefit of the scheme to be $US20 per person per day (Reinarman 1997, p. 151).

Policy variations between countries have provided models for comparison. In the Netherlands, few people use cannabis or heroin, and there appear to be fewer social problems and fewer deaths compared to, say, America. Grund, Stern, Kaplan, Adriaans and Drucker (1992) compared the experiences of heroin users in Rotterdam in The Netherlands and the Bronx in the USA. Their work highlights the effects of prohibition and harm reduction policies on the daily lives of heroin users. Grund and his associates point out that Rotterdam and the South Bronx have equivalent populations, yet South Bronx has ten times as many opiate users and the majority inject rather than smoke their drugs, while Rotterdam has fewer heroin users and the majority are smokers (because the street heroin is, on average, 30% to 50% pure) (Grund et al. 1992, p. 382). These authors clearly illustrate the differences between the two policies:

In Rotterdam drug treatment was funded beginning in the early 1970s and is readily available for those who want it ... The drug problem is viewed as one of the many social problems society faces which cannot be solved by repression ... This policy... has resulted in a stable availability, moderate prices and more consistent quality of drugs on the Dutch illegal market throughout the years compared with neighbouring countries and the US. As in many other Dutch cities, heroin and cocaine are mainly sold at so-called house addresses; places where more or less stable social friendship groups of drug users gather and where they can buy and use their drugs in a relatively calm atmosphere ... These places are often tolerated if they did not cause too much of a nuisance in the neighbourhood. (Grund et al. 1992, pp. 384-385).

In contrast, Grund and his associates describe how ‘zero tolerance’ and escalating drug arrests have shaped New York’s drug scene:

In New York the majority of drug sales occur in unstable and dangerous settings. Packaged drugs are sold through holes in the boarded-up doors or windows of abandoned buildings from which an unseen person passes an untried quantity of pre-packaged drugs to an
anonymous customer, or pre-packaged drugs are sold by small groups of people who wander a particular block, or hover in a particular doorway ... To make up for the lack of heroin and extend earnings, dealers cut their product ... Because of this unstable purity, smoking heroin, which can be perceived as a protective factor for HIV contamination, is hardly a serious option for New York’s opiate addicted population (Grund et al. 1992, p. 386).

Yet, despite the heavy emphasis on abstinence that is the basis of America’s prohibitionist policy, the demand for drug treatment services in New York greatly exceeds the available places (Grund et al. 1992, p. 385). Grund and his associates conclude that Dutch policy has resulted in a stable and ageing group of opiate users while the problems in the Bronx provide an example of ‘decades of neglect, exploitation and political corruption’ (Grund et al. 1992, p. 385). Thus ‘drug problems’ can, indeed, be caused by drug policies, and problems are exacerbated by the failure of broader social policies for the support of the poor and socially disadvantaged.

McCoy and Block (1992) conclude that the American ‘war on drugs’ is: ‘[T]he latest escalation in a decade-long policy of repression that has crowded the courts, filled the prisons, corrupted law officers, compromised our civil liberties, and criminalized substantial sectors of American society’ (McCoy & Block 1992, p. 5). One obvious effect of drug illegality is that people are arrested, tried in a court of law, and imprisoned, fined, or otherwise punished. If social policies can create or ameliorate drug ‘problems’ for individuals and communities, so too can drug laws, and policing practices (the ways that laws actually are enforced).

DRUG LAWS

The mere fact of illegality creates particular stereotypes and assumptions of badness. As Manderson (1993) commented: ‘To break the law is seen as bad, wilful, and deserving of punishment per se. Continuing illegal behaviour is ... taken as proof of the need for tougher laws. It is a vicious circle, each new law adding to the odium of the criminals ... Drug laws have in this way developed and perpetuated social attitudes towards drug users’ (Manderson 1993, p. 12).

In their report to the National Task Force on Cannabis, McDonald and his associates (McDonald et al. 1994, p. 9) point out that the Australian Constitution does not specifically give the Federal government power to legislate on crime, so that Australian drug laws are primarily State laws. Drug laws are relatively recent. Early Australian ‘drug laws’ (the colonies’ Poisons Acts) largely were concerned with labelling to prevent accidental death, and with records to trace poisons such as arsenic, rather than with restricting the community’s access to drugs. Manderson (1993) describes these early laws:

Drug laws in the late nineteenth century reflected a society in which drug use and abuse was seen as a continuum, and as a matter of individual choice, which required neither medical nor legal legitimation. Such drug control as there was came under the various colonies’ Poisons Acts, slightly modified copies of the mother Act of the British Parliament. The New South Wales and Victorian Sale and Use of Poisons Acts, for example, both enacted in 1876, listed a range of drugs and provided that, except in remote places, they could only be sold by a medical practitioner or chemist ... Even these limited provisions did not apply to medical prescription, homeopathic compounds, or patent medicines ... Neither the effect nor the intention of these provisions, however, was to stop addiction or recreational drug use, but rather to aid in the tracing of poisoners (Manderson 1993, p. 9).
In nineteenth century Australia, racism against Chinese immigrants was widespread, and the early laws reflected this, as Manderson explains:

The Chinese did not drink their opium, or take it in tablet form or subcutaneously as White Australians did; although occasionally chewed, it was the most invariable custom of the Chinese to smoke it, specially prepared in pipes, often in ‘dens’ fitted out for the purpose. Smoking was at once a private and absorbing reverie and a social activity. For the Chinese opium functioned as a recreational drug’. In 1857, when the governments of New South Wales and Victoria first imposed a duty upon the importation of opium, 328 pounds were imported in New South Wales, almost all of it destined for the 9,000 Chinese residents in the colony’ (Manderson 1993, p. 20) … [while in 1886 a staggering 37,368 pounds of opium were imported, and the] smoking of opium was therefore the habit, at once both ubiquitous and unique, of an alien and distrusted minority … It was seen as a “Chinese vice” … [and] opium helped to reinforce the popular fiction of the “dirty Chinese” (Manderson 1993, pp. 20, 22).

Manderson cites an 1876 government report where opium was blamed for Chinatown’s poverty and overcrowding, and ‘having been made to bear this sanitary and aesthetic burden, opium was then made to bear a moral one’, and was blamed for ‘vice and depravity’ (Manderson 1993, pp. 22-23). Manderson explained:

At the heart of the image of evil that developed about the Chinese and their opium use was the claim that women who smoked it either lost all sexual control, or became so heavily drugged that they were unable to resist rape or seduction. The effect of opium was said to enable “the criminal and sensual Chinese” to have their perverted way with White women (Manderson 1993, pp. 24-25).

McDonald and his associates suggest three stages of drug laws in Australia; the first stage introduced the notion of controlling the drug use of ordinary citizens, and the first law to specifically prohibit opium was the Queensland Sale and Use of Poisons Act 1891, which targeted supply to indigenous Australians (McDonald et al. 1994). South Australia followed in 1895, also covering supply to indigenous Australians, not use per se (Manderson 1993, p. 32). Manderson notes that both these laws actually failed to stop the sale of opium to indigenous Australians (Manderson 1993, p. 34). McDonald and his associates describe the second stage in Australian drug laws as occurring when the international treaties were finally implemented by Australian States. In 1926, Australia had banned the export/import of cannabis to conform to the Geneva Convention, but the States were very slow to enact complementary laws banning cannabis use, because such use was virtually unknown in this country (McDonald et al. 1994, p. 20). The first state controls for cannabis were contained in the Victorian Poisons Act 1928, while NSW introduced a similar law much later: the Police Offences Amendment (Drugs) Act 1935 (McDonald et al. 1994, p. 21).

The third phase, according to McDonald and his associates, started in the 1960s when the federal government took on a more active role, ratifying new conventions, updating customs regulations, and for the first time, introducing federal drug legislation (for example the Narcotic Drugs Act 1967) (McDonald et al. 1994, p. 21). States began moving the illegal drugs from poisons’ acts to specific drug laws, stronger penalties were introduced for an increasing range of drugs, police powers were expanded, and basic civil rights of individuals were
systematically eroded during this period; for example, the burden of proof was placed on the person rather than the state, and interception of private communications proliferated.

Heavier penalties were introduced for trafficking offences, and the images of evil justified greater intrusions into private life; as McDonald and his associates described it, ‘The focus on the Mr Bigs of the drug world has also enabled legislatures to enact drug laws which give extensive powers of search and seizure to the police, and which give considerable powers in relation to the use of listening devices and telephone taps’ (McDonald et al. 1994, p. 23). At the same time there was an appreciable reduction in penalties for drug users. Manderson commented that: ‘as the image of the evil trafficker became more and more important, the crime of possession for personal use was de-emphasised. Mere possession, the punishment of which had been so important in the development of drug policy in Australia, was becoming a side issue’ (Manderson 1993, p. 165).

Racism has often been linked to drug laws, with strikingly similar fears expressed. For example, Jack Herer (1995) describes how Harry Anslinger convinced the U.S. Congress that half of all violent crimes in America were committed by ‘Spaniards, Mexican-Americans, Latin Americans, Filipinos, Negroes, and Greeks, and these crimes would be traced directly to marijuana’ (Herer 1995, p. 29). Herer continued, ‘As an example of his racist statements, Anslinger read into U.S. Congressional testimony (without objection) stories about “coloreds” with big lips, luring white women with jazz music and marijuana. ... The congressmen of 1937 gasped at ... the fact that this drug seemingly caused white women to touch or even look at a “Negro” ‘ (Herer 1995, p. 29). Justification for repressive law enforcement relies on negative stereotypes of the drug users and purveyors.

A common feature of drug prohibition was the linking of a drug with racist and/or ‘dirty’ and depraved images of the drug users. It appears to be relatively easy to link particular drugs to people’s fears about other cultures, and law enforcement may selectively support those fears and punish their object; for example, Manderson described the invasion of Cedar Bay in the seventies:

Conflict between ‘established residents’ in the far north of Queensland and the ‘alternative lifestyle movement’ became intense ... “Hippie-life worse than aboriginal. Pot-worshippers in humpies”, screamed one headline from the Brisbane Courier-Mail in 1971 ... On Sunday August 29, 1976 ... twenty-two well-armed Queensland police, assisted by seven commonwealth customs officers, a patrol boat, a customs launch, and an RAAF helicopter, attacked the twenty inhabitants of Cedar Bay, near Cooktown, in the far north of the State. Up to one hundred marijuana plants worth about $20,000 were seized, making it unlikely that any “trafficking” was going on beyond the people who live there and their friends, and a number of arrests were made, mostly for vagrancy ... Whatever the pretext, the real aim of the operation seems to have been to raze the commune to the ground. Houses were burnt; books, children’s clothes and about four months’ supply of food were doused in fuel and ruined; and a large amount of personal property was destroyed. Water tanks were filled full of holes and a hose cut to pieces. The subsistence garden was destroyed and dozens of fruit trees were chopped down (Manderson 1993, p. 167).

McCoy and Block (1992) described another expression of discrimination in the enforcement of drug laws:
In April 1990, Justice Carol Berkman of the New York State Supreme Court struck down cocaine possession charges against a black woman arrested at the Port Authority Bus Terminal. Noting that all the defendants that the Port Authority Police had brought before her court were minorities Justice Berkman stated “The picture emerges is one of discriminatory law enforcement which does incalculable damage to our civil liberties and which produces at best questionable results for the war on drugs” (McCoy & Block 1992, p. 7).

McCoy and Block (1992, p. 14) concluded that, ‘If foreign sources were eradicated and U.S. borders sealed, criminal syndicates could quickly produce limitless supplies of synthetics. Drugs are not simply something visited on innocent Americans by sinister foreigners’.

McDonald and his associates (1994, p. 22) suggest that penalties for cannabis use have been falling steadily over the second half of the twentieth century because: ‘... research showed the widespread nature of cannabis use, alarming law enforcement statistics, the work of early Parliamentary and other inquiries, and difficulties in administering some drug laws’. In particular, the 1970s heralded the third stage in drug laws, with the emergence of a legal discrimination between cannabis and other illicit drugs, as well as between use and marketing offences across drugs, although the changes were patchy.

The first of these third stage laws was the ACT’s amended Public Health (Prohibited Drugs) Ordinance in 1975, followed by Victoria in 1981 (where penalties were reduced for trafficking in cannabis compared to other illicits) (McDonald et al. 1994). In South Australia, the Controlled Substances Act was passed in 1984, which discriminated between cannabis and other illicit drugs across a range of offences, including some trafficking offences, and this was followed in 1986 by the landmark legislation, the Cannabis Substances Act Amendment Act, which introduced a cannabis expiation notice scheme in 1987 for both using and growing small amounts of cannabis (that is, it introduced the option of a fine rather than criminal charges). After watching the SA results carefully, other states have slowly followed the South Australian lead.

As well as these broader legislative changes, the actual penalties handed out for a variety of cannabis offences in the local and district courts have tended to be lighter in the late twentieth century, apparently reflecting changes in community attitudes towards cannabis use (Criminal Justice Commission 1994). The Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs (1993) pointed out that there were clear differences between the maximum possible statutory penalties, the actual sentences handed down, and the time ultimately served in prison (Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs 1993, p. 8). According to the Advisory Committee there has been a steady trend towards decreased penalties, decreased use of fines and imprisonment, and an increase in community service penalties (with the average number of hours in the community service orders also declining over time) (Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs 1993, pp. 92-93).

Thus, while laws often reflect prejudice and privilege, over time legal, ministerial, and community opinion can reduce the legal penalties despite the actual drug laws. On the other hand, law enforcement practices can and do selectively target minority groups, although the reasons are not simple. Manderson (1993) asserted that drug
laws have not been about health or addiction at all, but rather: ‘They have been an expression of bigotry, class, and deep-rooted social fears, a function of Australia’s international subservience to other powers, and a field in which politicians and bureaucrats have sought power. Drugs have been the subject of our laws, but not their object’ (Manderson (1993, p. 12). And the people who are punished most often are those who are the most vulnerable.

Commentators such as Desmond Manderson (1993) do not discriminate between ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ drugs; Manderson suggested that Australian attitudes towards illicit drugs such as heroin, cocaine and cannabis are based on their illegal status rather than on any intrinsic harmfulness, observing:

Why are some recreational drugs condemned and other condoned; what makes a ‘drug’ so special and so especially bad? Those who smoke tobacco or eat to excess are never punished, regardless of the harm they do to themselves or others; alcoholics are only punished for those dangerous or socially undesirable acts that affect others; but the user of illicit drugs is punished simply for the act of using, or even of possessing, a particular substance, regardless of the social consequences of that act and regardless of whether or not it has caused harm or affected other people (Manderson 1993, p. 10).

Who are the ‘objects’ of our drug laws? Around two thirds of all illicit drug arrests involve consumers rather than traffickers (Commonwealth of Australia 1994b), and most arrests, both for personal use and supply offences, are for cannabis. When looking at patterns of arrest, it should be noted that arrests are not an indication of who is breaking the law, but only of who is caught; arrests reflect factors such as police budgets and priorities, and the visibility of some groups within the community (for instance, young males and some cultural groups) (Commonwealth of Australia 1994b; Criminal Justice Commission 1994).

Regardless of ‘visibility’, the arrest pattern is striking. The people most likely to be arrested for anything to do with illicit drugs are cannabis users. For example, in 1992 there were more than ten times the number of cannabis arrests compared to arrests for amphetamines and heroin use, and 140 times the arrests for cocaine (Commonwealth of Australia 1994b). Further, around two-thirds of all illicit drug arrests involve consumers rather than providers (that is, people charged with possessing small amounts rather than commercial quantities), small scale using offences comprised around two thirds of cannabis-related arrests and two-thirds of heroin-related arrests (Commonwealth of Australia 1994b). Thus a substantial amount of police and court time is spent prosecuting individual users of small amounts of illicit drugs, and overwhelmingly these individuals have been arrested for using cannabis.

This policing effort has not reduced either the use or marketing of cannabis (or, for that matter, of heroin, amphetamines, ecstasy, and most other illicits). Cannabis use had increased steadily from the 1970s onwards (Donnelly & Hall 1994, p. 35), while police continued to arrest less than 2% of cannabis users (Donnelly & Hall 1994, p. 20); Donnelly and Hall concluded: ‘Prohibition on the use of cannabis has therefore failed in its intent to stop people from using cannabis’ (Donnelly & Hall 1994, p. 65). Economists Collins and Lapsley (1996) noted: ‘Law enforcement efforts are not directed towards a reduction in drug abuse, but are based on punitive intentions
over and above deterrence ... Indeed, in relation to enforcement of laws relating to use of illicit drugs, there is considerable doubt expressed in the literature that law enforcement has any real effectiveness’ (Collins & Lapsley 1996, p. 25). Manderson comments that, ‘the legislative drug policy pursued in Australia has manifestly failed to reduce the harm associated with drug use and has, on the contrary, created a climate of fear and hatred that has been enormously destructive’ (Manderson 1993, p. 12).

Castells (1998, p. 203) says that, ‘In a desperate reaction to the growing power of organized crime, democratic states, in self-defence, resort to measures that curtail, and will curtail, democratic liberties’. However, these measures do not, apparently, lead to any overall reduction in illicit drug availability and use. Certainly, we must be sure that the loss of basic rights and invasion of our privacy are really justified. The apprehension rate for cannabis use was around 2.3% of occasions, assuming that users use only once a year, while the detection rate per occasion of use (ie per crime) is, according to Statistics on Drug Abuse in Australia 1994, ‘infinitesimal’ (Commonwealth of Australia 1994b, p. 101). It is notable that in the 1990s the north coast of NSW had the highest cannabis arrest rate in NSW, with double the state average of arrests for cannabis use, and almost four times the state average for cultivation (Didcott, Reilly, Swift & Hall 1997, p. 4).

The Victorian Premier’s Drug Advisory Council Report (or Pennington Report, 1996), caused widespread discussion when it was tabled in Victoria’s State Parliament in 1996. Controversy spread beyond Victorian borders, with comments from experts, lobby groups, and both the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition in Federal Parliament. The Report was a considered, comprehensive document which canvassed the most recent information available in the nineties from local and international sources. It was unusual in that it addressed heroin as well as the more popular topic of cannabis.

The report suggested that imprisonment should be a last resort for drug users. In brief, it recommended that ‘use of illicit drugs such as heroin should remain a criminal offence but that penalties should emphasise treatment’; that is, a first offence should receive a caution and referral to assessment and treatment services, a second offence should incur an adjourned bond and referral for treatment, and further offences should attract fines and community work orders. Trafficking laws should remain but should be reviewed to determine if current patterns of sentencing were appropriate (Premier’s Drug Advisory Council 1996, p. 130). Cultivation of five or fewer cannabis plants per private household should no longer be an offence; sale of marijuana should remain an offence, but small quantities sold between adults should carry a caution for a first offence, and an adjourned bond for a second offence. Use and possession of a small quantity of cannabis (25 grams or less) should no longer be an offence, and all criminal records for possession and use of small amounts of cannabis should be expunged. The report recommended that Victoria retain maximum penalties for the sale of cannabis to young people, and that local councils enact by-laws similar to those which restrict alcohol consumption in public places.

The 1996 Premier’s Drug Advisory Council report also recommended more emphasis on education and information to youth and the general community; specialist drug court services; a review of current services for injecting drug users, and support for the ACT heroin trial (which still had not proceeded at the time of writing in
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2001). Changes to law enforcement practices were suggested, including the need for a comprehensive strategy across the police service to ensure that harm reduction was an operational practice at all levels. The commission advised greater police support for community initiatives, along with career recognition for active and effective harm minimisation and community work on the part of police officers (Premier’s Drug Advisory Council 1996, pp. 119-130).

Importantly, the Advisory Council recommended that legislative amendments take into consideration patterns of drug use and the types of harm which specific drugs cause. This reflects the broader move away from an earlier blanket ‘badness’ applied to all drugs in all quantities, to a consideration of specific consequences, and a ‘harm’ continuum. It also looks beyond the simple user-dealer view of drug problems, to include the effects of policing strategies and other social influences.

In a commissioned report to the National Task Force on Cannabis, McDonald and his associates (1994) presented legislative options for the future; they concluded that neither complete freedom nor the current prohibition were appropriate given contemporary community standards (McDonald et al. 1994, p. 100). They suggested that, ‘if governments agree that total prohibition is not the most desirable approach, but are unwilling or unable to legislate for a preferable option’ (presumably because of public opinion), then ‘the Dutch approach is a desirable alternative. This would entail the government, the State or Territory Director of Public Prosecutions, or another appropriate authority declaring that, as from a certain date, no person would be prosecuted before the courts for specified (minor) cannabis offences’ (McDonald et al. 1994, pp. 100-101). That is, cannabis use would remain illegal but would not be prosecuted.

Queensland’s Criminal Justice Commission came to a similar conclusion, commenting that cannabis laws ‘cannot be justified in principle ... and are out of step with established community values and the penalties being imposed by courts’ (Criminal Justice Commission 1994, p. 89). The Commission recommended changes to the Drugs Misuse Act ‘so that intrusive police powers cannot be used in the investigation of simple cannabis offences’ (Criminal Justice Commission 1994, p. 90). Among Ali and Christie’s (1994) recommendations to the National Task Force on Cannabis were the following: ‘the development of a comprehensive national policy on cannabis which clearly states aims, objectives and strategies; that the possession, cultivation, sale and non-therapeutic use of any quantity of cannabis remain illegal, but that law enforcement focus on importation, sale and cultivation offences, and that there should be no criminal penalties for simple personal use/possession’ (Ali & Christie 1994, p. 10). This approach is, in effect, the Dutch model suggested by McDonald and his associates (1994).

One inevitable consequence of that illegality is a black market.

THE BLACK MARKET

The illegal drug trade carries a number of negative stereotypes, with images of sinister criminal networks, and danger and violence from ‘drug pushers’, ‘drug barons’, and Desmond Manderson’s (1993) ‘Mr Bigs’ of the drug
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world. While America is widely believed to be the dominant force behind the global ‘War Against Drugs’, the American role in the international drug market is somewhat ambiguous. McCoy (1992) claims that as a direct result of early American attempts to suppress the heroin trade, both production and consumption spread across the globe, and the international opiate traffic became much more resistant to suppression (McCoy 1992, p. 265).

McCoy and Block (1992) note that when, in 1972, Nixon sought to eradicate opium cultivation in Turkey and the heroin production laboratories in France, the drug syndicates simply shifted their source from Turkey to Southeast Asia, Mexico, and later Southwest Asia, and ‘by the late 1970s, the simplicity of the Turkey-Marseilles-New York heroin pipeline had been replaced by a complex of international smuggling routes that tied First World drug users to disparate zones of Third World production’ (McCoy & Block 1992, p. 9). According to these authors, George Bush’s ‘war on drugs’ (against cocaine) in 1989 was simply an extension of Reagan’s earlier ‘war’ against heroin (McCoy & Block 1992, p. 1), although under Bush the ‘Drug War’ raised ‘suppression to unprecedented levels. The Bush administration has often involved the US military directly in drug law enforcement by invading Panama with 24,000 troops, floating plans for a battle fleet off the coast of Colombia, and dispatching the green berets to Peru’ (McCoy & Block 1992, p. 1). McCoy and Block suggested that the American ‘drug war’ ‘may well become the main pretext of U.S. intervention in Latin America for the rest of the decade’ (McCoy & Block 1992, p. 2).

The close links between illicit drug markets, international crime, and intelligence agencies are well documented. For example, while the American government vigorously pursued international prohibition, its own drug and security agencies were pursuing contrary agendas. Block (1992) traced the often confusing links between drug enforcement and secret service activities in America, which included ‘cells of CIA agents within the Drug Enforcement Agency’ (Block 1992, p. 43). Block says that:

In the main the CIA has cared little about drug enforcement although it has often used drugs as tools of espionage and counterintelligence. Since the establishment of the CIA in 1947, the Federal Bureau of Narcotics [later the Drug Enforcement Administration or DEA] has provided a more or less constant cover for various covert operations. That policy has unfortunately inclined the DEA to a certain tolerance for anti-communist drug dealers abroad and drug abuse at home, often in the name of national security (Block 1992, p. 39).

Block partly attributed the escalation of illicit drug use world-wide to three critical American domestic problems: ‘ongoing DEA willingness to compromise its anti-drug mission to accommodate CIA operations; the IRS [Internal Revenue Service] decision to cease monitoring off-shore money laundering; and continuing corruption among local law enforcement in the key domestic drug markets (Block 1992, p. 40). Block attributes these compromises to the close links between the ‘intelligence community’ and the Federal Bureau of Narcotics’ long-time (1930-1962) director, Harry Anslinger (Block 1992, p. 40).

Manuel Castells (1998) is in no doubt about the extent and effects of globalised crime at the end of the twentieth century: ‘Global crime, the networking of powerful criminal organisations, and their associates, in shared activities throughout the planet, is a new phenomenon that profoundly affects international and national

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economies, politics, security, and, ultimately, societies at large’ (Castells 1998, p. 98). Castells listed an extensive range of goods (as well as people and body parts) that are smuggled between countries, however drug trafficking is the single most important commodity to the point that ‘the legalisation of drugs is probably the greatest threat that organized crime would have to confront’ (Castells 1998, p. 174). The United Nations Conference on Globalized Crime estimated that a global drug trade (worth around US$500 billion a year) was larger than the global trade in oil (Castells 1998, p. 169).

Bertil Lintner (1992) described the heart of the world’s opium production: ‘For decades, the Golden Triangle — where the borders of Burma, Thailand and Laos meet — has been one of the world’s most important suppliers of illicit narcotics. Although any statistics from this inaccessible area should be taken with a great deal of scepticism, most reports show a dramatic upsurge in both cultivation of opium and the refining of heroin in recent years’ (Lintner 1992, p. 281). Lintner traced the interactions between the opium trade and local and international politics, concluding, ‘It became impossible to say where drug-running ended and insurgency or counter-insurgency began. To add to the confusion, various intelligence agencies, Asian as well as western, had their stakes in the opium trade, either as pure money-making operations, or because many of the drug traders proved to be invaluable intelligence assets’ (Lintner (1992, p. 297). According to Lintner, international syndicates supply chemists for the heroin refineries along the Thai-Burmese border as well as acting as distributors (Lintner (1992, p. 300).

Manderson observed that, ‘Indeed the fact of illegality itself encouraged a shift from smuggling opium, which was bulky and mild to the more concentrated forms of the drug, morphine and heroin, which were easier to smuggle and more profitable’ (Manderson 1993, p. 62). Along with illegality comes the trend away from more harmless, less refined versions of the drug because they are bulky and weigh more, and so are more difficult to smuggle. Cannabis tends to be produced in the country of consumption because it is relatively bulky to transport and has a low price-volume ratio (Castells 1998, pp. 197-198) (that is, low profits relative to the weight of the drug and related difficulties in smuggling it). My interviews with crop growers will shed some light on this little-researched subject.

Castells suggests that substantial amounts of money from drug trafficking are laundered through global financial transactions and then re-invested in legitimate business (Castells 1998, p. 169). Cannabis is an important drug for the economy of many countries. The Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs (1993) estimated that the Australian market was worth around $361 million. Undoubtedly, this is a conservative figure, because their estimate was based on weekly users rather than all users, using one ounce every 2-3 weeks at $250 per ounce. Eight years later a national television program estimated that Australians spent $5 billion on cannabis each year (NBN television, Sixty Minutes, April 8, 2001). The domestic US cannabis market produced an estimated $32-$64 billion in the late eighties, compared to America’s most valuable legal crop (corn) at $15 billion (Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs 1993, p. 60).
Robson (1999) notes that the level of demand for cannabis has enormous economic implications for those countries where it always has been an important cash crop; for example, in the early 1980s the annual export from the Lebanon alone far exceeded 2,000 tonnes, ‘a significant contribution to the national economy’ (Robson 1999, p. 71). The illegal drug market is central to the economies of many countries. For example, the *Australian* newspaper (11 June 1999, p. 26) reported that in future Colombia will include the value of its illegal crops (coca, heroin and marijuana) in its calculation of gross domestic product (GDP).

The Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs (1993) mentions that in Australia there is organised criminal involvement in bulk importation of unprocessed cannabis from New Guinea, Thailand and other parts of south-east Asia, and oil and hash from south-west Asia; the committee notes that these routes are the same as those used for heroin importation (Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs 1993, pp. 65-66). The Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs (1993) suggests that ‘organised crime’ is also involved in domestic cannabis production and marketing, and outlines two largely independent supply systems in Australia, a local and a national system: ‘Local cannabis needs are satisfied locally or regionally by a network of relatively small-scale growers and local user-dealers and grower-dealers’ (Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs 1993, p. 62), while the national supply system may involve ‘an Italian criminal fraternity, and some outlaw motorcycle gangs have also been convicted with large-scale cannabis production offences’ (Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs 1993, p. 64). The Committee warned the Queensland government that ‘Organised criminal involvement brings with it murder, corruption and links with other organised criminal interests’ (Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs 1993, p. 64).

The Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs (1993, p. 59) suggested that ‘Cannabis cultivation in Queensland is largely for southern markets, partly because the NSW Drug Enforcement Agency’s Cannabis Eradication Program made that state increasingly inhospitable for large scale cannabis growing’. The Premier’s Drug Advisory Council (1996) notes that rigorous efforts at law enforcement have had little impact on drug availability: ‘Drug seizures are simply responded to by the black market with replacement supplies and or rising prices ... There is no possibility that interdiction of supply will solve drug problems in our community’ (Premier’s Drug Advisory Council 1996, pp. v-vi). Other authors also have noted that police activities in one region simply resulted in another area filling the gap (Castells 1998; Wodak & Owens 1996; McCoy 1992). Wodak and Owens (1996, p. 21) suggested that the emphasis on eradicating cannabis production in Australia may have supported the rapid rise of a domestic amphetamine industry, while the Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs (1993, p. 66) noted that law enforcement activities against drug black markets actually may help organised crime, ‘through the maintenance of high rates of return, removal of competitors, and through creating conditions where those more prepared to resort to corruption and violence are placed at a competitive advantage’ (Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs 1993, p. 66).

In summary, over the twentieth century perceptions of drug problems have broadened to include a range of drugs and drug-taking behaviours. Community notions of what constitutes a ‘drug problem’ reflect personal experiences, media coverage of the issues, and the effects of a government’s policies, services and education campaigns. National policies can, and do, impact at the international and local levels, creating or ameliorating
drug problems. Leaving aside the effects of prejudice, many of the problems associated with the use and marketing of cannabis and heroin appear to be derived directly from their illegality, with resultant black markets, secrecy and health risks. A drug policy based on prohibition creates a black market, which is inevitably associated with so-called ‘organised’ crime, violence, and problems of police corruption. According to the Royal Commission into the NSW Police Service, the drug trade ‘has the potential by itself to undermine any police service’ (NSW Government 1997b, p. 198).

As outlined in this chapter and explored further in the next, the illegality of particular drugs can create or exacerbate drug problems. The next chapter will focus in greater detail on the two drugs that are associated with Nimbin’s ‘drug problem’. Cannabis and heroin will be discussed in terms of their history, recent reports and research, and patterns of use, along with an examination of some of the roles that culture plays in ameliorating drug problems.
CHAPTER THREE
THE DRUGS: CANNABIS & HEROIN

In the last chapter I considered the possible nature of drug ‘problems’, and the pitfalls associated with any superficial analysis of such ‘problems’. In this chapter I will discuss the drugs that are the focus of my thesis. I will examine the history, patterns of use and risks associated with cannabis and heroin, as well as the cultural contexts of recreational drug use.

There are obvious differences between cannabis and heroin. Cannabis is relatively harmless, easily and widely cultivated, and minimally processed. In the early nineties cannabis had been used by at least three in ten Australians aged fourteen and over (Commonwealth of Australia 1996, 1993d), while by the late nineties this had risen to four in ten (AIHW 1999). Heroin, on the other hand, is highly addictive (Solowij & Lemon 1994, p. 118), requires sophisticated processing, and is the drug most often associated with overdose and death. Its use carries strong social disapproval, and in Australia it is most likely to be injected, which carries particular risks and stigma. Throughout the nineties heroin had been used by around two people in every hundred (AIHW 1999; Commonwealth of Australia 1996; 1993d).

CANNABIS: BACKGROUND

Humanity has a very old association with cannabis, and Paul Robson (1999, p. 66) suggested that it was probably our first non-food crop. Its use was first recorded around 10,000 years ago (McDonald, Moore, Norberry, Wardlaw & Ballenden 1994, p. 11), and both Hindus and Muslims consider it to be a sacred plant (Rubin & Comitas 1976, p. 18). Cannabis is called a ‘soft drug’, even by many who oppose its legalisation, and by the end of the twentieth century cannabis was second only to alcohol in popularity as a recreational drug (Donnelly & Hall 1994).

There are over sixty psychoactive chemicals among over four hundred in the cannabis plant, and the primary intoxicant, Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) was isolated in 1964 (Robson 1999, p. 73). The widespread use and approval of cannabis is most unusual among illicit drugs, and most probably its popularity has been helped by a lack of toxicity, ease of cultivation and preparation, and long association with humanity as a healing herb. The Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs pointed out that ‘cannabis has been used as an analgesic, sedative and intoxicant since ancient times’ (Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs 1993, p. 5), and its therapeutic properties have been rediscovered and expanded in the second half of the twentieth century. For example, Grinspoon and Bakalar (1993) suggest that cannabis has a role in the treatment of glaucoma, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, AIDS, chronic pain, migraine, pruritus, menstrual cramps, labour pain, depression and other mood disorders, insomnia, and for paraplegia and quadriplegia — where they claim that paralysed patients preferred cannabis to prescription spasm medication, and male patients said that it helped to achieve and maintain erections (Grinspoon & Bakalar
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1993, p. 83). Grinspoon and Bakalar also mention the antibacterial and anti-tumour properties of cannabis, and its widespread use as an anti-emetic to alleviate the severe nausea and life-threatening loss of appetite associated with cancer chemotherapy (Grinspoon & Bakalar 1993, p. 83). Phillip Robson (1999) adds anxiety, insomnia and opiate detoxification to this list of medical uses for cannabis (Robson 1999, p. 75). By the nineties several American states had (re-)legalised cannabis for medical purposes (Flynn & Anderson 1997).

Following representations from the Australian Medical Association (and HEMP, among others) the NSW government investigated the feasibility of legalising the medical use of cannabis (Working Party on the Use of Cannabis for Medical Purposes 2000). The subsequent report (WPUCMP 2000) recommended legal cultivation of small amounts of cannabis for the relief of HIV-related and cancer-related wasting, for intractable pain, for neurological disorders such as motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis and Tourette’s syndrome, and for chemotherapy-related nausea; other medical conditions may be added following further research. NSW is likely to legalise small scale cannabis cultivation for medical uses and other Australian states are likely to follow its lead (primarily because the initiative is supported by the medical profession, which invariably lends credibility to drug reform proposals).

I have been told that Australian hospital staff (doctors and nurses) have been aware of the benefits of cannabis for HIV/AIDS patients for at least ten years (de Launey 1997) while Grinspoon and Bakalar (1993) discuss the American medical profession’s knowledge of the beneficial uses of cannabis.

This return of cannabis to respectability as a medicinal herb appears to be part of the growing popularity of herbal and other alternatives to conventional western medicine. Many people experience conventional medicines as powerful and dangerous, and cannabis offers a benign alternative to some conventional drugs, as well as offering the ill person greater control over both the amount used and the timing of the doses (compared to, say, a conventional anti-depressant or sleeping pill) (de Launey 1997).

As well as its long history as a medicinal herb, cannabis played an important role in the provision of clothing, rope and sailcloth. John Jiggens (1995) pointed out that during the eighteenth century Great Britain depended on hemp from Russia and the North American colonies for sails, rigging and ropes for British ships. However, the loss of the American colonies as a source of hemp created a strategic weakness for Britain which was exploited by Napoleon in 1807 (Jiggens 1995, pp. 6-7). As a result, according to Jiggens, Sir Joseph Banks conducted experiments with ‘Chinese hemp’ between 1783 and 1787 in an attempt to develop a plant which would grow well in the British climate; he was forced to consider NSW as a possible alternative following a number of failures (Jiggens 1995, pp. 6-7).

According to Jiggens, early NSW governors Phillip, Hunter and King encouraged hemp cultivation, and in 1801 about 700 yards of hemp linen were provided from the colony’s crops. King wrote that European hemp provided ‘a very abundant return on the lowlands about the Hawkesbury and Nepean rivers (Jiggens 1995, p. 11). In Melbourne the Leader reported successful hemp cultivation with plants 14 or 15 foot high on the river flats, and
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The newspaper featured an advertisement for a local invention that converted cannabis stalks to hemp fibre: the Cliff and Bunting hemp machine (Jiggens 1995, p. 13).

Archibald Bell, the colony’s first paid magistrate, was also enthusiastic about cannabis cultivation, and suggested that it should be the colony’s main crop (Jiggens 1995, p. 13). Jiggens pointed out that Magistrate Bell had nine children, including William Simms and Archibald Jnr (an explorer who found an alternative route over the Blue Mountains); these two brothers explored and settled the upper Hunter valley north of Sydney. Fifty years after the Bell brothers established their holding, Dr Francis Campbell wrote that he had found hemp ‘growing wild’ on the banks of the Hunter river near Newcastle, and seeds from the wild crop, which he cultivated, thrived in the Australian climate (Jiggens 1995, p. 18).

The Bell family’s ‘crop’ was probably the major, if not the sole, source of cannabis for the east coast of Australia in the middle of the twentieth century, at a time when the drug was increasing in popularity world-wide. The Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs (1993) suggested that cannabis use in Australia spread in the 1950s, ‘very probably assisted by the enormous amount of symbolism invested in cannabis by what later became known as the counter-culture’ (Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs 1993, p. 7), but Jiggens (1995) specifically blamed the ‘Hunter Valley Crop’. He recounted how, in November 1964, hundreds of acres of hemp were discovered growing wild in the Hunter Valley (a premium wine-growing area in NSW), on one of the major river systems of eastern NSW (Jiggens 1995, p. 3). The ‘crop’ actually was an estimated 70 km stretch of cannabis growing along the river, covering around 500 acres (Jiggens 1995, p. 1), and, although probably larger, it was doubtless the same ‘crop’ that Dr Campbell wrote of a hundred years earlier. Jiggens claimed that the ‘Hunter Valley crop’ was the major source of cannabis in Australia in the early sixties: ‘Local lads sold the wild cannabis up and down the east coast of Australia ... Only towards the end of 1967 did Customs report any significant quantity of marijuana imported into Australia by the R and R boys from Vietnam’ (Jiggens 1995, p. 4). He described the local media coverage in 1964:

Meanwhile the Mercury’s rival, the Newcastle Morning Herald in an issue which showed a farmer standing waist deep in a 12 acre paddock of marijuana on his East Maitland property, reported: “since the presence of the marijuana was made public the Department of Agriculture office at Maitland has been receiving constant telephone calls from people who want to know how to produce the drug from the plant”. Like the Maitland Mercury, the Newcastle Morning Herald did not leave its readers guessing for long. Having shown a good identifying photo of the plant, its article next day informed readers that marijuana merely had to be dried before smoking (Jiggens 1995, p. 4).

Jiggens also pointed out that cannabis was growing in north-eastern NSW earlier this century. He cites a 1938 report in a northern NSW newspaper about a (probably humorous) talk given by George Giles, district Agriculture instructor, under the headline PROFITABLE SIDELINE TO DAIRYING (Jiggens 1995, p. 19). In the article Giles was quoted as saying that ‘hashish or Egyptian hemp was growing on the north coast of NSW, and that with Hawaii ruled out as a source of production, there was a market for it in the USA’. Mr Giles mentioned that the plant was growing in ‘experimental plots in certain isolated parts of the north coast’ (Northern Star 22 June 1938, p. 3). That same year, Smiths Weekly published a warning from America about a drug that
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‘maddened its victims’, and, following a number of similarly lurid stories in the Australian press, cannabis was declared a noxious weed in NSW and Queensland (Jiggens 1995, p. 19).

Herer (1995) cited documents (obtained under the Freedom of Information Act) on the Office of Strategic Services’ (an earlier version of the CIA) abandonment of experiments into truth serums, including ‘honey oil’, which Herer described as ‘a much purer almost tasteless form of hash oil to be administered to spies, saboteurs, military prisoners and the like’ (Herer 1995, p. 31): ‘The people being interrogated would often giggle or laugh hysterically at their captors, get paranoid, or have insatiable desires for food (the munchies?). Also, the report noted that American OSS agents and other interrogation groups started using the honey oil illegally themselves, and would not give it to the spies’ (Herer 1995, p. 31).

There are parallels between cannabis and alcohol prohibition in America; that is, prohibition laws were often instigated and maintained by lobby groups who were ultra-conservative and generally Christian, assisted by the machinations of various professionals, politicians and bureaucrats. Greg Chesher (1995), among others (eg Herer 1995; McDonald et al 1994), points to Harry Anslinger as a driving force behind US illicit drug politics. Anslinger dominated national and international drug policy from the 1930s until 1970, first as Assistant Commissioner of Prohibition, then as Commissioner of Narcotics, and later as US Spokesperson on the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs. To illustrate Anslinger’s views on cannabis, Chesher (1995) quotes from Anslinger’s 1960 book The Murderers:

Much of the most irrational juvenile violence and killing that has written a new chapter of shame and tragedy is traceable directly to this hemp intoxication ... a sixteen year old kills his entire family of five in Florida ... Everyone of these crimes has been preceded by the smoking of one or [more] marijuana reefers (Chesher 1995, p. 5).

Desmond Manderson (1995) offered an Australian expert to rival the testimony of Anslinger on the subject of cannabis:

The work of drug “expert” Professor Hardin Jones, provided some of the most extreme examples of this technique. He was quoted at length in debate on the Poisons (Further Amendment) Bill 1977 (NSW): “The conditioned social responses, such as affection for parents and tolerance for their suggestions, are impaired ... the hypnotic effects of marijuana are, in my opinion, largely responsible for ... a yielding to homosexual advances, and overly generous compliance with unreasonable requests by friends ... The diurnal cycle of sleep and waking is largely inverted. The marijuana user stays up all night” ... the rebellious behaviour itself was blamed on “drugs” and discredited as sick (Manderson 1993, pp. 162-163).

More recently such extreme claims about the dangers of cannabis have been challenged by systematic research, as well as by more informal sources as its use became widespread; for example, Manderson noted that: ‘... doubts as to how dangerous cannabis really was made it the weak link in the drug control regime. As penalties relating to its possession and trafficking increased, so too did the chorus of criticism’ (Manderson 1993, p. 163).
In Australia, several government reports in the nineties have focused on cannabis even when the briefs were broader. For example, Queensland’s Criminal Justice Commission (QJC) was set up in response to recommendations made by the Fitzgerald Commission of Inquiry into illegal activities and police corruption. The QJC was briefed to investigate, review and reform criminal justice issues arising from the Fitzgerald report (that is, the so-called ‘victimless crimes’ of prostitution, illegal bookmaking, illegal gambling and illicit drugs) (Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs 1993, p. 2). However, the scope for illicit drugs was narrowed to a consideration of cannabis because, according to the Committee: ‘... it is making the most demands on the criminal justice system, is produced in Queensland, and is the focus of most controversy with respect to possible changes in the law’ (Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs 1993, p. 1).

In the early nineties Peter Nelson (1993) searched two major databases, Medline (Index Medicus) and Psychinfo (Psychological Abstracts) and reported that at least 4,000 papers, monographs and books on the medical, psychological and social aspects of cannabis use had been published since the mid 1960s (Nelson 1993, p. 113). There have been flurries of cannabis research, with peaks of interest in the seventies and again in the nineties. Interest waned after the early cannabis research failed to produce clear-cut adverse effects or profitable medical products (Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs 1993), then interest was rekindled at the close of the twentieth century, possibly because household surveys made it glaringly apparent that a lot of people used cannabis, and the numbers showed no sign of falling — in fact, just the opposite was true.

CANNABIS USE

Cannabis, like alcohol, is a social drug. The 1995 NCADA survey (Commonwealth of Australia 1996, p. 31) found that cannabis was most likely to be used in social settings such as friends’ homes (71% and parties (62%), while around half used it at home. It has been estimated that a little under three million people had used cannabis in the past year, including over one million aged in their twenties (AIHW 1999). The proportion of Australians who use cannabis increased throughout the nineties. Table 3.1 presents NCADA results over thirteen years. It should be remembered that NCADA results are conservative, and actual drug use is higher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1</th>
<th>Cannabis use: proportion of the Aus. population</th>
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<td></td>
<td>(Sources: a) AIHW 1999; b) C’th of Aus. 1996; c) Porritt 1991)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ever used cannabis</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
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The 1993 and 1995 national NCADA survey results are the most relevant for my purposes as they were conducted around the same time as my 1994-1995 survey of Nimbin; at that time roughly one in three Australians admitted to having ever used cannabis. However, while the 1993 and 1995 NCADA surveys reported 34% and 31% respectively, Bowman and Sanson-Fisher’s 1994 national telephone survey found that around 40% of the population had used cannabis. I discussed the often substantial differences in results between household surveys in Chapter Two, and noted there that methodology will have a very important influence on research results. Bowman and Sanson-Fisher’s higher proportion probably resulted from their use of a telephone survey — which is more transparently confidential than the NCADA face-to-face interview method. Like other researchers, Bowman and Sanson-Fisher found that men were more likely to have ever used cannabis, and were more likely to have used it recently. Generally, age is a consistently better predictor of cannabis use than gender and other factors, and Bowman and Sanson-Fisher’s results indicated that close to six in ten 18-34 year olds had used it (Bowman & Sanson-Fisher 1994, p. 30).

Neil Donnelly and Wayne Hall (1994) found similar predictors of cannabis use when they analysed data from the NCADA 1993 survey to elucidate the factors associated with cannabis use. They pointed out that there was a typical pattern of cannabis use, even though the proportion of users may vary between regions, states and countries. That is, more younger people than older people, and more males than females, have ever used cannabis (Donnelly & Hall 1994, p. 46). They also found that men were much more likely to be heavy cannabis users, just as they were more likely to be heavy drinkers. Although there was little difference between male and female heavy tobacco users (Donnelly & Hall 1994, p. 47). After multivariate analysis (that is, statistically holding some variables constant while estimating the relative influence of others on the research results) Donnelly and Hall concluded that age was the best predictor of ever having used cannabis, and higher levels of education also remained a significant predictor after other variables were adjusted for (Donnelly & Hall 1994, p. 88). Tobacco use also was a strong predictor of ever having used cannabis, and Donnelly and Hall found that over one-half of current smokers had ever used cannabis, compared to one in ten non-smokers.

Contrary to a popular belief, unemployment was not a predictor of cannabis use after gender and age were controlled for; that means that unemployment only appears to be related to cannabis use because unemployed people are often young and/or male. Predicting ‘heavy’ use (weekly or more often) proved to be much more difficult; no strong predictors emerged, and some experience with other illegal drugs was the best predictor (Donnelly & Hall 1994, p. 98).

There are many examples of the ‘sensitivity’ of illicit drug issues, and cannabis remains the most controversial of all the illegal drugs. A New Scientist article claimed that the World Health Organisation had suppressed a commissioned report on cannabis because the report concluded that cannabis was safer than alcohol or tobacco (Concar 1998 p. 4), and Peter Nelson (1993) complained that: ‘... much of the literature is confounded by the political and social debate surrounding illicit drug use in general and cannabis in particular. There seems to be few neutral parties in the debate and some reports barely hide the prejudices which drive for particular conclusions, no matter what the empirical data appear to indicate’ (Nelson 1993, p. 114). The decades of
research into cannabis dangers actually yielded very few, and opposition to legalisation is more difficult to mount than, say, in the case of heroin, a drug with demonstrable dangers. Yet opposition (public and political) remains. Manderson noted that ‘Opposition to drug use reflected a whole range of social values (Manderson 1993, p. 163), and so will not be necessarily amenable to the persuasion of research results.

While there is controversy over the actual risks associated with cannabis use, that is not due to scientific disinterest. A number of authors (Pennington 1996; Wodak & Owens 1996; Herer 1995; Nelson 1994) have pointed out that there has been a steady stream of reports on the health and social consequences of cannabis at the end of the twentieth century.

Like the suppressed WHO report, a report prepared for the National Cannabis Task Force compared the effects of cannabis to alcohol and tobacco (Hall, Solowij & Lemon 1994). The authors state that ‘the probable and possible adverse health and psychological effects of cannabis need to be placed in comparative perspective to be fully appreciated. A standard for such a comparison is what is known about the health effects of alcohol and tobacco, two other widely used psychoactive drugs’ (Hall, Solowij & Lemon 1994, p. 207). The report notes that cannabis may pose a risk to the safe operation of machinery and vehicles, to people with a predisposition to mental illness, pregnant women, and adolescents with behavioural problems (Hall, Solowij & Lemon 1994, p. 204); however even these ‘dangers’ were only based on inferences (Hall, Solowij & Lemon 1994, p. 204) (that is, they were not based on direct evidence). Hall and his associates suggest that the acute risks of cannabis use are similar to, and generally lower than, those associated with alcohol and tobacco, while both tobacco and cannabis pose risks for respiratory and cardiovascular diseases (Hall, Solowij & Lemon 1994, p. 208).

Peter Nelson (1993) suggested that tobacco effects have confounded most research into the dangers of long-term cannabis use, and, like others, he concluded that there were probably greater health risks from combining the two drugs. Nelson noted that deep inhalation increased the risk of lung damage, and suggested that respiratory risks are derived from the illegality of cannabis (that is, cannabis is deeply inhaled, often with tobacco, to maximise the effects because it is expensive), although he suggested that cannabis may be eaten to avoid respiratory damage (unlike tobacco) (Nelson 1993, p. 115). Nelson believed that the physical effects of cannabis were unlike those of either tobacco or alcohol, and pointed out that cannabis, unlike alcohol, has no dose-related response curve (Nelson 1993, pp. 115-116) (that is, the drug effects are not related to the drug dose in any systematic and predictable fashion). This means that the effects of cannabis may be mediated quite strongly by psychological factors rather than by physical responses.

There is some support for this assertion in Jamaican research, where the so-called ‘amotivational syndrome’ was unknown among hard-working (and heavy smoking) Jamaican labourers — in fact, in Jamaica cannabis was used to ‘enhance their ability to work’ (Rubin & Comitas 1976, p. 57; see also Beaubrun 1983, p. 75).

The Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs commented that the respiratory, immunity, reproductive, and other effects attributed to cannabis were ‘actually subtle and non-specific, and the link with cannabis use is not readily
apparent’ (Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs 1993, p. 22). The Advisory Committee dismissed any danger of intellectual impairment, and suggested that lower birth weight associated with cannabis use during pregnancy may be the result of smoking per se rather than an effect of THC (Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs 1993, pp. 22-23). In relation to driving, the Committee pointed out that ‘Most studies have shown that THC is infrequently detected in the blood of dead drivers as the only drug present. In the majority of cases, THC is found in combination with alcohol’ (Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs 1993, p. 24).

On the controversial issue of cannabis dependence, Hall, Solowij and Lemon suggest that ‘the risk of developing cannabis dependence resembles the risk for alcohol dependence, rather than the higher risk of dependence associated with use of tobacco and opiates, and so it seems reasonable then to suppose that there is likely to be a high rate of remission without treatment in cannabis dependence’ (Hall, Solowij & Lemon 1994, pp. 118-119). Further, while alcohol has a well-defined withdrawal syndrome which is potentially fatal, cannabis does not (Hall, Solowij & Lemon 1994, p. 108), and according to Hall, Solowij and Lemon, there are more risks of cognitive impairment, poor occupational performance, accidents, suicides, violence, and cancers with alcohol (Hall, Solowij & Lemon 1994, p. 209). Ali and Christie (1994) point out that cannabis dependence largely occurs among people who are also dependent on alcohol or opiates, and that few people require assistance to stop using cannabis (Ali & Christie 1994, p. 16). In The Netherlands, where cannabis use has been effectively decriminalised for over twenty years, only 3% of all clients of the alcohol and drug outpatient services were registered with cannabis use as a primary problem (Netherlands Institute for Alcohol and Drugs 1995a, p. 3).

On the dangers associated with cannabis, the Netherlands Institute for Alcohol and Drugs echoes the conclusions of many others: ‘Cannabis is by no means risk free but in comparison with alcohol and tobacco use it is certainly not more harmful’ (Netherlands Institute for Alcohol and Drugs 1995a, p.3). Didcott, Reilly, Swift and Hall (1997) conducted a study in north-eastern NSW (that included Nimbin residents) into the problems associated with heavy, long-term cannabis use. In discussing this research it must be noted that the sample was entirely composed of heavy users; the criteria required that the (paid) volunteers had used cannabis for at least 10 years, and importantly, that they used cannabis weekly or more often. So the study was investigating ‘problems’ in a sample of users that represented a small proportion of the Australian and cannabis using populations. The Didcott and associates’ research found that 60% of their sample used cannabis daily, whereas, for example, Bowman & Sanson-Fisher (1994) found that around 6% of the Australian population had used cannabis in the previous two weeks. The NCADA reports (Commonwealth of Australia 1996; 1993d) reported that 12% to 13% of the population had used cannabis in the past year. I estimated that around 15% of cannabis users (rather than total population) in the Bowman and Sanson-Fisher sample had used it in the past two weeks. I based my estimate on 40% of the 1,608 people in the Bowman and Sanson-fisher sample who had ever used cannabis and the figure of 98.5 given by these authors as the (raw) number of people in the whole sample who had used cannabis in the past two weeks (Bowman & Sanson-Fisher 1994, p. 28). It is important to remember that only a small number of cannabis users Australia-wide are likely to use the drug weekly, let alone daily. The mean age of the Didcott and associates’ (1997) sample was 36 years and round 60% were men. The authors note that the sample was older and better educated than Australian and north coast populations (Didcott et al. 1997, p. vii).
The drugs: cannabis & heroin

Using three scales for measuring dependence, Didcott and his associates found that 57% of the long-term users met the criteria for dependence on two of the scales (the American DSM-III-R and the World Health Organisation’s ICD-10), while only 15% were categorised as dependent on the Australian SDS (Severity of Dependence Scale). Women in the sample were more likely to be classed as dependent than men (Didcott, et al. 1997, p. 39). However, acceptance into the study required heavy use, which of course contributes to the dependency results. That is, research specifically into heavy users is more likely to select problematic users in general, and women with problems in particular (because women generally are less likely than men to use cannabis heavily). Hall, Solowij and Lemon (1994) pointed out that the DSM-III-R makes a special case of cannabis and hallucinogens by excluding two criteria which are required to establish dependence on all other drugs (Hall, Solowij & Lemon 1994, p. 111). The two criteria which are not applied to cannabis are ‘characteristic withdrawal symptoms’, and ‘the substance often taken to relieve or avoid withdrawal symptoms’ (Hall, Solowij & Lemon 1994, p. 111). If the two excluded criteria were also applied to cannabis use, then fewer long term, heavy cannabis users in the Didcott and associates (1997) sample would fit the criteria for dependence, despite their exceptionally heavy use.

Around two thirds of their sample of heavy users were also current tobacco users, and more reported chronic wheezing (52%) than the north coast population generally (24%) (Didcott et al. 1997, p. 45). Despite this problem (obviously confounded by tobacco use), the sample was less likely to have long-term respiratory conditions such as asthma than the north coast population (26% compared to 36%) (Didcott et al. 1997, p. 44). This finding is supported by results from a well designed Jamaican study that also found no difference between heavy current cannabis smokers (ie smoking for over 10 years and at least 3 joints a day) and non-smokers, on a range of health indicators including respiratory functions (Rubin & Comitas 1976, eg pp. 95, 171-172). As with the Rubin and Comitas (1976) Jamaican research, the Didcott and associates’ north coast sample of heavy cannabis users enjoyed a similar health status to the Australian population as a whole (Didcott et al. 1997).

Despite decades of research, many questions about the physical effects of cannabis remain unanswered. However, it is clear that cannabis has few serious physical dangers compared to other recreational drugs, and its effects are likely to be strongly influenced by expectation, experience and setting. Cannabis may pose risks for pregnant women and for some people with a predisposition towards some kinds of mental illness, and there may be a risk of reduced concentration for skilled tasks such as driving a vehicle or operating machinery, particularly in combination with other psychoactive drugs, or in the case of naive users.

Unlike cannabis, heroin is the preferred recreational drug for only a tiny minority of Australians. Where cannabis is described as a soft drug, heroin is a ‘hard’ drug, public approval for heroin is low, and its use evokes very negative images. There is no such thing as a good news story about ‘junkies’.

HEROIN: BACKGROUND
Heroin is an opiate, derived from the opium poppy. Generally it is sold as powder or crystals and the purity varies widely, which is why its use can cause overdose and death. In Australia, as in America, heroin is typically injected, and drug injection carries a number of risks (such as drug overdose and transmission of life threatening viruses). Because of this direct overlap between heroin use and drug injection, and the potential problems associated with this link, both heroin and drug injecting will be considered together.

Like cannabis, opium has a long association with humanity. According to Alfred McCoy (1992): ‘Opium was discovered and domesticated during prehistoric times in the Mediterranean basin ... [and] became a trade item between Cyprus and Egypt in the second millennium BC. Opium first appeared in formal Greek pharmacopoeia during the 5th Century BC and in Chinese medical texts during the 8th century AD’ (McCoy 1992, p. 239). Paracelsus invented laudanum (a mixture of opium, alcohol and spices) in the middle ages, ‘and it was a formula that would soothe and torment millions of Europeans over the next 400 years’ (Robson 1999, p. 170).

According to Desmond Manderson (1993), opium was a commonly used drug during the nineteenth century in Australia, and was often included in children’s medicine; he said: ‘In nineteenth century Australia, opium was the preserve of neither the creative few nor the urban poor. It was freely available and freely used’ (Manderson 1993, p. 7). At that time most opium was eaten (actually it was drunk in laudanum and other potions) and smoking was regarded as ‘a vile alien indulgence’ (Robson 1999, p. 170). Intravenous injections were developed in the mid 1800s, which increased the effective strength of many drugs (Robson 1999, p. 170). The first successful injection was in 1858, when a Scottish surgeon adapted an instrument to deliver a dose of morphine as closely as possible to the point of pain (Robson 1999, p. 174). McCoy (1992) describes the effects of the syringe on drug use:

After the introduction of the hypodermic syringe to the United States in 1856, medical practitioners, initially sceptical, found that morphine injection brought instant relief to patients suffering from almost any ailment. By 1881 almost every physician owned a syringe and many used morphine as a panacea to treat a wide range of illness with no known cure ... Assisted by advertising and the approval of the medical profession, Western pharmaceutical manufacturers such as Bayer and Parke-Davis were selling substantial quantities of opiates and coca in the form of popular remedies and daily tonics. Such successful marketing made mass addiction to cocaine and heroin a significant feature of late 19th century life in Europe, Australia, and America (McCoy 1992, p. 249).

In the early twentieth century Great Britain had what Robson (1999) describes as a laissez-faire approach to illicit drugs, including the opiates, and during the First World War soldiers on leave in Britain could easily access a range of illegal drugs: ‘Harrods, for example, sold morphine and cocaine kits complete with syringe and spare needles labelled “A Useful Present For Friends at the Front” ’ (Robson 1999, p. 175).

However, a number of drugs were soon to be seriously banned and their illegality strenuously enforced. McCoy (1992) describes the influence of conservative Christian lobby groups on global opium policy at the end of the nineteenth century:
In the late 19th century, Protestant clergy and laity led a global anti-opium movement that culminated in a series of treaties restricting the global narcotics trade. In effect, a Christian crusade, through skilful propaganda and lobbying, transformed itself from a populist movement into a novel form of drug diplomacy that continues today under the United Nations. Paralleling these prohibition efforts, however, new criminal syndicates quickly emerged in the major cities of Asia and the West to organise a global traffic in illicit drugs (McCoy 1992, p. 248).

Manderson (1993) explained that the term ‘narcotics’ refers to the opiates (the ‘refined products of the opium poppy’ including opium, laudanum, morphine and heroin and various synthetics), as well as cocaine ‘an alkaloid obtained from the leaves of the coca plant’, and cannabis, ‘which is unrelated to, and unlike, both the opiates and cocaine’ (Manderson 1993, pp. 4-5). The aggressive American policy on ‘narcotics’ led to a number of international treaties, of which Australia was a signatory.

Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) was probably the single most important influence on global drug policy for many decades, in many countries, including Australia (e.g. Hartnoll 1998; Ballard 1993; Des Jarlais, Friedman & Ward 1993; Berridge 1992). The first AIDS case was diagnosed in Sydney in November 1982, although AIDS was present in Australia in the 1970s and possibly earlier (Garrard, McGahan, Milliken, Mathys & Wills 1994). Drug injection transfers HIV very effectively from one person to another when the same needle and/or syringe is shared, which was the rationale for provision of free, clean needles and syringes to injectors (Hartnoll 1998; Commonwealth of Australia 1993b). AIDS prompted quite radical departures from earlier government positions on illicit drugs in many countries in the 1980s, and the best example is the change to laws relating to the possession of injecting equipment (to facilitate needle exchange). This clearly represented an accommodation to the realities of illegal drug injection rather than a blanket insistence on abstinence.

Needle exchange programs are a recent drug service (needle exchange is not a treatment) and exchanges are appearing in a growing number of countries. They generally provide free needles, syringes and condoms, education, referral and outreach services. The first needle exchange was established in 1985 in Amsterdam, although groups of injecting drug users in The Netherlands had been handing out clean syringes since 1981 to contain the spread of hepatitis B (Grund, Kaplan & Adrians 1991). Early exchanges were established in both the United Kingdom and Australia, but in most countries needle exchange programs are limited in scope and have been in operation for a shorter time.

It is difficult to determine the relative effectiveness of controversial programs such as needle exchange; comparisons between countries are particularly difficult, as there may be major differences in access to health care, secure housing, economic supports and so forth. However, it appears that needle exchange programs have contributed to a reduction in needle sharing in many different countries (Buning & van Brussel 1995; Wodak 1992b; Darke 1992; Des Jarlais 1992).

A common explanation for opposition to needle exchanges is that the service ‘sends the wrong message’ and this same rationale is regularly given as justification for opposition to harm reduction initiatives (including the legal
The drugs: cannabis & heroin

Injecting room in Kings Cross. Needle exchanges often arouse strong community opposition because they are perceived to condone illegal drug use, and some exchange programs have, on occasion, operated in contravention of national or municipal laws (Clark & Corbett 1993, Christensson & Ljungberg 1991; Bardsley, Turvey & Blatherwick 1990). For example, a Swedish needle exchange project was established in Lund late in 1986 without official approval (Christensson & Ljungberg, 1991). Sweden, a prohibitionist country, had ignored a WHO recommendation of clean syringes for injectors, and they were only available on prescription. By 1988 an estimated 60% of heroin injectors in Sweden were HIV-positive. However in the province of Lund, with an estimated 3,000 injectors in a population of one million, the authors reported an estimated HIV-positive rate of 1% of injectors. They also noted an increased use of drug treatment services during the exchange’s first three years of illegal operation.

Bardsley, Turvey and Blatherwick (1990) describe the first few months of the Vancouver needle exchange, established in 1989. As well, a part-time health clinic was established adjacent to the exchange, to provide STD tests and general health services. The authors comment that the price of black market needles dropped from $5 to $2 following the establishment of the exchange. In the first five months of operation, the service expected around 200 clients but enrolled 2,600, with the outreach service contacting more women, youth, and immigrants than the fixed service.

In contrast to the experience of many overseas countries where clean needles are not easily available, Australia has a low rate of HIV/AIDS among injecting drug users (around 6% of injectors) (Commonwealth of Australia 1993c; Grund et al. 1992; Christensson & Ljungberg 1991). This low HIV rate has been attributed to a combination of factors, including prompt harm reduction initiatives by Federal and State governments (Darke 1992; Loxley, Marsh, Hawks & Quigley 1992; Wodak 1992b), and by the Australian gay community (Ballard 1993). Australia was one of the first countries to provide needle exchange programs as well as one of the first to introduce the screening of blood products for HIV/AIDS.

Injectors in Lismore and Nimbin were among the first in NSW to have access to free clean needles. Following a pilot program in the ACT in 1987, NSW introduced needle and syringe exchange programs in Sydney in 1988, with the first rural exchange established in Lismore in May 1988 (Reilly 1990). The NSW needle exchange program has two main aims: (a) to provide sterile injecting equipment to all injecting drug users regardless of their frequency of illicit drug use, and (b) to provide education and information to all injectors, and these aims do not always coincide with the aims of other sections of the community. The NSW program is one of the most extensive and diverse in the world (Keys Young 1989); there are four main distribution models: (1) the Health Department’s Needle and Syringe Exchange Program (NSEP); (2) Secondary fixed outlets such as hospital outpatients, the AIDS Council of NSW (ACON), General Practitioners (GPs), and Community Health Centres; (3) Outreach services, which may be provided by NSEP or by other services; and (4) the NSW Pharmacy Guild Scheme where needles are sold for a small cost or exchanged free if used needles are returned at the same time (for more details about the NSW model, see Reilly & de Launey 1996).
Along with decades of illegality, there have been a range of services and treatments available to heroin ‘addicts’. I will briefly examine the services for heroin users and other injectors next, as the services are often targeted for criticism, and accused of causing a drug problem. Nimbin’s ‘drug problem’, for example, frequently referred to discarded needles, drug overdoses in the main street, or to an alleged ‘honey pot effect’ of methadone and needle exchange programs operating in the village.

Methadone maintenance has been the major treatment available to heroin users throughout the late twentieth century. The methadone program was first used in Australia in 1969, and research has generally supported the benefits of methadone programs (for example, the Pennington report 1996, p. 72). Methadone is a synthetic opiate which is given orally to heroin users, usually once a day; it blocks the receptors usually occupied by heroin (all the opiates have a degree of cross-tolerance), and its effects are milder and relatively long-lasting compared to heroin. NSW provides methadone to more than half of all methadone clients in Australia (Commonwealth of Australia 1994b), which suggests that NSW is home to a significant number of Australia’s heroin users.

Heroin users who are involved in methadone maintenance programs are, generally speaking, safer — that is, they commit less crime, are less likely to share needles, and are less likely to contract HIV (Nelles, Bernasconi, Dobler-Mikola & Kaufman 1997; Frischer & Elliott 1993; Keene, Stimson, Jones & Parry-Langdon 1993; Crofts & Stevenson 1992; Des Jarlais 1992). However, some research suggests that some people in methadone programs continue to share needles (generally with partners or close friends) (Darke, Baker, Dixon, Wodak & Heather 1992; van Ameijden, vanden Hoek, van Haastrecht & Coutinho 1992). Despite the visibility of users who avail themselves of drug treatment services, Robson (1999) suggests that most heroin users have few problems with their drug use, do not seek treatment, and so do not come to the attention of health professionals and researchers.

There are problems with, and limitations to, methadone as a treatment for heroin users. The methadone program generally is prohibitionist (it does not permit any illicit drug use) and there may be urine testing for illicit drugs as part of the program, with ‘offenders’ denied further treatment. Further, methadone is not always popular with heroin users because of unpleasant side effects (particularly for women), problems in attending a clinic every day, and/or the lack of control over the dose (Rosenbaum & Murphy 1987; Rosenbaum 1985). Further, methadone is useless for people who are dependent on cocaine, amphetamines, benzodiazepines or performance enhancing drugs. The other main abstinence-based treatment for drug injectors, assuming that there are places available, is detoxification (medically supervised withdrawal), usually coupled with counselling, and often accompanied by a long term stay in a ‘therapeutic community’.

Despite opposition from some members of the public, methadone and needle exchange are important services, and are established where the need already exists rather than ‘attracting’ drug users who want to use them. Who uses these services, who are the heroin users?
HEROIN USE

A small number of people admit to having used heroin, and the proportion has remained quite stable over the 1980s and 1990s. The following table provides NCADA national survey estimates of the proportion of the population who have ever used heroin, and the proportion who have ever injected any drug illegally.

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<tr>
<td>% Used heroin</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Injected illegally</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
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Most estimates put the number of regular illicit drug injectors in Australia at between 30,000 and 60,000, with another 60,000 to 90,000 occasional or recreational injectors (Commonwealth of Australia 1993b, Kaldor 1992); that is, between 90,000 and 150,00 people injected drugs ‘recently’ (in the past year). The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare estimated 107,00 recent injectors, including 60,400 aged in their twenties (AIHW 1999), while Crofts and Stevenson (1992) pointed out that the injecting population constantly changes, and warned that a substantial proportion of Australians would be adversely affected if there is a sudden increase in HIV among injecting drug users.

‘Heroin’ is often synonymous with drug injection, and people may be surprised to learn that heroin is not the drug most likely to be injected. Young drug injectors are using cheaper and more readily available drugs such as amphetamines and tranquillisers. For example, in the 1998 NDS population survey, amphetamines were most likely to be the first drug injected, and most likely to be the drug currently injected (70% of injectors were currently using amphetamines compared to 51% who were currently injecting heroin) (AIHW 1999).

Heroin use has been identified as a problem in Nimbin, although heroin use is often confused with drug injection. Injecting drug users are marginalised and understandably secretive; there is little information available, but more importantly, even less is known about injectors who are not part of the treatment system. It is extremely difficult to access the ‘hidden’ injectors who have not had contact with treatments, and therefore our knowledge of drug injectors in this country may be based on data which underestimate the risks or problems associated with injection. A large survey was undertaken in 1989 in an attempt to develop a picture of Australian injectors, particularly occasional and recreational injectors who were most likely to have risky injecting habits, yet also most likely to be invisible to researchers. The Australian National AIDS and Injecting Drug Use Study or ANAIDUS (1991), was a survey of 2,482 injectors in four capital cities. Injectors were mainly drawn from Sydney and Brisbane (78%), with around half of the total sample recruited in Sydney (which reflects the fact that 50% of methadone clients live in this state, and so it is likely that around half of all heroin users live in NSW.

Close to six in ten reported contact with treatment services, and two thirds (63%) of the Sydney sample had used formal services, mostly methadone. The primary source of clean needles was from chemists. Injecting drug
users in non-metropolitan areas have received very little attention from researchers, despite being a focus of community fears. While most information about drug injectors came from city based samples, one survey included rural injectors. In 1989 (the same year as the nation-wide ANAIDUS survey), Keys Young (1989) were commissioned by the NSW Department of Health to evaluate the fledgling NSW needle exchange (NSEP). Out of a total of 342 exchange clients 73 were non-metropolitan injectors. Unlike ANAIDUS injectors, the Keys Young injectors listed the NSEP as their main source of needles and reported free needles and staff attitudes as the main benefits of NSEP (46% and 36% respectively). The most common complaint was the restricted opening hours (53%). The Keys Young sample mainly injected heroin (78%) followed by amphetamines (18%). One third had shared needles in the past month and 11% had shared all or most of the time; 40% of the non metropolitan respondents had shared needles in the past month, compared with 33% of urban respondents and 50% of ANAIDUS respondents. None of the non-metropolitan respondents reported sharing all or most of the time (needle sharing was an ‘occasional’ or ‘rare’ occurrence).

Public attitudes towards drug injectors may be changing at the close of the twentieth century; the 1998 NDS national survey found majority population support for a range of harm reduction initiatives for heroin users, and 54% of women compared to 46% of men approved of free needle exchange services, 59% compared to 57% of men approved of the methadone program, while 34% of women compared to 32% of men supported the novel and challenging suggestion of regulated injecting rooms (AIHW 1999). The most popular service for heroin users (approved of by six in ten Australians) was the ‘rapid detoxification’ procedure (AIHW 1999), probably based on media coverage of the subject rather than on any evidence for the effectiveness of the treatment.

Our knowledge of drug users and the dangers they pose to themselves and others is generally distorted: our information about population drug use (both licit and illicit) is an underestimation; our information about drug injectors comes almost entirely from people who are using drug treatment services; and our information about cannabis users comes from exceptionally heavy users or people (generally multiple drug users) who seek treatment. Even a superficial examination of drug use in western society in the late twentieth century will indicate that our society is quite familiar with a growing variety of psychoactive drugs, and they are used primarily for pleasure, with few problems. The next section will focus on recreational drug use within a cultural context.

DRUGS AND CULTURES

Rimm and Somervill described recreational drug use as ‘self-administration of drugs to achieve a pleasurable effect’ (Rimm & Somervill 1977, p. 407), although these authors caution that some people are ‘concerned about the moral implications of using drugs to obtain pleasure’ (Rimm & Somervill 1977, p. 450). It is noteworthy that many of the objections to cannabis or heroin were earlier applied to alcohol and coffee. For example, Robson (1999) pointed out that 200 years ago ‘Britain viewed coffee as powerful and regular users were often looked on with disapproval’ (Robson 1999, p. 198) while ‘Some doctors and others at the end of the nineteenth century
argued alcohol was so inherently addictive that individuals could not be trusted to decide whether to drink or not’ (Robson 1999, p. 254).

While humanity has a long history of recreational drug use, the 1960s and 1970s heralded an explosion in the recreational use of a range of illegal drugs in western society, which coincided with the users of those drugs — the baby boomers — reaching their teens and twenties. The idea of using illicit drugs to relax, to socialise or to enhance creativity, contrasts sharply with the prohibitionist view of all illicit drug use as a ‘problem’, with associated images of addiction and helplessness.

As ANAIDUS was the main source of information on drug injectors, the NCADA surveys were the most widely used sources of information about the drugs that Australians were taking. The following table shows the estimated proportion of the Australian population aged 14 and over who have ever used a range of drugs over the nineties. The majority of Australians have experience with the legal drugs alcohol (nine in every ten people) and tobacco (down from three-quarters of the population in the early nineties to two-thirds in the late nineties).

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<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>93</td>
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<td>Tobacco</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>76</td>
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<td>Marijuana</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hallucinogens</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Amphetamines</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ecstasy/designer drugs</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Heroin</td>
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<td>Injected drugs illegally</td>
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Cannabis is the only illicit drug to be used by a significant proportion of the population, although experience with some other illegal drugs has increased over the nineties, notably use of hallucinogens, amphetamines, and to a lesser extent, the newer ‘designer drugs’. As already noted, very few Australians report experience with heroin or with drug injection. In all, an estimated 3.3 million Australians used illegal drugs in 1998, and the overwhelming majority of these people had only used cannabis (AIHW 1999). The form of cannabis most commonly used by Australians was heads (59%) followed by leaf (32%) (AIHW 1999). Interestingly, the 1998 population survey found that more women than men aged sixty and over had some experience with illegal drugs (93,300 women compared to 69,900 men) (AIHW 1999), which may reflect increased medicinal use of the drug.

A World Health Organisation report on alcohol use (World Health Organisation 1980) suggested that both internal and external economic pressures contributed to the promotion and sale of alcohol in developed and
developing countries (and the same might be said of tobacco and pharmaceutical products). An earlier WHO report suggested that the pressures of change arising from migrations, national upheavals, and employment-based mobility, had weakened traditional family and social restraints on drug use (World Health Organisation 1973). In earlier times the use of a particular drug was largely confined to the area where it was harvested, and so its use was regulated by well established cultural norms (World Health Organisation 1973).

Rubin and Comitas commented that ‘the failure of policy makers to realise the importance of informal social controls in preventing drug abuse is beginning to be recognised’ (Rubin & Comitas 1976 p. 173). Wayne Harding (1998) discussed the importance of informal social controls (‘norms and rituals’) in the use of all drugs. For example, he said that, ‘we avoid being drunk in public not so much because it is against the law, but because it is socially unacceptable’ (Harding W. 1998, p. 217). Harding presented research he conducted into functional heroin use, which found clear differences between the groups he classified as ‘controlled’ (or functional) and those he classified as ‘compulsive’ users. Controlled users were able to keep their drugs without using them, and they had twice as many rules and practices to control their use of opiates compared to the compulsive users (Harding W. 1998, p. 219).

For example, many never used alone, others never shared injecting equipment and many only purchased their drugs from people they knew well (Harding W. 1998, p. 219). Controlled users ‘scheduled’ their use so as not to interfere with other demands (such as at weekends), and many controlled users had strict budgets for their drug purchases (Harding W. 1998, p. 219). Robson (1999) described functional heroin users in England:

So what do we know about these non-addicted opioid users (‘chippers’)? First, we have no real idea how many there might be. It has been suggested that there may be more chippers than addicts, and certainly most dependent users say they know people who can use heroin intermittently. Population surveys suggest that far more people experiment with heroin than ever become addicted or require treatment ... Research suggests that intermittent use is determined more by an ability to build the drug into a social ritual than by personality factors or family background. For example, a person may limit heroin use to a particular time and place, and separate it completely from family life and the social circle this includes ... They are unlikely to be involved in criminal activities, except a minority who take part in some drug dealing, usually on a small scale. Most restrict their heroin to once or twice a month with 20% using less frequently and 20% using weekly. Around one in five give a history of addiction at some time in the past (Robson 1999, p. 189).

Furthermore, Robson (1999) suggested that: ‘The grungy image of the classical junkie is very attractive to some, perhaps because it gives them that sense of belonging, of having a place, that their upbringing failed to provide. Certainly a history of broken homes, emotional deprivation, or physical and sexual abuse is very common indeed among drug unit attenders (Robson 1999, p. 214). It is quite likely that many ‘drug problems’ disguise other factors that are contributing to an individual’s difficulties.

Harding pointed out that new users may find it difficult to discover and join groups of controlled users: ‘Heroin and other opiate use is so widely disapproved of that controlled subjects found it necessary to keep their use a secret even from users of other illicit drugs. This secretiveness makes it hard for new opiate users to locate
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experienced controlled users who can help them learn how to avoid addiction and other adverse effects’ (Harding W. 1998, p. 220). Yet despite the obstacles, most people apparently use recreational drugs — even heroin — without serious problems, by using such informal controls.

Cannabis use in Jamaica illustrates the beneficial effects of social controls for cannabis use compared to the absence of such controls. Rubin and Comitas (1976) investigated heavy ganja (cannabis) use in Jamaica, and noted that among poorer Jamaicans the social rules for such use were embedded in the social structure, and there were many rituals, rules and safeguards (Rubin & Comitas 1976, for example pp. 146, 163-164, 173). These authors reported that: ‘Smokers assert that ganja is less likely to lead to antisocial behaviour than rum or other hard spirits. It is observable that the serious smoker is careful in his conduct, lest his friends and companions feel that he can’t handle ganja, that his “brains are too weak” ‘ (Rubin & Comitas 1976, p. 63).

Beaubrun (1983) claimed that ‘heavy’ users in Jamaica consume four times the average amount of THC consumed by a ‘heavy’ American user (Beaubrun 1983, p. 71). However, despite heavy use, social controls have developed among the Jamaican poor to minimise the problems associated with smoking cannabis. Boys may begin smoking at age of seven or eight, but usually are initiated in their early teens, by ‘peers or in a group smoking experience with many of the features of a “rite de passage” ’ (Beaubrun 1983, p. 72). Beaubrun pointed out that ‘The growing child in working-class Jamaica is gradually socialised into the use of ganja and has many smoking role models’ (Beaubrun 1983, p. 72).

Cannabis in various forms is an integral part of Jamaican culture, although smoking is largely confined to the poorer classes; Rubin and Comitas pointed out that ‘Those who only take ganja as tea are generally members of the higher social levels or are aspiring to higher status, while those who are known to smoke and drink ganja are members of the lowest social level’ (Rubin & Comitas 1976, p. 57). Cannabis was a basic herbal treatment among both middle and lower class families; Beaubrun noted that cannabis was often given to Jamaican children as tea to improve their performance at school, and it was even given to infants in their bottles (Beaubrun 1983, p. 74).

While smoking cannabis was socially unacceptable among wealthier Jamaicans, most drink cannabis teas and tonics: ‘Ganja tea, brewed from the leaves and stalks of the plant, is believed to have wonderful medicinal properties and is used even by middle-class housewives who would never dream of smoking ganja’ (Beaubrun 1983, p. 74). Rubin and Comitas (1976) pointed out that:

Furthermore, as has been previously noted, ganja is a total nostrum for the Jamaican working class; there is no multiple drug use and very limited use of any synthetic drugs or of other psychoactive plants from the folk pharmacopoeia. This difference in emphasis stems from folk beliefs in the attributes of native plants. Working-class Jamaican use of ganja is in the general tradition of folk herbals. Native medicines are not considered “drugs” and belief in the divine origin of ganja bolsters this concept ...

The Jamaican working-class user who seeks energizing as well as euphoriant and medicinal effects from ganja is responding to a different set of social and personal conditioning factors:
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the need to work at hard and onerous tasks in cultivating the land, to stave off cold and hunger at sea, to provide self-medication in the absence of adequate health care, to enhance enjoyment of social relations in the absence of alternatives for leisure pursuits, to augment income and to realize the sacred-secular virtues attributed to ganja in folk belief - wisdom, knowledge and understanding. The context of use in Jamaica and the United States, the social class backgrounds of the users, the motivations for use, the situationally determined expectations and reactions are for the most part completely different ... Despite the availability of hard drugs in the tourist areas, Jamaican ganja users do not evince interest in experimenting with other drugs and, in fact, disapprove of their use (Rubin & Comitas 1976, p. 154).

However, cannabis smoking is not socially acceptable to middle-class Jamaicans, and so there are few social controls covering its use. Consequently, middle-class youth experience more problems with cannabis, including school drop-outs, transient psychotic episodes, panic reactions and addictive behaviour (Beaubrun 1983, p. 73). In western society these problems are often cited to justify a policy of prohibition, yet there appears to be a social dimension to many drug problems; for example, among the Jamaican poor the role of cannabis ‘smoker’ or someone who ‘doesn’t have a head for it’ is decided by early responses to THC, so that if the effect is unpleasant the teenager can avoid cannabis without suffering ostracism ((Beaubrun 1983, p. 73). Beaubrun commented:

> Among the working-class, the cultural mechanisms operate to screen out the vulnerable and to regulate the use of cannabis so as to minimise its ill effects. Among the middle-class (or social elite) the opposite mechanism seems to operate so as to screen out the conformists and to expose the deviant personalities to the drug while giving them no useful models to imitate, nor guidance to follow’ (Beaubrun 1983, p. 75).

As a different example of cultural influences, Peele (1998) pointed out that while more white, middle class Americans drink more alcohol than poorer Americans, they were less likely to be classified as alcoholic: ‘In other words, the higher one’s social class, the more likely one is to drink and the less likely one is to drink abusively’ (Peele 1998, p. 45). Peele stated that: ‘Treatment is less important than the social resources of the … consumer in both the development of problems and in their [remedy]’ (Peele 1998, p. 2). Even within similar socio-economic groups, some cultures (such as American Jews, Chinese, Japanese, and Greeks) have remarkably lower rates of alcoholism than others (such as, American Irish, indigenous Americans, and eastern Europeans) with similar demographic characteristics; most probably this is because some cultures give their children culturally acceptable contexts and behaviours for the use of alcohol from an early age (Peele 1998, p. 13).

‘Problems’ aren’t always traceable to poverty, or to heavy use of a drug, or even to a drug’s illegality, but often problems do seem to be derived from the lack of key cultural influences such as functional role models and rules for the safe use of the drug. Wayne Harding (1998) explained the development of social controls for alcohol:

> Two important features of these rituals are that alcohol use is treated as a part of a social activity rather than its main focus, and that drinking is generally treated as a leisure activity. These features communicate the message that alcohol should be used in a way that complements rather than disrupts social relations, and should not interfere with work or other obligations. Assimilation of informal social controls begins in the family as children see their parents and other adults drink ... Rituals and norms are also reinforced for children and adults by portrayals of social drinking and unacceptable drunkenness in television shows, movies, magazines, novels and other media ... [but] socialisation in controlled use can break down. People grow up in families where one or both parents are alcoholics or neither parent
drugs, and in both cases the probability of their having a problem with alcohol is higher than in the general population ... laws owe their effectiveness to the fact that they are consistent with informal social controls (Harding W. 1998, p. 216).

Family and peers exert quite powerful influences on drug experiences. Suwanwela and Poshyachinda (1983) described the different cultural influences on problems with opium and other drugs between different hill tribes in Thailand; here economic security appeared to play an important role:

In the mountains there are several ethnically distinct groups who are referred to collectively as the hill tribes ... In a study of Hmong villages, many villagers were found to use opium occasionally and some used it daily. Opium is usually smoked through a special pipe. Some used it orally in the form of pills or solution. The prevalence rate of opium dependence was between 8 and 18 per cent of the population above ten years of age ... At evenings and other social gatherings in the village, tea, alcohol and tobacco as well as opium are used. The Hmong have some traditional customs which govern these behaviours. Youngsters are not allowed to use alcohol, tobacco or opium until they are above ten years of age, and opium use among young people is generally limited to the treatment of illnesses ...

Unlike the Hmong or the Yao ... The Karen are liberal in their attitude toward tobacco. Most men smoke cigarettes, local cigars or pipes, and most women smoke pipes. Girls were observed to use a pipe at the age of six or seven and, by the age of ten, most possessed their own pipe ... They use alcohol in the form of locally brewed rice or corn whisky, mainly for social occasions, and no alcoholics were encountered. [However] Opium dependence is a serious problem among the Karen. The rate of opium dependence ranges from 10 to 38 per cent of the population above ten years of age ... [The Lisu and the Lahu] are opium growers. They have a combination of the patterns described for the Hmong and for the Karen. Some households are economically stable and show the Hmong pattern. Some are poor and depend on wage-labour and then show the Karen pattern of opium use with a high rate of opium dependence (Suwanwela & Poshyachinda 1983, pp. 50-57).

In Australia over the past few decades a combination of laws and social sanctions have been shaping our ways of using alcohol, and the results include a decline in population use of (pure) alcohol, a trend towards drinks with a lower alcohol content, and a reduction in problems such as cirrhosis and alcohol-related road deaths (Laslett & Rumbold 1998, P. 27; see also W. Harding 1998, p. 215).

There are useful lessons to be learned from our society’s experiences with alcohol over the past century that may assist in the further development of social controls for use of other recreational drugs.

‘Drug problems’ may not have anything to do with a drug. Drugs have been symbols for many other social struggles, and prohibition has often served to unify opposition. Gregory, Gregory & Peck (1983) described the way a drug can be inter-woven with oppression and rebellion, in the following abbreviated story about the conflict between the indigenous population and missionaries in Vanuatu:

Kava is used as a drug on many Polynesian and some Melanesian islands. Vanuatu, formerly known as the New Hebrides, is one such location where kava, the root of the *Piper methysticum*, Forst, is frequently used. Tanna, a Southern Island in the chain, is the location of the John Frum cargo cult, a social movement begun in the late 1930s and still lingering today after some 50 years ... Only men drink kava on Tanna .. On most evenings at sunset, in
many villages, nearly every adult man drinks kava and meditates. This gathering for kava is also a key period of the day for important news to be exchanged ...

The Presbyterian missionaries who came to Tanna soon learned that kava was an avenue to the supernatural world of the Tannese, a vital link to their “false gods” and heathen ways. Further, the use of kava took place at sundown, when the missionaries wanted bible study classes. Thus, the missionaries became antagonistic to kava use on Tanna, as they had elsewhere in the Pacific... In the early 1890s, kava was eliminated from neighbouring Aneityum, to the south [where the] Council of Christians met and decided that every kava root should be destroyed. This was done, and there was no kava left on the island.

On Tanna there was steady pressure by the missions against kava ... Kava, however, also united the men who opposed the mission into a cohesive social unit. This hostile attitude continued in the 1920s and 1930s, during a time labelled as “Tanna Law” ... On Tanna itself, the coming of John Frum witnessed the rapid widespread use of kava, a return to dancing and the resurgence of other forbidden customs (Gregory, Gregory & Peck 1983, pp. 232-237).

There are many other examples of the profound influence of socio-cultural factors on the pattern of, and problems associated with, drug use. Robson (1999) concluded that:

The family, the circle of friends, and the neighbourhood networks are crucial in both starting and maintaining drug use. It is under the influence of these structures that the individual’s attitudes to drugs develop, and the first initiation characteristically takes place with a good deal of social rituals in the heart of the peer group. At the beginning of a drug career, the source of supply is almost invariably from within the immediate social circle. Compulsive, self-destructive drug use is much more common among groups in society that are poor and deprived, and people from this sort of background are greatly over-represented amongst those seeking help from the average drug and alcohol unit (Robson 1999, p. 213).

As Robson has pointed out, the dispossessed, the emotionally-damaged, the socially marginalised, are more likely to have problems with their drug use, regardless of the country or culture. At the same time, culture can exert important restraints on drug use and reduce such problems. One’s family and peers, and one’s own expectations and habits can help to create or ameliorate ‘drug problems’.

Rumbold and Hamilton (1998) also noted the active role that workers in the illicit drug field have played in changing policy and challenging myth :

A sense of frustration and disillusionment about previous efforts to deal with the problems associated with drugs, as well as growing community concern over the problems, has provided a discourse that is focused more on pragmatic considerations than polemics. Prior to the development of the harm minimisation model many workers in the drug and alcohol field had been facing contradictions in their own domains, domains such as the prevention of drug use, the treatment of users, and the search for humane and consistent policies. The accumulated knowledge of these contradictions contributed to the push to build this new harm minimisation framework (Rumbold & Hamilton 1998, pp. 136-137).

Rumbold and Hamilton (1998) described drug users as ‘active and conscious’, and pointed out that illicit drug users were empowered by a harm reduction perspective (as opposed to a prohibition-abstinence perspective) (Rumbold & Hamilton 1998, p. 138). They also suggested that, for balance, the harm minimisation model should
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include recognition of the beneficial consequences of drug use (Rumbold & Hamilton 1998, p. 138) by acknowledging drug use, among other things.

Furthermore, the concept of ‘harm reduction’ is no longer confined to the medical/public health sphere, but also acts as a yardstick for police priorities and as a standard for evaluating law enforcement outcomes. Over the eighties and nineties harm reduction was introduced as a framework for directing and evaluating police responses to crime (Price & Farrell 1998) as advised by the Woods Royal Commission (1997), and Kutin (1998) lists a number of ways Australian police services can introduce harm minimisation principles in policing drugs. Harm reduction in a policing context includes a refined understanding of the relative harms associated with the different drugs and an appreciation of the centrality of the cultures within a community (regardless of the place). As I have argued, harm reduction and prohibition have very different effects when they are imposed on a culture as law enforcement practices and as health and social services (or lack of them).

At the international level, it appears that there is also a trend towards ‘harm reduction’ policies and away from ‘prohibition’ as a framework for viewing recreational drug use. For the first time since its inception, America does not have a seat on the United Nations’ International Narcotics Control Board; commentators suggested that this signalled that the body responsible for international drug policy has rejected the American ‘War on Drugs’ approach, and might in future be expected to pursue policies that have harm-reduction goals (ABC radio news report, 8 May 2001). If this is the case then the policy shift will have profound effects internationally and nationally. The often quite radical shifts in drug policy at all levels over the late twentieth century reflected the growing influence of the post-war generations, with their wide experience of a range of recreational drugs (and therefore greater tolerance towards such use), and with unprecedented money, leisure time and leisure choices.

The illicit drug users are the post-war generations, the veterans of the psychedelic and protesting sixties and seventies, along with the body/performance-conscious, and the ‘ravers’ of the eighties and nineties. They fill positions of power, as well as population drug use profiles, as their numbers increasingly come to dominate our society. As well as their sheer numbers (Grahame Dunstan’s ‘critical mass’ [see Appendix IV]), these post-war generations had many more opportunities than earlier generations — greater access to education, medical services and healthy food, more avenues of political and public influence (notably through direct representation and through the media), and opportunities to create different lifestyles. Perhaps, as some commentators (eg Plant 1999) and members of the counter-culture suggest, the drugs, with their accompanying change of consciousness, encouraged new dreams, new ways of viewing the environment, and a greater willingness to accept society’s eccentric and marginalised.

In the first three chapters I have discussed the research topic and some key aspects of illicit drug use that influence both our ways of viewing and of experiencing ‘drug problems’. The next three chapters will present the results of my Nimbin research. In Chapter Four I focus on local opinions about a range of issues, including drug ‘problems’, and I present the results from the injectors’ survey. In Chapter Five I examine the drug
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economy in terms of the growers, buyers and sellers, along with law enforcement in Nimbin. In Chapter Six I look at the Nimbin culture in greater detail, from cannabis use to multiple occupancies, from drug protests to drug celebrations. Chapter Seven is a review of the previous chapters, with discussion and conclusions.

* * * * *
CHAPTER FOUR

NIMBIN VIEWS

In the next three chapters I will present the results from my research into Nimbin’s ‘drug problem’. In the first part of this chapter I will briefly review the various research methods (with more detail provided in Chapter Seven and the Appendices). The remainder of the chapter is devoted to peoples’ opinions, drawn from the household surveys, the taped interviews and the drug injectors’ survey, to present Nimbin voices on a range of drug-related subjects.

In 1993 I conducted an anonymous survey of drug injectors, with the support of the NSW Department of Health and needle exchange workers. There were 72 responses to my injectors’ survey (see also Appendix II), including 50 injectors who used the Nimbin questionnaire. The response rate was low (26%) but the sample was comprised of current injectors, including ‘hidden’ injectors (that is, people who had no contact with drug treatment services), and the results were similar to other research results into Australian (ANAIDUS 1991), and specifically rural (Keys Young 1991), injectors. Despite the many limitations to this study, the results do provide original and relevant information about the needs and views of the region’s drug injectors.

In mid 1994 and mid 1995 I interviewed 148 residents in the Nimbin household survey (see also Appendix III) with 79 from village households and 40 from rural households; I asked 29 volunteers from multiple occupancies the same questions. The overall response rate for households (excluding the MO volunteers) was 77%, and the refusal rate was 17% (the remaining 6% were not at home after at least four visits). The demographic profile for the households was similar to census data for the village and the north coast, aside from a bias towards older rather than younger people (with a median age of 40), and a bias towards women (58% of the sample). However, this systematic household survey provides — for the first time — comprehensive and detailed information about Nimbin’s demographic profile, residents’ drug use, and their drug-related concerns.

In mid-1995 I interviewed eight crop growers (see also Appendix V). Results were cross-checked with other growers and with knowledgeable members of the alternative community. Understandably, there is very little information about cannabis cultivation and my results shed light on an under-researched, and difficult to investigate, subject.

Over 1994 and 1995 I conducted unstructured taped interviews with 16 members of Nimbin’s alternative culture, including prominent spokespersons, drug dealers, health and legal professionals, and ordinary residents (see also Appendix IV). I quote extensively from the taped interviews throughout the three chapters of results, to ensure that the alternative community has ample opportunity to speak for themselves — to balance my (and others’) discussion of Nimbin’s ‘drug problem’; too often have residents been misquoted and their lifestyles trivialised,
denigrated or sensationalised. Following is a brief description of those who participated in the taped interviews; respondents who are quoted by name are listed first, alphabetically by surname, followed by those who were assigned an alias:

**Michael Balderstone**: a spokesperson for Nimbin’s alternative community, multiple occupancy (MO) resident, curator of the Nimbin Museum, and member of Help End Marijuana Prohibition (HEMP).

**Grahame Dunstan**: a cultural activist, director of Nimbin’s 1973 Aquarius Festival (and subsequent north coast cultural festivals), and political candidate for HEMP.

**David Heilpern**: a defence lawyer specialising in drug arrests, Southern Cross University Law lecturer, and civil rights activist, closely involved with the Nimbin community.

**Dr David Helliwell**: Nimbin general practitioner (GP) and long-time resident.

**Bob Hopkins** (also known as Prohibition End and The Plantem): a spokesperson for the alternative community, MO resident, political candidate, and member of HEMP.

**Katie Love**: a long-term MO resident, youth worker, and co-founder of Tuntale Falls Co-Ordination Co-Operative pre-school and primary school.

**Diana Roberts**: Lismore City Council (LCC) councillor, a spokesperson for Nimbin’s alternative community, MO resident, and Nimbin naturopath.

‘**Bill**’: a professional/creative local, a ‘hills person’.

‘**Dee**’: a dealer and single parent.

‘**Eagle**’: a runner, local youth.

‘**Fiona**’: a needle exchange worker.

‘**Flame**’: a multiple occupancy (MO) resident and single parent.

‘**Peter**’: a transient young adult, an injecting drug user from inner Sydney.

‘**Rod**’: a transient youth from Victoria, a minimal drug user, his parents attended the Aquarius festival.

‘**Tom**’: a long-term Nimbin resident, long-term injecting drug user, dealer and runner.

‘**Will**’: a drug injector and sometime dealer in a range of illicit drugs, with a long-term, casual connection with Nimbin.

The taped interviews are a rich source of information about the feelings, aspirations and worries of many members of the counter-culture in Nimbin, and I would have liked to include even more quotations from my interviews with these articulate and interesting people.

Over the research period (1993-1997) I attended protests, festivals and parties, and sat around with the street drug dealers. I have converted my (scanty) notes from this participant observation into short, first-person stories (for example, about the Mardi Grass), to convey a sense of my personal experiences with the counter-culture (in contrast to my more formal role of interviewer). Along with my inclinations and my reading, my interactions with Nimbin’s alternative community — from the formal interviews to my participation in protests, festivals and parties — inevitably have coloured this dissertation’s emphasis and conclusions.
In this chapter I will canvas Nimbin views on a range of issues, but first I will present residents’ conversations about the place called ‘Nimbin’.

‘NIMBIN’
Many people spoke of ‘falling in love’ with the beautiful Nimbin valley, others defined ‘Nimbin’ in terms of themselves (‘Nimbin is something we created’), and many spoke of Nimbin’s uniqueness.

A number of people mentioned falling in love with the area around Nimbin. The village lies in the crater of an extinct volcano, and the valley is shrouded in mist in the early mornings, the rolling mountains are covered in rainforest, and the climate is subtropical. Will, an injector and dealer who has lived on the north coast for over 25 years (at the time of the interview), said that ‘We came up and fell in love with the place ... People weren’t on the dole, there wasn’t any great wealth around, and people had to depend on each other for survival’. Flame, who had been living on a multiple occupancy for a shorter time (seven years at the time of the interview), said ‘I came here on holiday and I got arrested fighting for the rainforest …, and I fell in love with the place’. So did David Heilpern, lawyer and university lecturer: ‘I came to this area because I’d visited here, back in the seventies. I really loved it. I had a share at Tuntable Falls and I really wanted to make this my home, and the place I brought up my children’. Local doctor David Helliwell said of Nimbin: ‘I like the diversity. I think its a very vibrant place ... and one of the things that we have to learn about Nimbin is if we have hell, we have heaven as well’.

Nimbin’s alternative community had its origins in the Aquarius festival, when Nimbin attracted unusually high numbers of well-educated baby boomers who left the cities to live their ideals. Bob Hopkins, political candidate and HEMP activist, wanted to live out his philosophy: ‘Nimbin’s a state of mind, it’s not really all that much to do with the town. It’s just when we came in 1973 as a culture ... I’d been talking politics for a long part of my life ... There I was in the city talking about doing it, and I wanted to actually go to some place where I was doing it’. Aquarius changed the fate of Nimbin forever. Grahame Dunstan described it to me:

In 1972 I was appointed Director of the 1973 Aquarius Festival, which was a cultural festival which the Australian Union of Students (AUS) put on every second year, under the direction of the Aquarius Foundation, the cultural arm of the AUS ... We decided to define the 1973 festival as a lifestyle festival and invite proponents of all sorts of different lifestyles emerging around Australia at that time. We were disillusioned with the greed of the new class of rock music entrepreneur and we decided not to pay any rock and roll bands. A lot of people make the mistake of thinking of the Aquarius festival as an Australian Woodstock. It wasn’t. It was the peak expression of the student counter-culture in Australia at that time. About 5,000 students from around Australia came to the festival and there were about 20,000 day visitors from the Lismore district ...

The Aquarius Festival was a temporary community with time and space to share dreams. There was the dream that it was possible to live some better way, there was a desire to continue the thing, and acquire some land. That’s what Tuntable came out of. Shares were sold for the Tuntable Falls Co-ordination Co-operative Committee, Nimbin became a focus for a re-settlement, and lots of people bought land ...

The Festival was a time of dreaming. We were going back to the indigenous culture - the AUS was active in land rights in the sixties, and we had huge Aboriginal participation in the
Nimbin views

Festival. Nimbin is ancient initiation grounds ... and it still is today. I invited Oodjeroo (Cath Walker as she was then called) ... I invited her to come over to Nimbin ... she said then that this was ... a male initiation ground connected with the Rocks. It was a place of learning, and the people should come here for learning, but if they stayed too long and stopped learning, they’d be turned to rocks, they would become petrified. She said it was not a good place for women.

Bob Hopkins echoed the idea of a vision, and of teaching the wider community about sustainable lifestyles: ‘Nimbin was based on a vision... so much of that stuff has permeated now into the mainstream: environmental consciousness, ecological awareness, support of forests, land rights, natural healing, alternative energy ... organic gardening, organic farming, biodynamics, all that was part of the rationale of that period of time’. Katie Love pointed out: ‘This has always been a learning place I believe, and my experience of it is, well, if you stay here long enough you become a teacher. People come here to find something a bit different, and they take a little bit of Nimbin away’. Michael Balderstone, curator of the Nimbin Museum and HEMP activist, said, ‘The town, or the land perhaps, has a huge heart, with huge compassion and tolerance. … if Nimbin were in India it would be a holy town, and instead of being “dreadlocked dole bludging bums” the people would be revered Sadhus’.

When locals spoke about ‘Nimbin’ they generally focused on aspects of the alternative lifestyle that Aquarius Festival heralded. Aquarius veteran Katie Love said: ‘The Nimbin I relate to is the hippy scene, not the Nimbin that was here originally ... it’s something that we actually created out of the Aquarius dreams ... It’s a feeling of home; that’s what I’m trying to say. I don’t feel that anyone here is really homeless ... [although] the multiple occupancies are filling up ... there’s more and more people attracted to this dream of ours’. There were urban re-settlements all over the NSW north coast, in places like Byron Bay, Ballina, Kyogle, Tweed Heads and Bellingen, as noted in Chapter One. What made Nimbin so different, so special? Perhaps the key lies in the sheer numbers of those who settled Nimbin, which led, as Grahame Dunstan put it, to ‘critical mass’:

Because of the MOs and because of the numbers of people, the counter-culture values of the seventies took root here like nowhere else in the world, sustained itself as a culture, and grew ... When sufficient enough people share a value, vegetarianism for example, when sufficient people in a particular area share that value then a transition takes place, and the cultural value ceases to become an idea and it becomes a cultural reality that has a life of its own. It evolves and grows and changes, it becomes a part of community life... all the information resources begin to accumulate; whereas, if you tried to be a vegetarian living in Casino [‘the Beef Capital’] in those days, you would have found that you were an outsider.

As well as numbers, there was something else that made Nimbin different to other pockets of the counter-culture in north-eastern NSW. The baby boomers were able to purchase property in the village and surrounding area relatively cheaply, as Grahame pointed out:

One of the things that made the Nimbin resettlement different from other areas settled by the counterculture was that the Festival acquired shopfront property in the main street. The old RSL hall had been purchased by the AUS as an office for the festival, it’s called the Healing Centre now. It cost $500 including furniture, and we handed it over to the new community at cost. Also the Tomato Sauce building was acquired (it was an old general store) and the Rainbow Cafe. In the Mullumbimby area, the Main Arm valley, you had lots of people seeking alternative lifestyles, many before Aquarius, but they never had a foothold in town.
This was the first time the counter-culture had a foothold in a main street, and this gave the alternative movement the political power of presence.

Property ownership provided secure housing and some business opportunities for the steady influx from the cities. However, post-festival was a testing time for some, as Grahame explained:

People come here for learning and for reasons of crisis in their lives, or because they want to make changes in their lives. A classic model in the seventies was couples selling up everything they owned in Sydney to come to Nimbin, trying to find a better life as a family, and then immediately splitting apart ... [and] Nimbin’s always had that ambivalence between people with great vision who are doing things, making changes, and this sort of flotsam and jetsam of humanity who wash into town for a place to hang.

The term ‘flotsam’ was used in Margaret Munro-Clarke’s discussion of Nimbin (1986, p. 185) and was also used by ‘Bill’ (ff). It apparently refers to the homeless and transients who were (and still are) attracted to Nimbin, although there were few support services for them in the small village. Grahame also used the term ‘droogs’:

Also people came who were casualties, broken and falling. In the seventies we had these sixteen year old alcoholics. They got nicknamed droogs, from Clockwork Orange. They weren’t violent so much as disgusting. I’d never seen this phenomenon before, they came from the western suburbs of Sydney and they started begging on the streets of Nimbin. Everyone in Nimbin was poor. The great thing about Nimbin was that we were all poor, and having a good time. But these guys were poor and were determined to have a miserable time. We had to deal with it because there were never any gates. There was a big public debate, people were outraged, eventually the droogs were hospitalised, treated, but they were given lots of scope. Nimbin always has been like that. Compassionate. People have to be really outrageous before they get kicked out of Nimbin.

Will described Nimbin in the early days:

It was much more innocent, people weren’t on the dole. There wasn’t any great wealth around, and people had to depend on each other for survival, and fun, and amusement, and romance, and food, accommodation, clothes. Well, because land was so cheap in those days, people bought up and all of a sudden as the energy attracted more and more people to the area, the real estate prices started accelerating in a upward direction. And so, people that got in cheap had all of a sudden become filthy rich land owners, and land barons that were selling off a portion of their 400 acres or something, with a hefty sort of kick along the road, sort of onward and upward. So people became less concerned for each others’ welfare and mutual friendships ... people did a whole lot of things, you know, there were moves in various semi-professional directions, people started setting up businesses, doing herb farms, you know, running restaurants, fishing, buying boats. Other people lived very simply, quietly building their house, some people are taking ten to fifteen years to build a two room hut, fastidiously crafting each little bit ... [Today, Byron Bay] has become more cosmopolitan, and professional, and sun-tanned and efficient, yeah, and smiling. Nimbin still has this Aquarian middle-aged sort of smoke haze about it, but you know that’s nice too, it’s sort of somehow closer to nature, or an expression of being a bit more rooted in the earth, and less rooted in the twentieth century mind-games of planet earth.

Katie, youth worker and long-time MO resident, said of the youth who congregate in the main street:

Some of them are our kids. When I say ‘our kids’ I mean the hippies that came here and settled, and a lot of their kids aren’t staying at home. Sometimes they have a younger family, or a marriage break-up, and the young people just get out rather than hang about ... A lot of
[the homeless youth] come from other places. They’re drawn here either by the media or just the feeling that there’s something more here than they’re experiencing. And I even find quite often that the people who have lived here have gone away [but] their young people, their kids, often come back, they’re not always homeless for long [they are accepted on MOs], but they are drawn back here, even though their parents have gone away ...[All] teenagers always want to come to where the action is, and the action has not been all that crash hot in the last few years on the streets of Nimbin ... You can see [Nimbin] is actually a beautiful thing [But] because of the price of the land ... we’ve priced our own children out. The multiple occupancies are still filling ... there’s still plenty of room, but there’s more and more people attracted to this dream of ours. In a way, we’ve left our kids out a bit.

Katie was concerned that younger people, singles and families, couldn’t afford (or even find) secure accommodation in the valley. The overall impression I gained from the series of taped interviews, was that the counter culture had claimed the town and surrounding region as its own, and they had brought with them values of tolerance and sharing. This tolerance towards the dispossessed attracted many whom mainstream society despised or ignored. Michael Balderstone, HEMP activist, said: ‘Nimbin is like the end of the road. Health workers and police and jail staff send their hopeless cases here. Street kids turn up regularly and won’t say a word about their past’.

‘Nimbin’ often symbolised ‘freedom’, although that meant different things to different people. Nimbin provided the urban refugees with an opportunity to live more freely, be it freedom to put into practice environmental ideals, freedom from reliance on ‘government handouts’, or simply freedom to grow and smoke pot (cannabis). ‘Bill’ explained, ‘Well, I think a lot of us have that sort of late sixties or early seventies dream of going back to the country, being self sufficient, self supporting, not even living on the dole, trying to just keep away from everything, dropping out ... I live a very free and very comfortable life’. A cannabis dealer, ‘Dee’, also mentioned freedom:

Nimbin’s definitely a magnetic attraction for drugs and alternative lifestyle, a whole range of things I believe make it that way. The Aquarius festival had something to do with it, in making it a major place of revolution, definitely people making a stand in a place, and quite openly smoking [cannabis] in front of straight people in a social scene ... It’s to do with people being free really — just people being free to do what they want ... It’s a town where generally people accept each other, no matter what they’re doing. Whether they’re playing football I, a hippy can accept this footballer and the footballer feels good about it if you accept him, just as the hippy feels good about the footballer accepting him or her. It’s a town where no matter what variety of people, what variety of family, what variety of society you’ve come from everyone accepts it. No matter what variety of people, what sort of family you come from, there’s a general acceptance and a general place for each person, each social group.

For a transient youth, ‘Rod’, Nimbin is a relaxed town:

About three years ago I just came up for a holiday and stayed for a week or two, and then about a year after that I came up again and I decided to live here. It’s a good place. Like, you can just sit around in town and draw, play guitar, or whatever, just like if you’re at home, with a bit of extra people around. I wouldn’t feel comfortable doing that in any of the local towns around Victoria.
But for ‘Eagle’, a young street dealer who is a long-term resident, ‘Nimbin is a hole ... It’s just there’s nothing happening here, it’s a real fucking backwater’. Some people spoke of changing Nimbin’s image. Grahame Dunstan said:

Our tourist economy has been dominated by drugs. Most people think Nimbin and think drugs. They do not think innovative community; that’s why [we are] working at present on creating a relationship with Woodstock, which is an arts community, and emphasising the arts side, the social innovation, the music, sculpture, the fashion industry, and all the rest of the things that are happening here which are quite amazing. We need to bring these other things forward, but right now we have this problem of the drug scene dominating our public image.

Katie Love explained her dream for ‘Nimbin’:

And I just saw beautiful people, poor but happy, and that was my dream. I didn’t need a job, particularly as a career, or money ... I wanted happiness, and that’s what I’d like: a happy, creative, joyful scene here, with love and affection for young people, and respect between the generations. Really, I think if we just keep trying and not get disillusioned, the scene we dreamed of will prevail. We on the Aquarius Foundation have got a dream of having another celebration: in 1998 it will be 25 years since the Woodstock-Nimbin connection, and we’ve got a sister village happening with Woodstock. And by then we hope that if we keep going, and keep trying to get Nimbin positive, if we just keep believing, and keep trying, then we’ll have something to show for all our work.

Diana Roberts, MO resident and Lismore City Councillor, said of Nimbin:

I think Nimbin’s suffered from the lack of money spent on it for a long, long time. It’s really over many, many years, probably since we lost the Terania Shire, maybe even before that. My feeling is that money is coming to Nimbin now because the town has a strong advocate on council, myself, who has the respect of councilors and the support of the community. I think that’s the reality, and I’ve worked really hard to get things happening here. It hasn’t been that hard, because Nimbin has been neglected for such a long time ... [but] there’s still a lot of prejudice towards Nimbin [among Lismore City Councillors]; there are a lot of derogatory comments made about Nimbin ... But you know, there’s no doubt in my mind that Nimbin is what brings people to this area a lot of the time. Apart from the fact that Nimbin’s beautiful, and people know that, I think the tourism group in Lismore have really recognised it, and every time they promote Lismore they use the name Nimbin. Now it’s the ‘Lismore-Nimbin region’. Nimbin has a bigger population, and it’s growing all the time, and it also has a much bigger tourist trade than it’s ever had before. It’s a challenge for the community to be able to balance that, so that our lifestyles aren’t compromised.

Not everyone views the town’s growing popularity with tourists as a positive thing. For ‘Bill’, a ‘hills person’, Nimbin today is not the dream:

It’s catering too much to media sensation. It’s catering too much to the tourists ... This is my home, and this is what’s been provoking the whole issue. The people in town do nothing, they sit around all day long, deal, get out of it, and do nothing; absolutely nothing. They bore me to tears, they bore the hills people to tears. We’re out there doing stuff, and they are doing nothing, there is a strong division there. I mean, I also think we get on with the older types, you know the National Party straights, rednecks, whatever you want to call them, they’ve come to accept us. They don’t like the town either.
Bob Hopkins description of ‘Nimbin’ is apt: ‘It’s a state of mind’. The whole area bore the counter-culture’s imprint, from the village buildings to the concentration of multiple occupancies, including the community’s views on life’s problems.

THE ‘DRUG PROBLEM’

For some people the ‘drug problem’ defined ‘Nimbin’, and during the nineties drugs were debated passionately at public meetings in Nimbin’s town hall. The first public meeting I attended (in 1993) was convened to discuss the needle exchange (NSEP) program in Nimbin. It was well attended by local interest groups, Lismore City Councillors, NSEP workers, and senior Health Department staff. A skilled facilitator was hired to run the meeting, and the public sat in rows facing the stage, and a large space in front of the stage was available for speakers.

The meeting was described as ‘heated’ (Northern Star 9 June 1993, p. 5); there was shouting, insults, and anger. Some people were drunk, many were loud. As a media event, two people strode to the front of the audience and dropped a tarpaulin full of needles in the middle of the floor. Members of the Ratepayers Association claimed that they had collected them from all over town over several months, while needle exchange staff claimed that the Nimbin Ratepayers and Progress Association had raided the safe-disposal bins for the needles. One person accused the Health Department’s regional manager of Drug and Alcohol Services of being involved in drug dealing, apparently because he supported harm reduction initiatives and drove a late model car. The anti-needle exchange bloc were not interested in the health issues; they insisted that the needle exchange attracted drug injectors, and they just wanted the drugs, the drug users, and the drug services out of their town. However, as my results and the Main Street survey (Lismore City Council 1993, Appendix 2) suggest, these objections stemmed from only a small number of residents.

A ‘drug problem’ to one person may not be so to another. My Nimbin household surveys provided, for the first time, a systematic canvassing of the opinions of this small community about drugs. I asked residents what drug or drugs they associated with the ‘drug problem’, as well as a number of other questions about drugs and drug use. But first I asked an open-ended question about ‘social issues’ that concerned them (as in the 1991 NCADA survey). The purpose of the question was to determine the unprompted level of concern over drug issues, and was particularly relevant for Nimbin, given the often highly emotive media coverage of the ‘drug problem’ in the village. It was obvious from the answers that drugs were not a ‘top-of-the-mind’ issue for most Nimbin residents despite the press coverage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First issue: %</th>
<th>Combined village &amp; rural households</th>
<th>Village households (n=79)</th>
<th>Rural households (n=40)</th>
<th>MO volunteers (n= 29)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal/ family</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1

Important social issues in Nimbin (open ended, first mention) (%)
As Table 4.1 indicates, unemployment and personal issues were generally named first by village residents, followed by issues such as housing and care for the elderly, while rural residents were more likely to name personal issues (such as ‘change’, ‘alienation’, and ‘retirement’), followed by social and environmental issues. (Please note with all tables that percentages will not always sum to 100 due to rounding). Multiple occupancy opinions sometimes differed quite dramatically from the household views. With this question, many more MO residents were worried about social/ environmental issues (over half of MO residents compared to around one in ten householders), and fewer MO residents than householders were worried about personal or employment issues. ‘Drug problems’ of any variety certainly were not the focus of most residents’ day-to-day concerns.

I next asked Nimbin residents which drug they associated with the ‘drug problem’. The question was also open-ended. Compared to national results, substantially more Nimbin residents named heroin first, while fewer named other drugs including cannabis and alcohol, and many more MO residents named alcohol or tobacco as the problem compared to Nimbin households and Australians generally.

Table 4.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug</th>
<th>Combined village &amp; rural</th>
<th>Village households</th>
<th>Rural households</th>
<th>MO volunteers</th>
<th>NDS 1995a</th>
<th>NCADA 1993b</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heroin</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocaine</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the time of my research around one third of Australians named cannabis as the ‘drug problem’ (Commonwealth of Australia 1993d), compared to one quarter of Nimbin households, while less than one in ten multiple occupancy residents nominated cannabis first as the ‘drug problem’. There was a high level of agreement overall that heroin was the ‘drug problem’ among Nimbin residents. Notably, many more rural householders named heroin as the ‘problem’ than either village or MO residents. Comments indicated that some people named heroin because they were worried about needle disposal and they associated this problem with heroin use, while others may have linked the ‘street scene’ with heroin users.
I next asked Nimbin residents to select from a list of drug-related activities the one that most concerned the general community. Multiple occupancy residents were notable in that six out of ten saw excessive use of alcohol as the major community problem, while other drug-related behaviours concerned only a small number. Heroin use and needle sharing were the second and third most frequent community concerns in both Nimbin and NCADA 1993 surveys, but it is noteworthy that a greater proportion of people in Nimbin were concerned about heroin, while very few Nimbin residents (3%) or Australians generally (5%) considered cannabis to be a concern.

Table 4.3

The drug of most concern to the community in Nimbin & nationally (%)

(source: C’lth Aus 1993d)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First drug: %</th>
<th>Combined village &amp; rural</th>
<th>Village households</th>
<th>Rural households</th>
<th>MO volunteers</th>
<th>NCADA 1993</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excessive use of alcohol</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of heroin</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needle sharing</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco smoking</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of cocaine</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of marijuana</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (remaining drugs)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(8)*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* NCADA 1993 combined ‘other’ and ‘none’.

I next asked residents what drug-related activity was of most concern to them personally. Heroin use was most often mentioned as a personal concern in the Nimbin household sample, closely followed by alcohol, while in the national surveys people were clearly more often concerned with tobacco smoking and excessive use of alcohol. The Nimbin concern with heroin was much higher at 22% than the Australian population (at around 4%), but only for 20% of residents.

Table 4.4

The drug of most concern to self in Nimbin & nationally (%)

(source: C’lth Aus 1993d)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First drug: %</th>
<th>Combined village &amp; rural</th>
<th>Village households</th>
<th>Rural households</th>
<th>MO volunteers</th>
<th>NCADA 1993</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of heroin</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excessive use of alcohol</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco smoking</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of marijuana</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needle sharing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (comb. remaining drugs)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another way of asking people for their opinion about drugs is the ‘adult use’ question. In the self-completed sealed section of the Nimbin questionnaire respondents were asked whether they thought that regular adult use of a list of drugs was ‘OK’ or ‘not OK’.
In Nimbin seven in ten respondents supported regular use of alcohol and six in ten supported regular cannabis use. Around half of the Nimbin residents were in favour of regular use of tobacco compared to a little over one in three Australians generally. Apart from alcohol, cannabis and tobacco, there was little support for regular use of any of the other drugs. An exceptionally high number of people did not answer this question (the question was the final one in the drug use section, and people were generally tired by this time). Table 4.5 presents the proportion in favour of regular use of drugs, with numbers of people who did not answer these questions in Nimbin given in brackets (first for households, then multiple occupancies).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug: % (h/h, MO)</th>
<th>Combined village &amp; rural households</th>
<th>MO volunteers</th>
<th>NCADA 1993 a)</th>
<th>NCADA 1995 b)</th>
<th>NCADA 1998 b)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol (na = 5, 2)</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis (na = 6, 2)</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco (na = 6, 2)</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallucinogens (na = 8, 2)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamines (na = 6, 4)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecstasy/designer (na = 6, 2)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroin (na = 6, 4)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocaine/crack (na = 6, 3)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A much higher proportion approved of regular use of hallucinogens and designer drugs compared to the household sample, but small proportions approved of regular use of amphetamines or heroin. Even village and rural householders were more likely to approve of adult use of a given drug than the national samples, although small numbers can count as relatively high proportions (for example, five people would appear as 12% of the rural sample, 17% of the MO sample but 4% of the combined household survey). Most notable, however, is that many more Nimbin respondents were in favour of regular use of cannabis: over 60% of householders supported regular use, compared to between a quarter (1993) and a third (1995) of the national samples conducted around the same time. Over three quarters of MO respondents approved of regular cannabis use (even more than the proportion who approved of regular use of alcohol).

Even higher proportions in Nimbin were in favour of legalising cannabis than supported regular use of it, possibly because respondents were concerned about the consequences of illegality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cannabis legalised: %</th>
<th>Combined village &amp; rural households</th>
<th>Village households (n=79)</th>
<th>Rural households (n=40)</th>
<th>MO volunteers (n=29)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disagree</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All of the MO respondents (100%), and seven in ten households (consistent across village and hinterland) favoured legalising this drug. There was stronger support for legalising cannabis in Nimbin than found in national surveys conducted around the same time. While more Nimbin men support legalising cannabis (74%) compared to women (68%), the only non-users in Nimbin who supported legalisation were women (female non-users comprised 7% of the women who supported legalisation, although the actual number is small). This result lends some support to Lenton’s (1993) findings on gender differences in attitudes to decriminalisation of cannabis.

The taped interviews provided a different approach to gathering opinions on Nimbin’s ‘drug problem’ by canvassing the views of prominent spokespersons, as well as some less visible members of the alternative community. When asked if Nimbin had a drug problem, Michael Balderstone, HEMP activist, said:

Yes, there’s heaps of drugs, and heaps of drug abuse. A lot of the problems of the street come from dealers. That’s what’s upsetting everyone really, they are running ['Runners’ sell cannabis to tourists], they’re hassling people, they’re insensitive, they’re rude. It becomes a cut-throat thing. I don’t blame them at all, I think they’re mostly heroin addicts and pot smokers who have to deal to get a smoke.

Grahame Dunstan agreed:

There’s a problem. Two points: one is dealing in the street. We have a drug tourism happening, now people come to Nimbin to buy and sell drugs. This wouldn’t be so bad except for the prohibition laws that kept it grotty. We can’t regulate it. [The second is the heroin users] What you must understand about the heroin scene, the injectable scene, is that it isn’t that we have more people injecting drugs in Nimbin, it’s just that we have more untidy injectors. Junkies coming out from Lismore and shooting up in front of the school kids in their classes ... I mean, of course there’s concern. I had a public meeting to talk about the twentieth anniversary of the Aquarius festival but everyone wanted to talk about the drug problem. There was no space in their minds to talk about Aquarius because of the disgust and concern they felt about the injectable scene.

‘Rod’, a young Victorian whose parents attended the Aquarius Festival, also believes there is a drug problem:

Yeah, I do. Heroin and alcohol would be the problems. Well heroin: people ‘running’ in the cafes and on the street, disturbing everyone, watching people, and not only people running, but people dying in the toilets and that kind of thing, getting carted up the street on a stretcher whenever they drop. Yeah, and alcohol I guess is a bit of a problem too, but on a different extreme: the violence, people going off at each other, alcoholics going off at junkies running ... A lot of the people up in the hills just stay in the hills, and hardly come into town at all. They try to avoid the place because of what they see as a drug problem with the heroin. No one seems to focus much on the alcohol. Well, I think that is just as much of a problem, only it’s more common, it’s all over the planet pretty much. ... I like the open mindedness of everyone around here, even though it stuffs a lot of people around as well, but as long as I don’t get stuffed around its all right ... What I mean is, getting off too much on a lot of drugs, not that it’s a bad thing to enjoy drugs, but when it’s a day-to-day thing, when you don’t get other things done, like food or looking after your children — I see heaps of people in town not really looking after
their children very well because they’re more preoccupied with what they have to do [sell drugs], because they have to, I guess.

Other people also mentioned that some members of the alternative community were avoiding the town, presumably because of the ‘drug problem’. Katie said, ‘It is pretty bad, in just the one main street. Nimbin has seen a lot in the last few years, things that we’d rather not have seen. A lot of the hippies are just cutting off and getting out of it in their little bit of heaven’. ‘Bill’, one of those who are cutting off in their little bit of heaven, feels very strongly about the drug problem:

The hard drug problem? The dealing is the problem! ... There’s sleazebag, wheeling and dealing smackhead types selling to tourists for copious amounts of money, driving hoon cars ... And I find that nauseating. I really do, I don’t like it, and I’d like to see the town rid of those people, they’re not alternates, they’re just the flotsam and jetsam from the city. They were used to hanging around the streets in the cities, and now they’re hanging around the streets of our little town. They’ve wrecked the town, they’ve ruined it, it’s gone.

For ‘Eagle’, a young runner, the drug problem is the aggressive side of the street scene: ‘Just the dickheads here ... Most of the people involved in selling drugs on the street are dickheads. I think it sucks ... There’s nothing wrong with selling, but you just do it to your friends, you don’t do it on a commercial scale, like trying to hit up every mother fucker who walks down the street and just doesn’t want to know about it’. Will, heroin user and dealer, said something similar: ‘I think in most people’s minds it was the wrong sort of drugs. Certain drugs are easy to take, and I think it’s a central problem in Nimbin. There is a criminal element, but only in the fact that prohibition can set in’. Bob Hopkins also focused on ‘hard drugs’, the media, and the ‘flotsam’ when speaking about a ‘drug problem’:

The heroin scene was here then, but it was very much a small group who looked after itself, made sure no kids got to it. The publicity brought people here, the people who came were travelling with cases full of pharmaceuticals for sale. So the Nimbin drug scene has developed, but it still carries survival services in place: the Rainbow Cafe’s really important, the street, the Museum, the Neighbourhood Centre, the Hall, and the country, where we’ve got so much property, places where people can be on the street and be poor. There’s nowhere else in Australia where you can do it, other than some city locations, and even then you’re likely to get hassled and moved on.

David Helliwell, Nimbin GP agreed that there is a drug problem:

Yes, I’d have to say we have problems from drugs. We have an increasing rate of intravenous drug usage, both opiates and amphetamines. We have a situation where we have become a centre for the trade in marijuana, and that, in fact, is how people will fund other drug habits. So we have people coming to sell, and we have people coming to buy, all coming to Nimbin. So we have, I guess, an environment where people work selling drugs, using drugs, and to some extent getting rich as well ... To a lot of people, the street is their livelihood.

However, many of Nimbin’s alternative community did not believe that Nimbin had a ‘drug problem’. For example, Lismore Councillor and MO resident Diana Roberts disagreed:

If I were to answer it from my own personal perspective, I would say that a drug problem exists when a person doesn’t have control over their drug of choice. In other words, where
their drug is controlling their life ... On the basis of this I’d say some people have a drug problem. To say Nimbin has a drug problem implies Nimbin has more of a drug problem than anywhere else. Nimbin has a media image problem in relation to drugs and drug dealing, and using on the main street is a problem to the community of Nimbin’ ...

There’s been a range of responses [to the ‘drug problem’]. My first direct involvement in any of them was the public meeting that was called in Nimbin, I think that would have been in 1989. There was a sort of a community forum that I thought was managed appallingly, where all these people who set themselves up as some sort of consultative committee or group on the drug thing called a public meeting. They called everyone into the hall, sat up the front and gave their own perspectives, none of which I could really relate to, and then stopped any debate from the floor. What we saw after that was an increased police presence in town for a few weeks, and nothing changed. So that was my first introduction to how the community deals with the ‘drug problem’. I know that there’s a long history before that, but that was my first encounter.

When I was elected to council it was at the same time as a group formed, called the Nimbin Ratepayers and Progress Association. Now primarily they had formed to respond to Nimbin’s sewage problem, which put me at complete odds with them, in terms of what they perceived as being the solution. But they ultimately also became involved in the drug problem, and their way of dealing with it I found to be incredibly antagonistic, not at all compassionate, not empathetic, confrontational and really angry. To me it seemed like they were bringing up a lot of fear, and a lot of that fear, I believe, must be within themselves as people, if that’s the way they were trying to solve problems. Because it didn’t seem to me that stuff like demanding an increased police presence, and demanding the closure of the needle exchange program, and demanding the closure of the methadone program, and other harm reduction programs, wanting to drive people off the streets, and clean up the streets and make Nimbin look nice and clean. To me they didn’t seem to be creative solutions at all. I believe that there are people within that organisation who are genuinely concerned and compassionate people, but the stance that they took as an organisation, I felt was quite inappropriate.

Bob Hopkins said something similar about Nimbin town meeting to discuss drugs:

Look, the thing about this is that they never, ever, came up with any positive measures. The complaints tended to be more like: ‘You’re to blame’. It was like hit the junkies across the head, blame everyone, and go home feeling contented. The police would be lurched into action for two weeks, arrest everybody in sight for anything. A lot of innocent people would get busted in those times. After two weeks the cops would disappear back to their normal duties, and the town would go back to normal, it’s just a silly situation ... There was this spell that was around here, it really was based on fear. Everyone was scared. We’d sit there like Jews in a concentration camp and listen to these people say things that were distortions. They weren’t true, but you couldn’t get up and defend yourself because if you did, you’d stand out as a pot smoker. Even though we were obviously pot smokers, none of us were defending our rights, because we were rural, we stand out. You’re more visible.

‘Peter’, a transient injecting drug user from Sydney said: ‘No, Nimbin has no more of a drug problem than any other place in Australia ... it’s just that Nimbin gets more media attention than any other country town’. ‘Flame’, an MO resident, also disagreed that Nimbin had a drug problem: ‘Marijuana, with a bit of education, should also not be used as an everyday thing, but as special thing .. where it gets used not misused. It’s the same with alcohol’. ‘Flame’ pointed instead to the visibility of Nimbin’s drug market: ‘It’s more out in the open. Unfortunately a lot of people need drugs, and its very, very obvious in Nimbin, people with eight hundred dollar
Nimbin views

Habits have to turn up every single day, and their faces are there every single day ... [but] yeah, if people come into the village to buy hemp, it’s good the service is there for them’.

The point that Nimbin was virtually one small village street was made by others. Lawyer David Heilpern said:

I don’t think that Nimbin has any more of a drug problem than anywhere else in our society. Nimbin’s drug problem is more obvious. You see, people live in Nimbin because they want to live there, not because they want to work there or because they want to die there, but because they want to live there. And living there means being really active and part of the community, so of course there are aspects of that community like, for example, having children. Does Nimbin have a children problem? Well, there’s a hell of a lot more children out on the street, and you see them dancing around and whatever, but that doesn’t mean that it’s got more of a problem ... It’s a more visible aspect of the society, and also there’s a concentration in Nimbin of unemployed people. So there’s people with more time and perhaps more recreational drug use, but certainly not more of a problem. I would say less of a problem than the ... bowling club has on a Friday night.

Those involved in the cannabis market also identified the small, almost stage-like main street as a ‘problem’, along with the attitudes of some members of the business community. ‘Dee’, a cannabis dealer, blamed problems associated with the street scene on the town’s geography:

Everything’s fenced off and the pub’s fenced off all around the backyards, and the bakery’s fenced off, it’s almost like they’re trying to close areas off from people to deal, so as to make it more obvious in the street, yet complain about it being in the street. I think it’s a paradox that they do that, that they close off these backyard sections and back alleys that people hide in to do their drug life. They’re creating what they don’t want, they’re creating what they don’t want to see. They don’t want to see it, but they’re stopping people from hiding it.

And ‘Tom’, a local injecting drug user who deals to support his habit, echoed this viewpoint:

Well, as far as being on the street’s concerned, I reckon they’ve done it to themselves basically ... As far as dealing smack or marijuana, they’re telling everybody they want it off the street, and they realise it’s not going to stop, and they know it’s just gonna keep happening, and they just want it off the street. Well, every spot in town which was a nice quiet spot, where you couldn’t be seen from the road or anywhere like that, has either been fenced off or destroyed, you know. Because of all the fences and everything, it’s brought every one onto the street, and that’s made them have to do their business actually on the footpath, which is exactly what they didn’t want, and they’ve done it to themselves. I mean there’s no more drug dealing here than anywhere else, it’s just that it’s all on one little street ... [And] I think that the media ... over-exaggerating this bullshit about the heroin scene and stuff in Nimbin, has actually attracted people to come here looking for the heroin, which is not what we want. I don’t want our town to be like that.

In the late nineties more public space became available away from the single main street, and the shopping district expanded. Future research might investigate the effects of such geographical changes on local perceptions of a drug problem.
The role of the media in Nimbin’s ‘drug problem’ was often mentioned. ‘Tom’ suggested that media coverage had ‘advertised’ Nimbin and attracted injectors who would cause problems, while Bob and ‘Will’ both remarked that the publicity attracted purveyors of pills and powders to the relatively ‘soft’ cannabis market. ‘Bill’ also declared that the media publicity had attracted ‘junkies’ and tourists, while the anonymous Nimbin publication The Hitchhiker’s Guide to Nimbin (2001) commented: ‘Another nightmare scenario is the recent influx of tabloid television programs who arrive undercover with hidden cameras, buy some weed and then show the whole thing on national television. This sort of behaviour has resulted in many locals being very camera shy’.

For some, the ‘junkies’ had ruined their enjoyment of the village and hinterland; ‘Bill’ said:

You know, I’ve never been robbed. I’ve always felt that if someone stole then they would be needing it more than me, and I’ve never been ripped off. I don’t believe in it, and it just goes against my whole philosophy to have a house with locks on it. And I like the idea if you come to my house and we were out, the stove is always on, there’s a pot on the stove with hot water, get yourself a cup of tea, do what you need and go ... if you want to go and pick some fruit, that’s fine, that doesn’t worry me. Now I’m worried ... We’ve created what’s taken us years and years and we’ve had no help from family or friends, we’ve done it all ourselves. Oh, friends have helped us build, but we had no money and we’ve built ourselves a home ... I’ve got a beautiful place, everything’s just perfect, I have a good network of people, but I now have to shut my gate when we go out. We’re now talking about putting locks on the house, and now lots of hills people are talking about getting Alsatians, Dobermans ... I mean, one of the things that upset us, is even just living here, and [drug injectors] will probably end up causing us to move.

One ‘problem’ that was a recurring theme in Nimbin related to the drug injectors. The next two sections ‘Needles in Nimbin’ and ‘the Drug Injectors’ represent the major discussion of this important topic.
NEEDLES IN NIMBIN

Some people blamed *all* injecting drug users for intolerable problems caused by some; ‘Bill’ said:

I live a long way out of town, I live down an impossible dirt track. I find [needles] all over the road, I find them in my child’s bus stop, I find them in the woodshed. There is no way that those needles can get there from the needle exchange. We are very secluded, we are very private. It took us years to get the power up there, and yet I’ve got needles there. You know, I can’t get stuff delivered from town because they say our track’s impassible, and I’ve got bloody needles up there. And I’m not talking one or two, I’m talking twenty five this year, at least twenty five this year. Why put them where my child gets the bus? My child walks to the bus stop, and we can’t walk barefoot through our bush any more.

My daughter has what she calls her fairy cubby house, and it was in a beautiful bit of rainforest, and OK, I guess it’s a bit cosmic, but we really like it and we planted the orchids. And we’d go there on a hot day, it’s ours, we paid for it, but the junkies dump needles in there. I don’t like having to do things that I don’t want to do, like shut the gates, write signs saying piss off, you know: ‘trespassers will be prosecuted’ ... People up here talk about putting axes under their beds, buying guns, and what’s it for? It’s not for dope growers, it’s the junkies. The junkies come and rip off people’s crops. If they’re not ripping off crops they’re ripping off your TV, they’re chasing your video, if it’s not your video they’re ransacking your house. They’re totally immoral people, it comes down to always being frightened because of the junkies. There’s too many in the town, they’ve taken over. No one’s looking at a solution. A lot of it’s our own fault, we’re far too tolerant.

Further, a problem like discarded needles readily lead to blaming the needle exchange services, and demanding their removal. The town’s drug services were perceived to be part of the ‘problem’ by a small but vocal section of the community. Dr Helliwell described this ‘lack of understanding’ of the issues by some sections of the Nimbin community:

We have individuals who are constantly criticising the [methadone] service. Criticising, I think, inappropriately; in other words people are asking for the removal of the service! I mean we have had the most wonderful suggestion that people on methadone should have their driving licence taken away. They should be brought out to the clinic once a day, and then bussed home, you know. Where are the chains?.

Dr Helliwell went on to explain the situation for injectors in Nimbin before the needle exchange service was established:

At one stage, before we had a needle exchange in Nimbin, we actually had a needle and syringe that were left under the town hall and were shared anonymously. I mean, you know, that’s a recipe for disaster, terrifying! We had a situation, in 1987 I think it was, where I did ten notifications of Hep B in one week. I think one of the things that it’s really important to look at, is that misconceptions occur because we have different goals. If someone has a goal of clean up the street, that may not necessarily be the same as our goal, which is to reduce the harm related to drugs and HIV transmission. I mean, one of the things that I would be happy to be quoted on is that within the drug and alcohol services we have not tested one user positive for HIV in the whole eight years. In a town like Nimbin, with the number of visitors and the level of I.V. drug use, the rate of Hep B and Hep C, and none tested positively, that’s a hell of an achievement ... and that’s our goal, and that’s the difference. Our goals will be different from say, property developers or shop owners.
When asked about discarded needles, ‘Tom’, a long-term resident and drug injector, said, ‘I’d say it was tourists. I mean, the majority of people that do leave fits around are out-of-towners ... I’d say about 95% of people who use [heroin] here will dispose of their fits [needles and syringes] properly. Finding them on the side of the road ... it would have to be the out-of-towners I’d say’. Discarded needles were a frequent complaint (and not only in Nimbin). My injectors’ questionnaire asked about the main methods of disposing of needles and syringes in the past month. Each injector had the option of selecting more than one answer (multiple choice), so that percentages in the following table refer to the total answers (not respondents) in each category, expressed as a proportion of all those who answered the question.

Table 4.7
Usual method of needle disposal among Lismore-Nimbin injectors
(multiple responses) (na = 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods of disposal: %</th>
<th>Total %</th>
<th>‘Nimbin’ (n=49)</th>
<th>‘Lismore’ (n=22)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special disposal bin</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always return to exchange</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threw away in black box</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubbish bins</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burn</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threw away wrapped up</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gave them away</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While a variety of disposal methods were listed, most injectors disposed of their needles safely. The most popular method was in the special disposal bins (usually in public toilets), while the next most popular method was return to the Department of Health’s needle exchange program (NSEP). Some people reported burning their injection equipment (they invariably crossed out the accompanying word ‘bury’), or disposing in rubbish bins in the safety container (‘black box’).

Respondents were asked why they didn’t always return used equipment to a needle exchange. Close to half (46%) always returned their equipment and around six in ten used the exchange or the special disposal bins. Of those who did not, the most often reported reason was a reluctance to carry the ‘black box’, which is bulky. Other reasons for non-return were fear of police, concern over other people noticing, and nowhere to dispose of needles. Injectors added their own reasons to my list, such as ‘too many needles’ for the container, ‘burned needles immediately after use’, ‘too much effort’, ‘easier to dispose of safely in wheelie bins’, and ‘not told they could be returned’. A number of people commented that more disposal bins were needed. Respondents using the ‘Nimbin’ questionnaire were more often concerned about carrying around the used needle containers than Lismore respondents (32%, compared to 25% of those who used a Lismore questionnaire), perhaps reflecting a greater visibility and vulnerability in Nimbin. The restricted opening hours of needle exchange services posed more of a problem for Lismore respondents, where half (48%) listed exchange opening times as inadequate; a similar proportion of respondents (53%) had nominated opening hours as a problem in the 1989 Keys Young study.
Injecting drug users experienced hostile attitudes not only from the community, but also from service providers. Comments included: ‘Chemists should dispense needles in a non-judgemental way’, and another injector wrote: ‘I find the staff in some hospitals can be rude and very judgemental when exchanging needles with them. I think they need educating to realise using addicts are people and have needs and feelings like everyone else in the community, they don’t know enough about our situation/disease’. Another wrote: ‘People share fits on weekends because they can’t get them anywhere else. They won’t go to hospital because certain staff is rude’. Many injectors in the Nimbin-Lismore sample also were worried that people or police would identify them, and these concerns were particularly problematic for respondents using the Nimbin questionnaire. One Nimbin injector wrote: ‘Other people’s attitudes and fear of police are most local users’ prime worries’, and another injector commented: ‘Don’t put exchanges opposite the [shopping] Square or other high profile places, parents from school see me all the time. I hate going there because of this positioning’.

The stigma attached to heroin use was also raised in the taped interviews with health workers and injectors, and in the Keys Young (1991) results. However, there is probably less prejudice in Nimbin than in many other small towns in the region because of the counter-culture’s tolerance.

I wanted to look at the degree of harm associated with injection, including heroin overdoses, needle sharing and access to a range of services. I often came across references to overdoses in Nimbin, so I asked the local GP (who was also attached to the hospital adjacent to his surgery, and was the methadone prescriber for a wider region that included Nimbin). Dr Helliwell said:

Well, per capita, one would have to say yes [there are a lot of overdoses in Nimbin]. I think that we seem to have a spate of them, mostly occurring with visitors to the village. Recreational users. I remember one overdose where this guy was from the Coast, he just got out of jail, and he thought: ‘I’ll come to Nimbin, have a blast’, and of course he’d lost his tolerance, poor bugger, so he dropped. What the needle exchange has been working on very hard over the last twelve months has been looking at reducing the harm from overdose in terms of trying to get people to check what they’re using beforehand. Strategies like always buying from the same dealer, building up a trust relationship with them, so that you are getting accurate information, rather than little information. If you stay with the same dealer, after a while you’ll tend to get information. Like people say: ‘Oh, it’s not as good as last week, but it’s pretty good’. Things like not using alone, things like if you’re unsure of the quality of the heroin, test it first, and then use. Those types of things, like about abusing alcohol the night before, that alcohol affects us the next day. Karen has done a very good job of that, and I think our overdose rate has actually fallen quite dramatically.

Of course, such harm reduction techniques are severely impeded by the arrest of established dealers, and the resultant necessity of hasty and secretive purchases from strangers. Those problems stem from prohibition and policing strategies, not from the drug. Among the dangers associated with heroin injection is the risk of transmission of blood borne viruses such as HIV and hepatitis through needle sharing, and, like the ‘problem’ of drug overdose, this ‘problem’ has serious implications for the individual and society. The NSW needle exchange program was developed to help address needle sharing problems.
I found from responses to my injectors’ survey that few Nimbin-Lismore injectors used needles after other people (more injectors had passed on used needles to someone else). Klee, Faugier, Hayes and Morris (1991) reported that British needle exchange clients were more likely to pass on needles than receive them, probably because partners or friends were not in contact with a needle exchange. This is probably the case here, with exchange clients comprising most of my sample (from the distribution method).

In my sample of injectors, one in five had used a needle after someone else in the past month, and, most had shared needles on only one or two occasions (generally with a partner and after cleaning the needles). The ANAIDUS sample reported more who had used a needle after another (27% compared to the Nimbin-Lismore sample’s 19%) but fewer in the ANAIDUS sample had passed on used needles to others (50% of the ANAIDUS sample compared to 68% in Nimbin-Lismore), probably because ANAIDUS surveyed few needle exchange users. However, compared with the earlier study of non metropolitan NSEP clients (Keys Young 1989), a slightly higher proportion in the Nimbin-Lismore study had not shared needles at all in the past month (65% compared to 60% reported Keys Young), and equivalent low proportions had shared frequently. There is no evidence that Nimbin (or Lismore) injectors are riskier or more irresponsible in their injecting habits than injectors anywhere else in Australia.

I also queried injectors’ use of AIDS and STD (sexually transmitted diseases) testing. The single choice STD answers indicated that 23% rarely or never used STD tests, while 56% regularly or occasionally used such health checks. Most injectors (92%) had had at least one AIDS test, but over half were not satisfied with the pre-test counselling they had received. A common comment was ‘what counselling?’, while other respondents seemed to think that counselling only occurred with a positive test result. The services were not necessarily local and respondents may have been satisfied on some testing occasions and not on others. Fewer ANAIDUS respondents (76%) reported having an AIDS test, which may reflect greater use of testing in recent times, otherwise the difference is notable.

Respondents were asked to select from a list any services they had used for AIDS tests (multiple choice). The most often named services for AIDS testing were general practitioners (GPs) in their surgery. The other main service that injectors used was hospitals, where comments suggested that AIDS tests were associated with surgery or pregnancy.

I also asked injectors to rate their chance of catching AIDS. An unusually high number (20 people) didn’t answer this question. Of those who answered, four out of five perceived their chance of catching AIDS as remote or nonexistent, although the Nimbin results strongly influenced the total proportion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chance catch AIDS: %</th>
<th>Total n = 52</th>
<th>Nimbin (n =36)</th>
<th>Lismore (n=16)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.8
Chance of catching AIDS (%), closed choice, n = 52 (na = 20)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nimbin views</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chance</th>
<th>Nimbin</th>
<th>ANAIDUS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No chance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small chance</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifty-fifty</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong chance</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV positive already</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ANAIDUS respondents were given more and different response choices to rate their chance of catching AIDS, but 12% of ANAIDUS respondents selected ‘No chance’ compared to 2% of my Nimbin sample, although much larger proportions, eight in ten injectors, rated themselves as having a ‘small chance’. ‘Nimbin’ injectors appear to be particularly confident about not catching AIDS, but this may largely reflect the realistic assessment of the high proportion of injectors who have no current sexual partners — so they weren’t sharing needles and weren’t having ‘unsafe’ sex (which are the two major risks for AIDS and other viruses).

Who are the drug injectors? Heroin users were often pointed to as the village’s ‘drug problem’ although other people spoke of prejudice against all injectors for the behaviour of some.

THE DRUG INJECTORS

‘Peter’, a transient drug injector, described problems with some health workers’ attitudes: ‘[We are seen] as being scum ... they don’t seem to work on their attitudes at all. You know they come in the service with the knowledge but [they] are really down on people when they are supposed to be supportive ... you have to draw the right people in for the right job ... otherwise you’re going to fail. There’s nothing worse than having a lot of sick people around who are sick because they’re too nervous about utilising the services that are available — it’s sad’. ‘Tom’, a local injecting drug user, said: ‘People’s attitudes towards drug users are pretty much the same all over, unfortunately’. On the other hand, ‘Flame’, like many other MO residents, was supportive: ‘Heroin users, I think that their particular drug should also be legalised, or at the very least it should be made available for them through government supply. It’s just too cruel, what goes down. I don’t like seeing my friends suffer. They are my friends. I don’t have a fear of someone who takes a pain killer, I can’t organise myself to have a fear about it, it’s purely and simply a pain killer, and it means that those people are in pain as far as I’m concerned’.

Two studies, the Keys Young (1989) and my 1993 Lismore-Nimbin injectors survey (de Launey 1993) also found that the attitudes of health services staff were extremely important to drug injectors. Further, ‘Fiona’ pointed out to me that heroin users were loath to contact the police in violent situations because they feared arrest. This same problem was mentioned by some of the cannabis crop growers I interviewed (Chapter Five), and it comes as no surprise that people may avoid police and other services.

The prejudice against drug injectors extended beyond services to the general public. I was told by one outreach exchange worker of an opiate overdose in Nimbin’s main street, where people walked past the crumpled body, ignoring it completely. When the worker asked for help to carry the person to the hospital, one passer-by said to her: ‘Why don’t you just let them die’. The worker described on-going difficulties in getting help for overdose
victims, although she eventually obtained a second-hand stretcher which made the trip to Nimbin hospital easier.

‘Fiona’, another needle exchange worker, also spoke of particularly hostile attitudes in Nimbin:

[Many people had] very negative attitudes towards injectors, and very little understanding of health issues around injecting drug use. I think its across-the-board throughout Australia, but unfortunately I’ve come up against a sort of a harder element out there [Nimbin], because it’s not hidden out there, it’s not hidden like in Canberra for example. And because people have to face it every day, they’ve either gone one way or the other, and a lot of people have become very ‘anti-’, without any information or with very little information. People still see needle exchange all the time as encouraging drug use and they don’t seem to be able to understand the sort of concepts that the Health Department is into, like that we’re here to minimise harm. I suppose the big thing for me over the last couple of years, working around this area and getting to know a bit more, is how incredibly discriminated against these people are, and how disempowered they are. Because they don’t know anything else they do take on a victim role, and it’s very hard for people to break out of that, to get on with their lives, even though quite a lot of them are doing it. It’s very hard for them to continually try and access services and things, when a lot of people in those services don’t have a good enough understanding of what this whole area of health is all about ...

I just think a lot of the blame stuff is totally out of whack with anything that really happens. Like, an instance with the community hall committee, who have blamed a huge amount of damage, thousands of dollars worth of damage, on intravenous drug users. Now most of our clients have their own place to stay, or stay with friends. There’s not a lot in town of an afternoon, evening or night, they tend to be around more in the mornings, it just doesn’t fit. I think it was actually whole tins of paint and building materials being wrecked, and it just reeks of adolescent stuff. Apart from anything else, there is a lot of young adolescents that are hanging around town, who do not have places to stay. I don’t want to immediately blame another group, but it’s an example where the blame is being put on the intravenous drug users, and often it’s not rational.

Similarly, ‘Dee’ described a prejudice towards injectors among many dealers in the street scene:

The ones that use smack very rarely are accepted by the scene. An etiquette of the scene is who you give your bags to [to sell]. A lot of people want to cut out the smack users, they don’t want them having any mull to sell, they are being vindictive, they want to hang smack users, they talk about them like nasty creatures, and these are generally other runners, who run and get the brunt of their violent anger and aggressive desperation to have the tourist ... Most smack users are people who are very down on themselves and haven’t got a high self esteem.

On one occasion I was sitting in the small triangle of grass which was Nimbin’s only park when two men went running past me. A local explained that they were racing to get to a tourist first. He observed that ‘junkies work harder’. I also experienced the difficulties associated with injectors and the street scene; I was sitting in the Museum when two drug injectors (according to the locals who tried to hustle them back outside) assaulted a third person they believed had ‘ripped off’ an unidentified drug; I found the physical violence very disturbing. ‘Tom’ offered a different perspective:

Right, violence has increased lately, a little bit, basically because of the police. In town the police activity has just been stressing the whole town out. The whole town stresses out, they’re biting each others’ heads off, you know. And the fact that a part of the town scene does rely on mull. Because of all the police activity, the media and stuff, people haven’t been coming here to find their mull, because they know that they’re going to get pulled up, or
searched or busted after they’ve bought their pot. It’s not worth their while coming, and they’re not coming, so there’s not nearly as much business for those people. And they’re not just injectable drug users either — there’s all sorts, there’s teenagers, there’s mothers that are trying to sell pot as an income supplement, all sorts of people. There’s percentages of the people selling pot in town who are injectable drug users, who are going to use the money for their next taste, but, I really find that I don’t see it as a crime you know, selling dope to people who want to buy it.

Michael Balderstone blamed cannabis prohibition for creating ‘junkies’:

It’s just supply and demand. More and more people want pot, the price goes up, more kids using needles, more kids using powders, more danger and disaster. I absolutely can’t stand it sometimes, we’ve all watched kids becoming junkies. They try and hide it at first, but it’s a small community. I’ve lectured kids when they get twenty-five bucks together: buy a good stick and have a few joints. They couldn’t even get that some of the time but you could always get twenty-five bucks worth of powder, so they start using needles. To them it’s: ‘Why not? Everyone tells you bullshit anyway. I can handle it’ ... ask any doctor, young kids get a taste, they go back to it. This is what the fucking drug laws are doing. It’s criminal.

Michael went on: ‘I’ve talked to heaps of junkies who say the best thing, seriously, the best thing for them to get off their habit is two ounces of really good heads’. ‘Fiona’ also mentioned that cannabis was useful to heroin users; she said: There is probably more growing and use of marijuana; that’s just a feeling in Nimbin, but I don’t know, well, quite a lot of injecting drug users use cannabis to get off heroin, which I think is quite useful, and you can use cannabis on top of methadone to get the same sort of effect, which is quite useful too ... people who need to calm themselves down, slow down, thing like that, cannabis use can be quite effective’. One well-known medical use of cannabis is its ability to ease detoxification (‘withdrawal’) from drugs such as opium and alcohol.

My household surveys and taped interviews offer insights into the alternative community’s dreams, their realities, their fears, and my survey of injectors provided important insights into their needs. It must be remembered that my injectors’ sample is not necessarily representative of injectors in Lismore and/or Nimbin; however, it does give some indication of the problems faced by local injectors, and there is some evidence that most injectors lived where they received their questionnaire (from questions about use of needle exchanges and other services in other locations). National and international studies of drug injectors generally recruit two to three times as many men as women (Frischer & Elliott 1993; Hall, Darke, Ross & Wodak 1993; Klee 1993); for example, two thirds of the ANAIDUS sample were men, and almost three quarters of the Sydney sub-sample were male (ANAIDUS 1991). In the 1998 population household survey (AIHW 1999) around 60% of those who had ever injected were male, and twice as many men as women had injected illegally in the past year (that is, women are more likely to give up injecting). In my Nimbin-Lismore survey there were approximately equal numbers of men (51%) and women (49%), but Lismore needle exchange staff report a similar gender equality in NSEP clients on the north coast (half are women).

A very high proportion of the area’s injectors had insecure housing. Four in ten injectors lived in tents, tepees, temporary shelters, or were staying with friends or relatives. A similar proportion (43%) had lived in two or
more different places in the past six months (with only a partial overlap). There were no obvious differences between ‘Lismore’ and ‘Nimbin’ injectors: 43% of both had lived in two or more places. Clearly, a substantial number of the Nimbin-Lismore injectors had insecure housing, and it is very difficult to organise clean needles, return needles, have health checks, or cut down on/give up a drug, when one’s accommodation is inadequate or temporary.

Two-thirds of respondents were not using treatment services, but among those who were, most were using a methadone program (87%); overall, three in ten injectors who responded were currently in a methadone program. Although the questionnaire did not seek comments on methadone there were more criticisms about this heroin treatment program than about any other issue. One respondent wrote: ‘Methadone does more damage to my body and my family’s routine for too long and forces you to be in contact with other addicts who you’re trying to distance yourself from’, while another wrote: ‘Methadone is so hard to come off, weeks or so, heroin withdrawals only last a couple of days, it doesn’t take so much out of you’. Another respondent suggested a more flexible methadone program: ‘Methadone should be more accessible, available when you need it (irregularly) so you don’t have to pay for it [on the black market] as it’s good to come down on’. Explaining the widespread unpopularity of drug treatments (including methadone), one injector commented: ‘I have tried them but found them unsatisfactory: too rigid. No room for tailoring to suit the individual’. This injector simply wanted a low threshold detoxification centre: ‘For too many people who live on the streets the vicious circle cannot be broken for lack of anywhere to go through the miserable process of drying out’.

The Nimbin area’s only methadone prescriber, Dr David Helliwell, told me that the number on methadone at any given time varied between 25 and 45, ‘and that includes servicing Murwillumbah and Pottsville and Kingscliff. No, it’s not a huge number, and in the end I guess, the way I see it is that methadone is a very slow process for a lot of people’. The plethora of negative comments, taken with the small number of local heroin users in my survey who were currently utilising the methadone program (less than 30%) lends strong support to the Swiss alternative to methadone. It seems to me that the only rational and effective approach to heroin use is to supply the drug on prescription.

My Nimbin-Lismore survey also asked how services for drug injectors could be improved. The most frequently selected (69%) of the multiple responses was for safe using places (injecting rooms). Unfortunately this question was not asked in the ANAIDUS (1991) and Keys Young (1989) surveys of injectors. Many more injectors who used the Nimbin questionnaire (three quarters) wanted a safe injecting place, which suggests particular difficulties for injectors in small communities. Comments on Nimbin questionnaires included: ‘NSEP should provide a safe, clean shooting gallery, would create a situation where a much greater percentage of needles would be returned’; another said: ‘I suggest that the needle exchange should have its own operating place where people may use (hit up) there, where there is privacy and the needles are collected, eliminating disposal problems and people hitting up in public places’; other comments included ‘A place where we can meet and have tea and coffee and food to share, and to shoot up as well, and have a sleep and a cup of tea’; and ‘Should push more for a shooting gallery. This would control the problem of needles being dumped all around town’. This injector added:
‘Younger users need more information about hygiene’. A Lismore injector wrote: ‘There should be shooting galleries for users. Some people are very careless about needles, some use too much so it would stop them OD-ing. It could be a safe place and would also stop people driving fast to get home to use, also using then drive. Someone would stop a driver driving just as a drunk should be’.

Injectors took advantage of the spaces provided in the questionnaire to add what were generally well-considered and pertinent comments. One injector attached a letter to their returned questionnaire, and some excerpts on services and personal needs follow:

I would like to further explain the need for a ‘drying out house’. Many people feel, as I do, that the Methadone program does not offer help to people who do not wish to exchange one addiction for another. I applied for a short term Methadone program (2 weeks) and was turned down. I do not want to become dependent on Methadone and believe it to be a more harmful and debilitating drug than heroin when used for any length of time. As short-term programs are denied, and I do not want someone else telling me when I am allowed to reduce the dose, the Methadone clinic is no use to me at all. For many people who wish to break their heroin addiction it seems an overwhelming obstacle when faced with no home, no support ... The practical help needed would be a clean, dry, warm place where people can get through being ill without the pressure of dealing with the ‘straight world’ [including professional help] ... Many of us lead ‘double lives’ because of the stigma attached to heroin use, so that because we use in ‘secret’ we also ‘hang out’ in secret ... I feel that the kind of support programs in existence, while good for some people, are too regimented and demanding at a time when the least pressure is likely to send the person running straight back to heroin ... I work full time (16 hours a day) in my own business, live with straight people who are completely anti-smack. I can get the time off to dry out but have nowhere to go to do it, and it would not be tolerated where I live ... I am trying so hard to keep everything together and make a success of my business but I must stop using.

Among injectors there was overwhelming support for single doses of heroin on prescription: 91% supported the suggestion and the question elicited a number of serious comments, with respondents pointing out that it would reduce the risk of HIV, and questioning who would have control over dosages. Comments included: ‘Supply free heroin to addicts, take away the obscene profit motive and reduce crime, allow addicts to be productive members of society, not having to spend all their time scoring or getting money to score’. Another injector commented: ‘When will the authorities see the futility of their attitude to junkies. Legalise it in a controlled environment’.

I also asked Nimbin-Lismore injectors what drugs they had used in the past month (see also Appendix I). The vast majority of injectors had used tobacco (93%), followed by cannabis (86%) and heroin (77%), alcohol (61%), and a third had injected amphetamines (half of the amphetamine injectors had also injected heroin). The Nimbin-Lismore sample were current injectors: 91% reported that they had injected in the past month, half (51%) injected daily and another quarter injected every two or three days; the remainder (24%) included recreational and experimental users, with 18% injecting once a week or less, and 5% classified as ‘Other’, which was generally ‘once’ or ‘first time’, although some respondents commented that use of a particular drug depended on availability or their finances, so at least some ‘occasional’ users may not be so by choice.
'Tom' spoke to me about secrecy: ‘I remember when I first started to use it, I didn’t want people to know. It was very difficult to keep it really quiet, and there’s quite a few, as they call it ‘closet users’ around the area. People that just, you know, have a taste once in a blue moon, once a month, or once every six months or something. Just recreational users, they’re not really running habits or anything like that, they’re just using it like any other recreational drug’. I asked ‘Tom’ if he thought that the ‘drug problems’ would disappear if heroin was available on prescription; he answered: ‘Yeah, definitely, because I really don’t think that any more people are going to use injectable drugs, whether they’re legal or illegal. I think the same people are going to use those drugs anyway’. Lawyer David Heilpern believed that many problems associated with the heroin injectors would be eased by removing Nimbin’s cannabis market:

The only way ... most of the heroin users in Nimbin, are able to support their habits, is by selling cannabis. It’s a hundred, two hundred, sometimes even three hundred dollars a week, sometimes even two hundred dollars a day habit, that they’re using. And I know for a fact that the only way that they can make that sort of money in town is by selling heroin or selling cannabis. And if we can get the cannabis dollar out of that market, the heroin problem will dissolve. Now people say to me: “Oh yeah that’s all very well, but then people will go and do break and enters and all that sort of thing”. I think that’s bullshit. The reason we don’t have a high break and enter rate in country areas of NSW is because it’s a small town, people know who’s home, and who’s not home. It’s not like the city, where you never meet your neighbours. Break and enters, you know, it’s a hard, risky business — in comparison with selling dope on the streets of Nimbin anyway. So, I’d like to say that, if the drug laws change, you know a lot of those people aren’t going to move from Nimbin, they like it, they’re not going to move to follow the drugs, they’re just going to get off it. And, at the moment the drug laws support an enormous heroin industry. Most of the ganja dollar goes straight up the arms of somebody or other, and into the hands of the heroin dealers. We can only hope that the law changes soon.

My research into injectors in Nimbin-Lismore suggested that north coast injectors are no more problematic than urban injectors (in terms of indicators such as sharing needles and needle disposal, unsafe sex, and use of health services) although there may be particular difficulties associated with being an injector in rural areas, including fewer services and greater visibility. The Premier’s Drug Advisory Council (1996) notes that the rate of intravenous drug use (particularly of heroin and amphetamines) is high in this country compared to other countries (Premier’s Drug Advisory Council 1996, p. 69), that deaths from drug overdoses are increasing (Premier’s Drug Advisory Council 1996, p. 86), and are equivalent to deaths from traffic accidents in Victoria (Premier’s Drug Advisory Council 1996, p. 9). Injectors are forced to the margins of society by prejudice, drug illegality and law enforcement practices — and few treatment choices. However, in Nimbin there is not only great tolerance, there is a safer way of funding a drug habit than might be available in urban sites. As ‘Tom’ pointed out: ‘I think there’s probably a pretty big difference between a person that lives in the bush or in the hills around here that uses injectable drugs, as to an injectable drug user from Sydney. I mean, I think you’d find that the majority of injectable drug users up here would be a lot more honest people, and they don’t have to go to the extent of breaking into houses or stealing ... The majority of people who do support habits in this town sell marijuana’.
OPINIONS ABOUT DRUG POLICY

In my household survey I asked Nimbin householders and MO residents some policy questions, such as whether they thought the government was doing enough, not enough, or too much about drug education, drug treatments, drug dealing, and drug use. Results for these questions are presented in the next two tables, the first for households the second for multiple occupancies.

Table 4.9
Attitudes to various drug policies in Nimbin h/holds (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gvt is doing: %</th>
<th>Drug education</th>
<th>Treatment/ rehab.</th>
<th>Enforce laws for drug dealing</th>
<th>Enforce laws for drug use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enough</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer/ don’t know</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three quarters of all respondents, both household (Table 4.9), and multiple occupancy residents (Table 4.10) believe the government should do more in the way of educating people about drugs. Most people also believed the government was not doing enough in treating people with drug problems (69% of householders and 86% of MO respondents). However, there was markedly less support for more law enforcement for drug dealing and only a minority of householders believed there was not enough law enforcement for drug use, although it is difficult to know exactly what ‘drug use’ the residents were thinking about when they answered this question. Multiple occupancy residents’ views differed markedly from those of householders, particularly in relation to current laws for drug dealing and drug use.

Table 4.10
Attitudes to various drug policies in Nimbin MOs (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gvt is doing: %</th>
<th>Drug education</th>
<th>Treatment/ rehabilitation</th>
<th>Enforce laws for drug dealing</th>
<th>Enforce laws for drug use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enough</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer/ don’t know</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the question on government enforcement of laws relating to drug use, only four in ten households believed the government was not doing enough, and three in ten believed it was doing too much. As with the previous question about drug dealing, MO residents firmly diverged from householders with this question: eight in ten believed the government was doing too much, and none were unsure. Some Nimbin respondents commented that it ‘depended on the drug’ (ie the government was not doing enough about ‘hard drugs’ and doing too much about ‘soft’ drugs). These responses have been included with ‘no answer’/‘don’t know’ responses. These ‘government’ questions highlighted the need to define and clarify the terms used in national opinion surveys.

Among Nimbin residents who were interviewed for the household survey, support for change in drug laws also was reflected in unprompted responses to the question: ‘What else do you think the government should be doing
Nimbin views

about drugs?’ which followed the closed choice questions regarding government performance in education, rehabilitation and law enforcement. Three in ten people first mentioned the legalisation of illicit drugs (usually cannabis), while a similar proportion (30%) mentioned more or better education (usually for young people). Stricter enforcement of laws was mentioned by around one in ten, and the comments included ‘not give them free needles’, ‘more policing in Nimbin’ and ‘come down stronger on ones who use’. The remaining comments (16%) were difficult to classify and included ‘stop subsidies to tobacco growers’, ‘a bigger effort in the right direction’, and ‘Where is the unemployment money going? It’s going to buy drugs’. There appeared to be little support for police activities in Nimbin. Three questions in my 1995 rural household survey related to law enforcement in the Nimbin region. The first question was ‘Has your privacy ever been disturbed by police actions against marijuana growers when you have not been growing marijuana yourself?’ Around two thirds of the household respondents said ‘No’ (62.5%), one third said ‘Yes’ (35%). Many more MO residents (83%) felt personally disturbed by police actions.

The next question asked ‘Have you ever felt personally harassed by such police actions?’. Close to seventy percent of the household sample said ‘No’ (67.5%), 30% said ‘Yes’. Again, many more residents of multiple occupancies were personally harassed (79%). The final question was open ended and asked ‘What other reactions or feelings have you had as a result of police activities against marijuana growers?’ Given responses to the previous two questions, surprisingly few respondents made positive comments about police activities. Despite the fact that only around one third of household respondents said that they felt personally disturbed or harassed by police activities against growers, two thirds did not approve of police activities. Multiple occupancies are generally the main targets of police aerial searches, and it is not surprising to find an even higher level of dissatisfaction (93%) among these Nimbin residents.

Table 4.11
Feelings about police activities in Nimbin, open-ended (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Views: %</th>
<th>Rural households</th>
<th>Multiple occupancy residents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative answers</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive answers</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral/no answer</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following are some of the comments about police activities from rural householders, followed by MO residents’ comments:

‘I don’t feel that the resources and money spent on marijuana control can be justified’.

‘Waste of taxpayers money. It has to be a method of keeping the price up’.

‘Good on the police!’.

‘I think it is a total waste of public money to employ the police with sophisticated equipment to harass people for small time growing of marijuana’.

‘Anger. Feeling of a waste of time and money that could have been better spent in the community’.
‘Harassment, intimidated, under siege, violation of rights, helicopters unacceptable’.

‘It always reminds me of those Vietnam movies. ... my angry reaction is that so much money is put into these campaigns and it doesn’t happen anywhere else. Spend the money rehabilitating the addicts on the street’.

‘A waste of taxpayers money with little results, certainly not ... touching the big growers, a bit too much commando style tactics on small growers and individual users of marijuana’.

‘I have felt a sense of anger regarding police activities against marijuana growers, as I feel that police activity may be an indirect form of suppression of a dissenting political/cultural minority’.

‘It forces prices up, and creates the crime’.

Multiple occupancy residents expressed similar views:

‘Marijuana is used as a handle to vent discrimination against a different minority. It has led to alienation of individuals from their own families and society’.

‘I believe marijuana is a great source of cloth, and a cancer aid, also I think the police are corrupt and are smoking it and selling it, and they love the money it generates by being illegal’.

‘I feel it’s an invasion of privacy and a waste of money and police resources’.

‘I believe the police ... pick on some very small growers, like a single mother who happens to have some seedlings on the tank and they give her a huge fine.

Leave small people alone and control the amount of smack and speed on the market’.

‘I feel that such activities are a waste of time and public funds which could be far better used policing other types of crime. Also that often there are serious mistakes made in matters of identity and false harassment’.

‘Object to the noise and harassment, invasion of privacy by helicopters’.

‘I feel that the helicopter raids are a horrible waste of police funds that should be spent on more serious social problems’.

‘Strong feelings of political intimidation’.

‘Cops are crop snatchers, they bust crops and then release the substances into the mainstream. Total control and profit’.

‘Anger, hate, intimidation, nervousness’.

‘I feel that people know the risk when they grow, and they should find ways to combat the laws not the enforcers. Police only take action because of pressure from above and because it is decreed illegal. We should be fighting for the right to smoke and grow, not the police’.

‘I feel it is an expensive, unnecessary, outmoded, offensive and disturbing action’.

Among householders, there was strong support for adult use of cannabis, and more education about drugs, and there was little community support for law enforcement as experienced in the region; less than one-quarter of respondents believed that heroin was a community concern. Injectors worried about discrimination and services,
and they wanted heroin on prescription; there was no evidence that they were more irresponsible than injectors in other places, and this observation is supported by the region’s high needle return rates. There is high unemployment in Nimbin, as there is throughout the north coast region, and few opportunities. Yet according to Michael, Nimbin is ‘a really warm, family, tribal, friendly little town. In the street scene there’s a couple of hundred people here every day, shopkeepers, drug dealers, junkies and street kids, the whole array of nutters, weirdos, beggars, the lost and searching’. Arguably, the Nimbin community has coped better with these social problems than many other places, possibly because the alternative community is both tolerant and socially responsible.

Earlier chapters presented ways of understanding drugs and drug ‘problems’; in this chapter I have presented Nimbin residents’ viewpoints on a range of drug-related issues. Many of those who believed that Nimbin had a ‘drug problem’ identified the ’junkies’ (discussed in this chapter) or the ‘the street scene’ (discussed in the next chapter). Among those who did not believe that Nimbin has a ‘drug problem’, many pointed to the town’s geography, the drug laws and their enforcement, and/or the excessive and unfavourable media attention, all of which will be discussed in the following chapters. The next chapter will examine the drug economy in more detail.
CHAPTER FIVE
A DRUG ECONOMY

It was hard to ignore the street drug market in Nimbin; this version of the ‘drug problem’ was often referred to as ‘the street scene’. In the household survey I asked rural residents and multiple occupancy volunteers to what extent they thought cannabis contributed to the local economy. Two thirds of the household sample and 93% of the MO sample believed that the sale of cannabis contributed to the economy, while 7% of both household and MO samples firmly believed that cannabis did not, and close to a third of rural householders did not know.

Table 5.1
Does cannabis contribute to the local economy? (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contribution</th>
<th>Rural households (n=40)</th>
<th>MO volunteers (n=29)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know/ not sure</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is impossible to estimate how much money changes hands in Nimbin’s drug market. Bob Hopkins spoke of ‘an incredible cash turnover’, and ‘Dee’ estimated $50,000 a week during peak periods, dropping to perhaps $10,000 in quiet times (this was in 1995), while in 1998 Nimbin’s Chamber of Commerce estimated the value of the drug trade as around $175,000 per week in summer, and $50,000 per week in quiet times (Northern Rivers Echo 7 August 1997, p. 8), although it is not clear how those figures were derived. The only way to obtain a valid estimate would be to examine the annual turnover of legitimate (and effective) green cafes.

In my examination of Nimbin’s green economy I will start at the beginning, with the crop growers, the cannabis ‘farmers’, before discussing the street market and law enforcement.

THE GROWERS

As well as the eight formal interviews with large-scale growers (which are the focus of the following discussion), I also spoke informally with people who grew smaller amounts of cannabis (‘patches’). My research into crop cultivation highlights a range of myths. For example, large crops are invariably ‘commercial’ quantities and small amounts are for personal use. Also, the weight of the cannabis is not an indication of the value of the plant (as discussed shortly).

I found that the size of the crop is not an indication of cultivation for the market. One informal contact (that is, not one of the eight formal interviews), regularly put in a large crop with friends (100 to 200 plants) to provide
cannabis for their personal use throughout the year. Conversely, people might grow a small number of plants (10 to 20), with the express intention of selling them; one informal contact grew twenty plants in his backyard; twelve were female and, when they were harvested, he kept some for his own use, and sold eight ounces of heads for $1,200. He used these profits to purchase a car, which helped him to find part time work. For most (but not all) of the people I spoke to, formally and informally, the crops and patches provided cannabis for personal use and for sharing with friends, not only (or even necessarily) for the market. Thus, the number of plants are not an indication of cultivation for the market.

Eight ‘commercial’ crop growers answered a number of questions about cultivation for the market. Following the method I had used for surveying injectors, I initially gave 16 questionnaires with stamped return-addressed envelopes to contacts to distribute among growers. Only two were mailed back to me, so I recruited six growers for semi-structured face-to-face interviews (for further details about methods and results refer to Appendix V). Like the household survey and some taped interviews, this phase of the research faced the additional problem of recruiting participants during the protracted police operation El Dockin. Some of the interviews with growers were hurried, respondents tended to be very nervous, and I did not pursue topics that seemed to be sensitive.

Of the eight large-scale growers who responded by mail or were interviewed face-to-face, six were men and two were women. Although I made an effort to recruit women growers, it proved to be particularly difficult. I was told that women rarely grew crops alone because of the heavy work involved — although they might work in partnership with a lover, son or friend, providing cash, use of a vehicle, or other services such as ‘trimming’ (preparing the heads) for the market.

All eight participants had grown large crops (over 100 plants) for profit at some time, while recent crop sizes (over the past three years) ranged from ‘a few’ to 500 plants. Half had planted recent crops of 40 plants or less, and half had grown recent crops of more than 100 plants. All had planted crops for profit in the last three years, most within the last year. Half had been growing for over ten years, and Half for two to five years. Table 5.2 provides information about the crop growers who were formally interviewed for this thesis.

### Table 5.2
#### Profile of crop growers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grower</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Interview type</th>
<th>Av. number plants (recent crops)</th>
<th>Years growing crops</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Mailed</td>
<td>100-200</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Mailed</td>
<td>20* (x2 p.a.)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>20 -500</td>
<td>15-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>100 (x2 p.a.)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>1-16</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>10-40</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14-19</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>10-20</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* an average of 20 female plants per 100 mixed sex, twice pa.
I asked growers to estimate the weight range and/or the average weight of a single cannabis plant. The estimates provided in table 5.3 are for marketable cannabis only (dried, with roots and stalks removed).

Table 5.3:
Average weight & weight range for one plant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>grower</th>
<th>average weight</th>
<th>weight range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 oz</td>
<td>1 - 3 oz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>na</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 lb*</td>
<td>1 - 4 lb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3 oz</td>
<td>1 oz - 10 lb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>about 8 oz**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5 oz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>4 oz</td>
<td>2 oz - 1 lb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>4-5 oz leaf, 2 oz heads</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* (if the grower is experienced, (see below).
** 'Impossible to judge', (see below).

The weight of the saleable parts of the plant apparently can fall within a wide range — one ounce to ten pound, and the weight appears to be a direct result of growing conditions and the growers’ experience. Most growers put the average weight of the saleable parts of a plant as between 2 and 5 ounces, although one grower estimated one pound. This long-term, very experienced, grower explained the reason for the wide variation in plant weight that I’d obtained: ‘An amateur grower would get four ounces from a plant, a reasonable grower would get about eight ounces, and an experienced grower one to four pound’. He said that many so-called ‘crops’ were only yielding a few ounces, and he asserted that it took ‘an expert’ to ‘pull ten or twenty pound of high quality cannabis from a crop’. A female grower was very reluctant to estimate weights or value: ‘It’s impossible to judge unless I can see the plants’ she said, ‘No two plants are the same … the record for one plant is about eight pounds, but that only happens once in a blue moon, and … prices fluctuate from one week to the next’.

Growers stressed that the weight of a plant was critically dependent on where it was planted, how much rain fell, and the time of year. One said: ‘the weight of the plant depends on the soil, season, weather, el nino and so on, there’s so may factors involved, and they’ll change sex so easily’. Another said ‘plants can’t be valued at price per ounce because some plants only give you one head … I’ve never got more than two ounces from a plant because I can’t care for them from a distance’. In (reluctantly) offering average weights, the growers were probably referring to heads rather than the whole plant — heads are the only relevant part of the plant for the growers.

The Criminal Justice Commission (1994) estimated an average of one pound from a cannabis plant, although it’s not clear whether the prisoners and police officers who assisted the Commission were referring to the weight of heads only, or were including leaf and tips, or even stalks and stems. The Commission estimate of a one to four pound yield from a single plant is only reasonable where the grower is an expert and has ideal growing
conditions, or if leaf and stalks are included. Cannabis plants may be seedlings, male plants, or leaf-only plants; they may contain stalks, and may be recently harvested (wet). Weight loss between a recently harvested and a dried plant was estimated by one grower to be between 25% and 75%. Growers stated that plants which were leaf or male were of little or no value, yet a grower caught with several pounds of cannabis leaf as opposed to a few ounces of female heads risks higher penalties for substantially lower returns. Generally speaking, seedless heads attract the highest financial returns for the time, money, risks and effort associated with growing a crop. Male plants in the vicinity will pollinate female plants, resulting in seeds, so male plants are pulled out of the crop. ‘Professional’ crop growers can become quite angry with amateur growers, as one grower complained: ‘Some dickhead up the road, their pollen screws up your female plants’, while another used the analogy of a father guarding virgin daughters from unwanted pollination.

Robson (1999) also pointed out that cannabis varieties and potency were directly related to the growing conditions:

Whilst there are a number of varieties of *c. sativa* named after their geographical location (e.g. *c. indica, c. americana*) they are all essentially the same plant. Resin content and shape depends upon ambient conditions. If grown in peaty or heavy soil in a warm, wet climate, tall, solid plants ideal for fibre extraction result. Plants grown in sandy soil in hot, dry surroundings are rich in resin, most of which is exuded from the flowering tops of female plants, coating nearby leaves and stalks ... A particularly potent form known as *sinsemilla* (literally without seeds) is obtained by culling out the male plants before pollination can occur. This results in ... a particularly abundant yield of the resin which contains the mind-altering ingredients ’ (Robson 1999, pp. 72-73).

The potency of cannabis plants are critically dependent on environmental conditions and the grower’s skills. Hydroponic cultivation was an obvious response to the increasing difficulties in growing ‘bush’ crops. Hydroponic cultivation presents unknown health risks, and will yield quite different average weights, potency and ‘crop’ values compared to the open-air crops. The *Hitchhikers Guide to Nimbin* (2001) commented:

Hydroponic plants are grown using chemicals, however it is possible to grow under lights organically. Just as it is possible that outdoor plants are often grown with chemicals. [In the case of hydroponic cannabis] some people flush the plants thoroughly with water (as we all know you need to) and others use Mortein to kill the insects and don’t flush at all ... Hydroponic plants do not see the moon and are not touched by the sun and don’t feel and get their nourishment from the soil and the falling rain. Take care when smoking hydroponic marijuana. See if anybody know the plant’s history ... And as more and more growers move inside to grow hydroponically, the era of sun kissed, natural organic buds is waning.

The results from my research raised questions about popular stereotypes of crop growers, including organised criminal involvement and highly lucrative drug trafficking. The growers who participated in my research might be better described as independent local entrepreneurs with aspirations for an improved quality of life, rather than as ‘Mr Bigs’ of the drug world. The growers’ financial aspirations were generally modest, and usually involved meeting the costs associated with vehicles, homes, children and entertainment. In an area with high unemployment and widespread poverty some growers made a reasonable income, but many who claimed to grow for profit actually made very little money — being ripped off in one way or another year after year. Their profits
A drug economy

in the past year ranged from $50,000 to zero, although some growers may have been reluctant to admit to large profits. One grower said that they had made $50,000 from their last crop, one said that they would have made $30,000 to $40,000 if they hadn’t been ripped off, another said they’d made around $500 (because they’d been ripped off), two others said $300 for the same reason, and a sixth said ‘not much’ (because they grew fewer plants following repeated rip offs).

THE VALUE OF A POT PLANT

As cannabis users dominate the overall arrest figures for illicit drug use, so too do cannabis seizures dominate arrests for large amounts (‘supply’ and ‘cultivation’). Police use the weight of the cannabis plants to determine the charges, and the seizures are described in terms of an arbitrary $2,000 per plant. As well, the number of plants seized and the ‘street value’ of crop seizures influence public perceptions of the seriousness of the offences, and help to demonstrate the effectiveness of drug operations, so that these definitional issues have very real social ramifications.

In 1994 lawyer lecturer David Heilpern argued in a Lismore court that the standard $2,000 per plant represented ‘street’ prices, and should not, in fairness, be applied to cannabis crops. Mr Heilpern was reported as telling the court: ‘Nobody values a cow on the basis of the cost at a butcher’s of prime rump steak’ (Northern Star 29 October 1994, p. 3). I was interested in his line of argument, and so I asked growers to estimate the value of a single plant.

I asked growers what different grades of cannabis were worth to them and I was told that prices, like plants, apparently depended on a number of factors, and often fluctuated from one week to the next. Estimates of the value of the lowest grade of cannabis (male plants or leaf) ranged from nil to $100 per plant. Male plants were usually pulled up, mulched in, thrown away, or eaten, although cannabis cookies made from leaf and tips (and selling on the street for $2 to $5 each) provide an example of value-adding to the (relatively) unsaleable parts of the crop. Estimates for the value of a mix of leaf and tips to the grower ranged from $100 to $500 per plant, and one grower commented that he left the tips to mature into heads; so that tips really had no value to him. Estimates of the value of female seeded (‘seedy’) heads ranged from $400 to $750 per plant. Generally, cannabis heads which have seeds are not worth as much as ‘sinse’ (sinsemilla, or seedless heads), and the price difference reflects the lower potency and/or the reduced amount of smokeable cannabis with seedy heads — although after reading this statement (as a cross-check), one grower pointed out to me that the presence of seed is not necessarily a handicap, because ultimately the buyer judges the product by its potency (the THC content).

All the growers stressed that the value of the crop also depended not only on quality, but also on factors such as the time of year, demand, and amount of care given to the plants. Prices were lower when there was a glut, and two growers provided (1995) estimates of seasonal variations in price are given with Table 5.4.
Table 5.4
Estimated value sinsemilla/ unseeded heads

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grower</th>
<th>$ value per plant</th>
<th>$ value per ounce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>500*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>300-400</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1,000 - 2,000</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>300**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1,000 - 5,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1,000 (if 4 oz)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Harvest is March to June: $200-300, July-Feb: up to $500-600 per oz
** Very early or very late: $150-200, middle: $350-450, late $500 per oz

Some growers did not discriminate between seedy heads and ‘sinse’, and the prices for ‘top grade’ cannabis in some cases apply to both seedy and seedless heads. Some growers provided dollar values for ounces rather than for single plants. Note that the plant averages in this table refer to high quality heads, not to a product with leaf and stalk included. Customers prefer heads rather than the relatively worthless leaf which has low THC content.

At the time of these interviews in the mid-nineties, cannabis heads were selling ‘on the street’ in the north coast for anything between $300 and $1,000 an ounce, although the price depended on the time of year and the quality, and prices were invariably cheaper for dealers and friends.

Current cannabis laws are unable to discriminate between growing to sell and growing to use, but also fail to consider the realities of the market, which is based on demand quality not weight. The price of cannabis is determined by ‘product’ factors such as THC content and absence of leaf, stalk, and seeds, and by external factors such as the time of year and demand. Currently, the weight of plants determines the gravity of the crime (including the increasingly important legal discrimination between personal use and ‘supply’), while the only reasonable way to describe cannabis crop seizures is in terms of the THC content, not in terms of plant weight or an arbitrary ‘street value’.

I asked growers why they grew commercial crops. They often mentioned personal supply, but many also had idealistic, or even reverent, attitudes towards cultivation of cannabis. For example, the teenage grower said:

I like to sell for low prices because I believe people shouldn’t have to pay hideous amounts of money to smoke a herb, when they could grow their own if they had a good location. [Q: What problems do you have?] Harassment from other people, who think you shouldn’t be doing it at that age. They think, believe, first of all, that young people shouldn’t be smoking pot, and they get really pissed off when they find out I’m growing it, but after I talk to them they realise it’s better I grow it than getting involved with the street scene to supply my marijuana use ... I only sell pot when its necessary to buy something important ... I try not to make my standard of living higher ... I buy shoes, get the car registered, things like that. I try not to abuse the profits and take it for granted.

Another grower said, ‘I like the mull, I think it’s good to grow mull — I like doing it’, and another grower explained: ‘It’s the only way someone like me ... (unemployable) can make money, and also my ideals motivate
me — everyone should get high at least once’. Another grower said, ‘It drew me to the forest, put me in touch with the real world, [and] to get medicine to the masses instead of alcohol and cigarettes, you get a hit of ganja out to the masses ... but connectedness with nature — ganja has taught me so much about being in touch with the forest’; and another explained: ‘Inability to get a smoke ... and to get a bit of cash ... I’d much rather the laws were changed so that we could just give it away or share it. It’s a sacred plant to me, and I don’t like having money involved in it’. Another grower gave as their reason for growing cash crops as: ‘To supply my marijuana habit without paying money and getting involved in dangerous illegal activities’, while another said, ‘A pot smoker tired of paying for an easily grown, innocuous plant. The monetary gain in my case is not substantial, [but] the money does come in handy’.

One woman grower stated that: ‘Females have a different attitude to growing, women approach it differently, more respect and reverence for the plant, not dollar signs in our eyes. I don’t think about how much money I’ll make, I think of it as my own supply, and if there’s anything over, I might sell it to pay the bills or whatever’. The other woman told me that:

So far the big problem is ... partners, partners are your worst enemies. You need [the men] for heaving digging but they have dollar signs in their eyes. I know a husband who is selling her half of the crop at half price. Any women who grows with a man has had it ripped off or he “got less” for it. Somehow you’re entitled to less, when push comes to shove, and they see the heads sitting there.

When asked how things had changed over time, four growers said that they now grew smaller amounts (several patches rather than a single large crop), more hidden, harder to access. One large scale grower was growing an estimated one twentieth of earlier crops, and individual plants were smaller because it was too difficult to care for them properly. Another long-term grower commented:

You gotta be a fox, you have to evolve ... there’s less and less forest, the environment around you becomes more and more crowded, less and less space for anonymity. That means more people watching you ... There’s police helicopters, more sophisticated policing, more people growing smaller patches, and more smokers, so more demand for what there is, and the cost of living is higher, so people are trying to subsidise their wages or dole — ten to twenty plants make ten to fifteen thousand dollars to subsidise your wages.

The amateur backyard grower I mentioned earlier only effectively made $1,200 on his twenty plants, not $15,000, but an experienced grower (such as Grower #3, quoted above) could earn $1,000 per plant ($15,000 for 15 plants) if each plant yielded around four ounces of sinsemilla. It is obvious that the ‘street value’ of a cannabis plant ($2,000) actually reflects the upper end of the market, the value to the grower of high yield, high quality heads (it could not possibly refer to other parts of the cannabis plant or to lower or poorer quality yields).

While profits can be high, a pervasive picture of little profit and high loss emerged from both the formal interviews and informal conversations. The main factors which reduce the number and quality of marketable plants are: male plants, crop theft (rip-offs), and the difficulties involved in caring for an illegal crop. A woman grower mentioned that ‘you can lose 70% of a crop to thieves, rot, wallabies and moths’. One grower said that
'about half the crop will be female if you’re lucky’. Another said: ‘one plant is for the cops, one is for the rip offs, one plant is going to be male, one plant goes to pests, and the fifth is for you’, while another said that it was usually ‘one for the cops and three for the rip-offs’. Theft can range from crop loss while still in the ground (by professional searchers, chance discoveries, or acquaintances) to the guys with hoods and shotguns’ as one grower put it, following the harvest.

‘Rip offs’ are regular experiences, as the following grower comments illustrate. ‘There’s patch thieves and stash thieves and unpaid credit. I gave a pound to some friends to sell and they got held up by a shotgun’. ‘Rip-offs? Ninety-nine percent are lost this way. I had every crop for 16 years ripped off, now I only grow a few’.

‘My last crop was ripped off. It was worth around $40,000. They go out in range rovers, with kids on trail bikes who fan out. They take maps [of the state forests] and work an area in grids. [But] most of your thieves are your friends’.

‘Last year virtually the entire crop was taken. [Q: how often have you been ripped off?] Regularly. Young kids and outsiders who come to the area especially for the purpose, just get dropped off and roam through the hills. Nowadays mistrust is so widespread, it’s coming between neighbours. You don’t know who to believe’. The teenaged grower commented, ‘You face getting ripped off, that’s probably the biggest one ... other smokers, unpaid credit from friends, just neighbours ripping off ... it’s rare for me, but for a lot of the growers it is a major problem, you’re more likely to get ripped off than busted by the police’.

It’s not surprising that crop rip offs are such a common experience; the profits can be enormous, and not all thefts involve crops in the ground. One grower said: ‘[There are] the violent rip offs. Home invasions are the biggest fear, they’re rarely reported’. As the value of cannabis increases (as a result of successful police operations), so too the violence associated with cannabis theft may be expected to increase; and, like the value of the drug black market, the actual number of serious crimes of this sort will never be known. According to David Heilpern (1995), in the first six months of 1995 (around the time of my interviews), nineteen armed home invasions were reported to police in the north coast region. Most involved cannabis, and many more were not reported. Some of the people I spoke to feared the police, and some growers suspected police involvement in rip-offs; that is, they believed that police officers targeted people’s homes for armed robbery based on information from informants or helicopter and light plane crop sightings (first waiting for the crop to be harvested).

One grower commented, ‘I was told of this, just this morning. A gun was put in their mouth by people who were so out of it they were really dangerous — there was even a concern that it might have been the police or tied in with police’, while another grower believed that one in four rip-offs originated with the police. Although the stories of rip-offs spread rapidly through the alternative culture, incidents are rarely reported to the police. Over the course of my research, I was told of several violent incidents from different sources.

In one case, the home invasion was described as frighteningly professional: the invaders burst into the bedroom and woke the couple by discharging a shotgun near their bed. The residents (one naked), were forced to the floor and tied up, and the phone line was cut. They were in fear for their lives, as the invaders expected to find a crop but the victims only had a few ounces. It seems that the invaders’ information was a little out of date, and the
residents were not the people the invaders were looking for. On another occasion a dealer in the main street was
dragged into a car at gun point, driven to a remote area, robbed and dumped. In another incident a woman was
forced to kneel before two men in balaclavas, one with a shotgun and the other with a machete (her young
children were in the next room). These intruders took money and cannabis without harming anyone, but she told
me that she was still terrified to be alone several years later. The situation was luridly described by NZ
*Penthouse* (Farry 1997, pp. 36, 104): ‘NIMBIN’S DOPE GROWERS ARE REAPING A DEADLY HARVEST...
As psychedelia turns to psychosis, the once-quiet hills of Nimbin now echo to the sounds of gun fighting and
jungle warfare ... so far the violence has been sporadic, but as the stakes get higher, there’s every chance
Nimbin’s lush green pastures may soon run red’. There will certainly be more, rather than less, violence
associated with the drug market as products become scarcer and prices correspondingly rise. Queensland’s
Criminal Justice Commission commented that police activities against cannabis growers may have the
unintended consequence of supporting organised criminal involvement in the vast cannabis market, by removing
the independent growers (Criminal Justice Commission 1994, p. 89).

Despite the regular, expensive, large scale police activities in Nimbin (discussed further at the end of this chapter)
— described by many as a ‘drug war’ against the village — there is no evidence that the market for cannabis in
Nimbin (or elsewhere) is growing smaller. On the contrary, evidence suggests that cannabis use is increasing
rather than falling (AIHW 1999; Donnelly & Hall 1994), and, as noted in earlier chapters, the existing cannabis
market is large. Who, then, will supply the expanding (and decriminalised?) market in the future? Further,
Wodak and Owens (1996) suggested that other drugs (such as amphetamines) will quickly fill the vacuum created
by successful anti-crop operations, and Castells (1998) pointed to the global problems associated with criminal
access to the vast profits from the illegal drug trade. The Wood Royal Commission (NSW Government 1997b,
1997c) stated that the illicit drug market in Australia was the single major cause of police corruption. There are
many ‘drug problems’ that are directly traceable to drug illegality, including the black market.

While the growers, not surprisingly, were an extremely secretive group, the sellers were an extremely social lot.
As ‘Dee’, a long-time woman dealer, put it: ‘Sometimes it’s a whole scene, and there’s friends there that you
enjoy seeing every day, and you become part of the family with them. It’s a lot to do with finding your own
tribe, and it’s a lot to do with surviving on the planet without an education’. The next section will explore the
street market in more detail.

**THE BUYERS AND SELLERS**

People come to Nimbin to buy drugs. If they are not known to the sellers they are called ‘touros’ or ‘tourists’.
The financial turnover from the street market is substantial, and certainly has an impact on the economy of the
whole area. For example, ‘Dee’ said: ‘When it’s at the low points I’d say ten to fifteen thousand [dollars per
week from cannabis sales], and maybe forty to fifty thousand at a very busy time. And I think a lot of that does
go to Nimbin itself, into the shops, into the straight people’s shops. They hang out the signs: “No drug dealers”
A drug economy

but a lot of their money is drug money. It comes from the tourists who have been attracted here for the drugs, (and for the scenery as well), not for the shops themselves’.

Bob Hopkins said of the market:

There’s a whole set of buyers, there’s a whole set of people who are prepared to sell your pot for you, an incredible industry, incredible cash turnover. I’m an anarchist, I really used to question all notions of authority and taxation. Now I look at the amount of money that goes through this town, and none goes towards building and maintaining the infrastructure of the town. It’s the criminal class that now tax the trade, instead of the government for all the people, or the local council ... The amount of money involved in the illegal drug scene in the area is amazing ... A lot of people have gone away from here and created some pretty classy enterprises. It’s interesting that a lot of that particular group of people never acknowledge where their money came from, and tended to move away from here. Even if they continued to smoke pot, they just sort of moved on. Money is an element in society that produces all sorts of people who smoke pot. We’ve got this community that is extensively quite poor, and yet there’s these huge amounts of money possible. It’s lovely, it really is lovely, these guys who work on the street and sell heaps, it’s all gold at the end of the bloody rainbow, it’s enough to satisfy whatever their needs are.

‘Dee’ told me: ‘Four years ago the growers suddenly put their prices up. They’ve suddenly realised there’s less and less out there ... before, the grower hardly got anything and the person on the street got heaps you know, up to nine hundred dollars an ounce, whereas the growers were giving it for two hundred’. During the grower interviews I was told that profits had increased over the nineties; one told me: ‘[Heads] used to be $300 a pound, now it’s $4,000 a pound’.

The local GP, David Helliwell described the social pressures between the legitimate and the illegitimate businesses in Nimbin:

Tourism and cannabis are the two things that really drive it. If you look at what happens from about November onwards, we have a much larger number of tourists coming through the town until Easter. That actual window of about four months is a really busy time for Nimbin, in terms of visitors, and also in terms of a lot of feral folk, because a lot of feral folk are transient and they literally travel up and down Australia. They may start in the summer in the cities, and then they may finish up in the middle of winter up at Cairns or somewhere like that. And we are part of that network, so we have a lot of folk coming through. We’re going to have to live with the fact that tourism, development, and drugs are not going to go away quickly in Nimbin, and we’re going to have to accept that. In the end, it’s saying that just as people who are involved in tourism or development have to accept that drug use is here to stay in Nimbin, so people involved with drug use have to accept that tourism and development are here to stay.

Some members of the alternative community disapprove of the cannabis market, believing strongly that cannabis should not be sold. This view seems to be part of the counter-culture’s tradition that cannabis is ‘sacred’ and should be freely shared in ‘sessions’; ‘Bill’, for example, said:

I think it should never be sold, I think if you’re going to grow, give it away. It was never intended to be a commercial crop, it was part of a dream, you know, it was part of why we were all here, it was something that was used, it was part of our whole social cultural thing, it was never meant to pay for
the rego ... We’re not in a rat race, and to me Nimbin ... well I don’t care about the bloody tourists. I didn’t come here to be a sideshow ... Most of the old hippies, if they were going to smoke dope would give it away and share it, it was a social thing. It was the integral part of our life, it still is. You know, you drink a glass of red wine, it’s a social thing; if you haven’t got some I’ll give you some.

Who are the buyers, the ‘touros?’ ‘Dee’ said:

You get all sorts of people buying the drug. You get old men, you get old ladies, mostly you get young working people, young straight kids ... There are a lot of other sorts of groups, like bikies that come in now and again, and a few business-looking couples, and quite a few family people come in to buy it ... Most locals are quite angry about the sales to touros because they miss out, because most of the drugs are for the market. Locals expect to get it at a lot cheaper prices, and they’re never happy with the deals, but the tourists are always hungry to get the deals because there is none where they come from ... The smack’s for the locals, it’s not for the tourists. Hardly any tourists come for smack. Most people that use smack are a local market. There are those people who come in with speed and smack but they’re generally a lot messier than the local users, leaving their needles in the grass and the toilets ... I find it very hard to believe that some undercover cop would be there trying to score smack, and not look obvious. Like smack people generally have a smack vibe, and cops will find it a lot easier to say: ‘Where can I score some marijuana?’ and be a straight person buying marijuana, because there are so many straights that use it, than being a full-on straight on the street trying to score some smack, and say the right words and lingo and talk the right way.

Bob Hopkins said,

A lot of people come here solely to score pot, quite a huge number of people come here. They’re regular people who come here, there’s no other town in Australia where you can go and almost be assured that you will make contact with somebody who will try and sell you pot. People are quite happy mostly just to come here and score, they’re only here for five minutes in town, ten minutes, they’re in their cars and on their way back out again ... I tend to think that most growers around here probably sell out of town.

Who are the sellers? There are the ‘runners’, who obtain small amounts of cannabis on credit and sell it to tourists, and there are the dealers, who have many bags of cannabis (often on credit from the grower) that they supply to the runners (see also the Pot Shop). There have been complaints about runners harassing tourists the minute they arrive in the village, but what may be unwelcome harassment to some visitors, is competitive enthusiasm among the runners. Single bags are available to runners on credit, to sell to tourists (or ‘touros’). Runners may make anything from $10 to $100 on a bag, and a small amount of the cannabis (a ‘tax’) from the bag for themselves. Some runners sell for only one dealer, while others will shop around on behalf of the touro, and people may be runners today and dealers next week. Growers and dealers generally only supply people they can trust. There is a close-knit social network which supports and protects people involved in the cannabis market.

‘Dee’ said of runners:

I’d say three-quarters are smack users and a quarter are non-smack using people. They want smack, they want a bit of money. The young guys will be sitting in a pub or playing pool, there
will be smoke in, [bags to sell] so they run it, and generally those sorts of guys don’t put much money on a bag, they just take the pot [their ‘tax’] … When you’re talking about smack dealing runners, you’ve always got couples generally, and if they are not couples, then they will couple up with a male and they will work as a team … So there is a very equal number in runners.

‘Tom’, a runner who was also an injector, said of the sellers:

They’re not just injectable drug users either, there’s all sorts, there’s teenagers, there’s mothers that are trying to sell pot as an income supplement, all sorts of people. There’s percentages of the people selling pot in town who are injectable drug users, who are going to use the money for their next taste, but I really find that, I don’t see it as a crime, you know, selling dope to people who want to buy it’.

The runners this week may be dealers next week, and dealers may also be growers. Further, Bob said, ‘There’s a lot of people now who bring their pot to Nimbin to sell in big quantities’. ‘Dee’ explained why some people deal:

The type of people who make their life out of dealing, it’s because they … haven’t got any other option than to do that. Well, just say that you’re a mother with five children and you break up with the father, and he’s been supporting you by doing mechanics, and suddenly he’s gone and there you are, you can either be stuck at home with five children, never ever quite getting by in the fortnight, and stressing out and hitting your kids, and hitting your head against the wall, and never getting a new lover, because you’ve never got any time. Whereas if you grow a bit of pot and you come in and sell it to a runner, who then gives it to another runner who’s a smackie … but say that mother does that, well she then has the opportunity to pay somebody to baby-sit her kids, she then gets to go out with some money, she then gets to really go to dinner with someone, then, you know, attracting another person in their life, to help her with upbringing the children. I’ve seen a lot of people on the pension that do that sort of thing …

In dealers, I’d say there’s more women, maybe, dealing, than men dealing, because women keep it together better. They keep business together more evenly, they’ll keep their contacts for a lot longer time because they’re constantly paying off debts quickly and efficiently, and … maintaining a credit rating … Sometimes it’s one step forward, two steps back when you’re doing it … Most of the people who go into the drug business end up in debt …

There are a few women around who just deal for locals and they’ll grow a small crop … they might be able to supply friends in the dry season, when there’s absolutely no mull, with $20 deals … it’s a lot less risk, they are never in town … I’d say only 10% [of growers] do that. There’s those few growers that believe in the old way, the cheap way, that believe in it being a herb for healing people. Local people don’t like how much it goes for, they don’t like people exploiting tourists, they see that as exploitation. … They are not in touch with what it’s like to have to go into town … other people dealing alongside can be quite aggressive towards you … it’s wise to pay these people off sometimes … when you need a hand they are there.

Dealers have anything from one or two to a dozen bags of cannabis to sell at any given moment, sometimes for themselves but usually for a grower, and usually on credit. ‘Busts’ (arrests) leave the dealers and runners owing money on the confiscated drug, and this increases the pressure on them to sell more to clear their debts and get ahead again. Bags generally weigh an ounce or half an ounce, although dealers will make up smaller amounts from bags that are not selling, or which are now too small because they have been taxed by dealer or runner.

‘Dee’ described the stress of being a woman working in Nimbin’s cannabis market:
Well, I’ve just recently given up because I find it ages me every time I do it. I have a major stress level. I have to deal with negative people who are grumpy and push their anger on me if I won’t drop five dollars off a bag, I deal with very heavy police seeing me all the time ... I’d rather be at home knitting, sewing, playing with the kids and maybe learning a craft ... Being a woman dealing, I find it’s a lot easier to be ripped-off ... They’ll [runners] come back saying some mistake happened, and just never pay you ... people that are dealers and run out and you’ve still got it, and you’re expected to time and again come up with the goods and blow them out [share cannabis] ... There [are] certain times of the year when there is hardly any pot around ... and that’s when it’s really risky, because there are a lot of people who want it and the cops can see the water when the desert is dry ... that’s when prices go right up to eight hundred dollars, nine hundred dollars [for an ounce of quality heads].

‘Will’, some-time heroin user and dealer pointed out that: ‘As far as it goes in Nimbin, there’s been remarkably little theft’. According to a Nimbin police officer (Sergeant Neville Plush, 19 September 1998), many other impoverished communities have higher rates of violence, domestic violence, child abuse, theft and other property crimes; and lawyer David Heilpern agreed (refer to transcripts). There is widespread disadvantage in the region, but people are less likely to engage in other crime because they can make money in the market.

There’s a code which some dealers disapprove of because it hampers free trade, and the role of the runners may be why some dealers would prefer a more regulated market. The runner who makes first contact with a tourist owns that touro, and you don’t ‘steal’ someone else’s touro; that is, the first runner has exclusive rights of supply (and pricing, and there’s the rub). There’s been aggression, anger and violence when that rule is violated, although I was told that if you are bigger and tougher you can get away with stealing someone else’s touro. Dealers would prefer to control the runners’ profit margins because they ultimately lose sales on over-priced (and over-taxed) bags of cannabis. Under the touro ownership rule there is less price competition and often no advantage to a wholesaler (grower or dealer) for charging lower prices because the runner absorbs it. As ‘Dee’ said: ‘Well, a lot of people are really quite angry about how much runners actually put on a bag ... They put a hundred, a hundred-and-fifty on a bag, rather than fifty, twenty, twenty’s what one would call reasonable for doing that sort of thing, though maybe fifty if they thought it was a high danger time’. The Hitchhikers’ Guide to Nimbin (2001), cautions buyers, in the section “How to Score in Nimbin”:

When buying your ganja avoid anyone who also deals other drugs, specifically powders as you may be associated with that drug. Looking around to see what’s on offer is the best way to ensure a decent deal for yourself. It may be difficult to extricate yourself from somebody who seems determined that you won’t get away until you have been parted from your money, so say these words loud and clear at the beginning. “Right now I’m just looking”. The seller should not have a problem with this. If they are selling you a reasonable deal — chances are you’ll be back. If the seller reacts badly to you wanting to have a look around it may be because they know that you’ll do better elsewhere. [more recently, it seems that many tourists are taking this advice].

On the other hand, if you are making a spectacle of yourself, insisting on seeing every $5 deal in town, being obvious or just stuffing people around, don’t be surprised if the natives become restless. We live under stupid laws as most people (police included) agree, but they are the laws and selling (or buying) illegal herbs can result in prosecution. The seller runs the greatest risk and avoids like the plague any situation which draws attention to him. ie: Tourist on one side of the street brandishing bag of herbs above his head, calling to his mates across the street to come and have a look. Tourist who has looked twice at every deal in town comes back and wants to have “one more look at a twenty bag”. Chances are you’ll be
refused and probably abused at this stage ... Asking for a sample of the product before you buy will cause the seller to laugh hilariously at your sense of humour.

When a runner approaches a tourist they would generally use a stock phrase such as: ‘After any pot man?’, ‘Smoko?’, or ‘Filthy heads?’. If the visitor is interested they will discuss prices and the runner will then go and fetch a bag for the tourist to examine. If the sale proceeds the bag of cannabis is exchanged for money. The runner takes the money back to the dealer minus their cut, and collects their ‘tax’. Runners generally smoke the tax immediately. ‘Taxing’ refers to the almost universal practice among runners of retaining some of the cannabis they are running. The runner decides how much cannabis they will take from the bag for themselves, and they stash that with the dealer for collection when they come back with the money (and if the bag doesn’t sell the ‘tax’ is returned to the bag). ‘Dee’ said,

Well, generally a runner will take one or two buds out of a bag, put them aside, under a brick or something. One or two buds would be a gram, possibly worth twenty dollars to the average tourist. Maybe sometimes they tax more, or tax less if they want to make more money. Yeah, they can take as much as they like, but the person who’s giving them the bag will often say: ‘I feel you’ve taken too much, I reckon that’s a bit much, don’t you reckon you should put that big one back and take this other one?’ and he might say, ‘No, I’m not making any money on it, so this is what I’m making’, or he’ll go: ‘Don’t worry about it’ or: ‘OK, yeah, sure you’re right, here, man’. Generally, they run off, sell the bag, come back and pick up the tax, give me the money and ask for a ten dollar discount, or if they haven’t bothered to tax a bud out, ask me for a bud, which I always say: “I’m not here to work for you, I’m working for me, you work for you, and you get your own bloody bud”.

While the dealer might be watching the transaction, they deplore the runner speaking openly to them (which would identify them to buyers and undercover agents). During the police operations, when surveillance is particularly intense, the money changes hands in quick huddles, and bags are often stashed away from the dealer (who may not even handle them, but may supervise the runner as they retrieve the bag), and the ‘taxes’ might sit under serviettes or in empty tobacco packets. ‘Dee’ explained:

Where there weren’t many people in town who were dealing because the busts were on, and one or two people had been dragged away, and there was no dope in town and I had some, it gets really heavy, when people who are runners don’t care, they don’t care about being busted. It’s mostly smack dealing runners, who are smack addicts, who will just walk up and say: ‘I want to sell pot to this copper over here’, in front of the undercover cop, and totally identify you. It’s just ridiculous that they have no idea of the risk that they are putting on themselves, and the risk that they are putting you in, and you have to say to them: ‘Don’t talk to me!’ and walk away from them. And they get really angry at you, for being so rude and treating them like shit.

However, in the following ethnographic ‘story’ (the names I use are pseudonyms), things were more open, perhaps because the ‘pot shop’ was under cover, with a clear view of all approaches. As well, some people appeared to signal the approach of strangers, but I didn’t ask if that was by design or simply because they chose to hassle some people for personal reasons. In later years the Nimbin community was to trial (illegal) green cafes in the true sense of the term, but the mid-nineties’ pot shop invariably lacked that level of stability and organisation.
I spent an afternoon at what could best be described as a ‘mobile pot shop’. It wasn’t like Amsterdam’s ‘brown cafes’, which I’d visited in 1995. This Nimbin ‘shop’ was illegal and highly mobile — sometimes it was inside (in cafes and sheds) and sometimes outside in the street or park, because the ‘shop’ came into being whenever cannabis dealers gathered to share news and cannabis while doing business. Almost continuous ‘sessions’ operated whenever and wherever dealers and runners congregated.

‘Dee’ described the seasonal changes to me in her taped interview:

So, you build up certain relations with fellow drug dealers during the flourishing season, when there’s a lot of dope around and a lot of touros, and there’s a lot of sharing, a lot of joints, there’s less tobacco in the joints. Then things start getting a little harder, and you have to start cutting off these relationships where you sit down and have a talk and a joint with someone, because you can’t always have a talk and a smoke with someone. So, slowly you get less and less people that you have that talk with every day, and people bring out more bongs, and you need to bong more desperately, because you can’t afford joints. And it becomes a really heavy vibe-out scene where somebody you know comes along, and you’ve just mulled up for two people, and they really heavy you for a bong and you can’t give them one, but they are your really close friend and they get really upset and I just say: ‘Well it costs money and it costs time’ (and it costs blood, sweat and tears, basically).

A few months ago people shared joints. They would add cannabis to a mull bowl and sit around gossiping, while one of their number mulled and rolled a large communal joint or ‘spliff’. People who hadn’t contributed would gather, and some would get a toke, based on obligations and favours. At the time of my story there was less cannabis, and people smoked small amounts of head in bongs (water pipes), not joints.

THE POT SHOP

Today, in this ‘shop’, there are three bongs, a bamboo one and two made out of small plastic drink bottles. The bamboo bong is only used by one or two people, while the plastic bongs appeared to be public equipment. Cigarette lighters and cigarettes are in constant demand, and one plastic bong has a cone made of damp newspaper. Someone complained that the weighing scales had been stolen, but someone else seemed to think that Will had taken them home (minding them for their owner). The air is hazy with cannabis smoke, and there is a smell of spilled bong water. Crow hustles in, saying ‘I’ve got a touro who’s been running my arse off. I’ve got to have a cone’. Apparently he has ‘parked’ the touro in the pub. He takes the bamboo bong, mulls cannabis and tobacco in a small bowl, and packs a cone. ‘Is that skunk?’ Dan asks him. ‘No, but it’s filth’ Crow replies. Dan comes over and peers at Crow’s cannabis; he reaches into the bowl, extracts a small bud, squeezes it, sniffs, and returns it with a nod of appreciation.

Crow takes almost religious care when he prepares cannabis for smoking. He has a widespread reputation for ‘excellent spliffs’, and is often asked to roll the large communal joints favoured by Nimbinites when cannabis is abundant. One attraction of the Mardi Grass Festival is the joint rolling competition which Crow has won on at least one occasion that I observed; the joints are judged on aesthetics such as creativity of shape, number of papers used (the more the better), and structural considerations. He is also an expert at preparing bags for touros,
and he showed me the correct way to package cannabis for sale: no stalks or seeds, very little ‘kiff’, (leaf and dust from heads, as opposed to ordinary leaf), the contents should be well distributed, with larger buds prominently displayed towards the top, and with the cannabis slightly flattened and forced upward in the bag, to increase the appearance of size and to show buyers clearly what they are getting.

Another runner comes in. ‘Where’s that bag for one-fifty?’ she asks Dan, who’s smoking one of the plastic bongs. Dan passes across a plastic sandwich bag of cannabis heads. Two men in their thirties, slightly overweight, are waiting nearby. The customers look as if they should be in the pub with a tinnie, or watching footie on TV. ‘Is that skunk?’ one of them asks the runner when she takes the bag outside to show them. After handling and discussing the bag for several minutes the runner says loudly to the two customers: ‘Forget this, I can get you a weighed half ounce for one-eighty if you’ll wait for a while’. The plastic bag is returned to Dan, who explains the exchange to me: ‘It’s not half an ounce any more, they took it away earlier and it came back short’.

Everyone seems to be talking about skunk. I ask, ‘What is skunk?’. ‘This is skunk, desert skunk. The best’, a black woman says, showing me a plastic sandwich bag full of heads. I smell it and say: ‘It doesn’t smell horrible, why is it called skunk?’ People are anxious to explain that it’s a variety of cannabis, very potent, with distinctive buds that are ‘shiny with white crystals’. Owl, a young mother, says, ‘I always name mine anyway. The touros like it’. Crow is in and out of the ‘pot shop’ over the next hour, always using the bamboo bong, which I now suspect is his (although Owl uses it as well). Crow ‘pulls a cone’ and announces to the whole room: ‘Next week when I get my ounces I’m going to sell them cheaper than anyone else in town, and make a bundle, quick. None of this fucking around trying to sell rip-off bags — and it’ll be filth’. He finishes smoking and leaves the hazy gloom, collecting his skateboard at the door. Runners seemed to resent the dealers’ ability to set bag prices and to foist under-weight bags on them to sell, while the dealers often expressed resentment over the runners’ ‘exorbitant’ profits and ‘overtaxing’. There was probably some validity in both views.

Everyone is having a session in the pot shop, including those who best could be described as ‘service’ providers, because they don’t have any pot for the pot, so to speak. The *Hitchhikers’ Guide to Nimbin* (2001) calls them ‘plebs’, and sets out the group expectations for those who want to participate in a session without contributing cannabis (or having any other claim):

1. Person with mull makes all the rules [but]  2. Person with glass bong has a big say ...  Do not assume we are still living in the 70’s and everything is peace, love, sprouts and $30 ounces. This is the new millennium and awareness is the key word ...  If you are given the privilege of mulling up the mix show some restraint and never ever presume to place yourself at the head of the line. Bong should be passed firstly to the major contributor and then position in line will be determined by that individual  ...  Reasonable complaints on the other hand, include “there’s a seed in my cone” or “I can’t pull this cone - the bong is blocked”. Then responsibility passes to the pleb. It’s the pleb’s fault and he may be required to forfeit his bong for slackness in the cleaning and maintenance department.

There is also the opportunity to perform other services for cannabis. While I was sitting in the ‘pot shop’ Joe came in. He has no cannabis and no money. ‘I’ll give you a bud if you’ll watch Ben for fifteen minutes’ Owl
A drug economy

says to him; she’s going to pick up more bags from her grower. Joe will watch Ben to make sure that the child
doesn’t wander off or hurt himself. Joe’s style of child-care is more one of casual guardianship than interactive
attention — he is more interested in chatting to Dan about his unsatisfactory relationship with his ex-wife. He’ll
get the bud when Owl returns, and then ‘chuck it in for a session’.

Cannabis is not just a social lubricant and a valuable commodity, it is an alternative currency. In her taped
interview, ‘Dee’ commented: ‘I think dope is a much more powerful barter system than money. Marijuana can
buy you things that money can’t … Some people will do anything for a smoke but do hardly anything for twenty
dollars. Therefore there’s a lot of power for single mothers struggling on a pension: car repairs, give somebody a
bit of mull and your car gets fixed, give somebody a bit of mull and you can get food, or a dress made’. Cannabis
certainly occupied an integral position in Nimbin’s social life and regularly substituted for cash.

Two local young women come into the dealers’ space, and one says to Dan, ‘Can I have a bud for ten dollars?
I’ll give it to you on Friday’. A ‘bud’ appears to be a variable notion, sometimes referring to a small amount, and
other times to what I would describe as a ‘stick’, as in this example. Dan and the young local huddle together
over the bag of heads as Dan picks out individual buds and lays them in a line. She decides to get twenty dollars
worth on credit, and they are haggling over the exact amount she will get; Dan replaces some heads, selects
others. The young woman says to Dan, ‘I don’t want the kiff, put it back, it’ll make the [original] bag look
bigger’. Dan adds a bonus bud and finally scoops the heads into a scrap of newspaper for her. The young
woman smiles at me, ‘I got more head because I didn’t want the kiff, and then the deal looked too small. Do you
want a cone?’ (I don’t think I’ve met her before, but she seems to know me).

In the taped interviews Dee had complained about friends and acquaintances expecting a ‘good’ deal. After all,
everyone has to live and work side by side in Nimbin. The young woman quickly and expertly mulls head with
tobacco, smokes a cone using one of the plastic bongs, and packs a cone for her companion; she leaves while her
friend is smoking it and returns with two more young women. The four of them settle in to have a session. One
of the young women takes the guitar and her three friends sing. The space is filled with music and laughter, and
chattering, huddling groups; the ambience is more like a party than a place of dangerous and illicit business.

Crow has gone back to the hard-to-please tourists, leaving the bamboo bong packed for Owl after she reminded
him that she’d given him a cone a few days (yes, days) ago; when heads are in short supply these obligations are
important. As The Hitchhikers’ Guide (2001) warns: ‘Sharing your herbs is great … Ripping off is not on. Ditto
not paying your debts. It’s bad feng shui, rotten karma and will guarantee you a very bad reputation’. ‘Dee’
explained in her taped interview, ‘It’s important that they give each other a bong. If you’re a woman doing it
then you’re less likely to be ripped off, less likely to be hassled [with friends around] .. so you build up relations
with fellow drug dealers’.

The pot shop has suddenly filled; three strangers, and three or four locals huddle together in a corner. This
exchange is unusual and probably involves more than one bag, and buyer and supplier may have been reluctant to
entrust money and/or cannabis out of sight. When the touros have gone, the runner (a thin older woman) relaxes for a while, smoking her tax with her two friends. Dan, who has skunk, grabs Crow when he returns for another cone: ‘Swap a bud. I want to try something different’. Dan mulls Crow’s cannabis separately, to assess it. They are all connoisseurs — intensely interested in varieties of cannabis — comparing texture, colour, smell, taste and effects. The pace in the pot shop has slowed, and people socialise for longer periods. Crow, Owl and Dan throw equal amounts of head into a mull bowl for a shared ‘session’. The session is an important social ritual (not only in the street market but throughout the alternative community), and complex rules have developed around it. The session is the most enjoyable part of working the market for all the participants, and small groups of runners, wholesalers, and their friends laugh, relax, share gossip and warnings, and try out each other’s pot.

Several sessions might be going on at the same time, and sessions may involve two people or many. As people move into and out of the pot shop and share ‘sessions’, information spreads rapidly, and a lot of cannabis is smoked. While sharing was still the norm in the mid-nineties, that changed in the late nineties as heads became even more expensive, and ‘solo’ sessions became increasingly common. Solo sessions involved people smoking only their own cannabis while sitting with others who were also smoking their own.

Piper comes in, picks up a guitar, and begins to play. He hasn’t spoken to anyone, and appears absorbed in the music, hair hanging down over his face as he bends over the guitar. Piper is not loquacious; it seems to me that growers are seldom as chatty as dealers and runners. Like a lot of other people in the town, he’s a very good musician. The four young women leave: ‘We’re going back to the pub. There’s music over there’ (they mean a jukebox). Owl says to Dan, ‘Piper’s got bags too’. Piper shows Dan some plastic bags of cannabis. ‘A hundred’ he tells him, while Dan is sniffing and squeezing the contents of one bag. ‘A hundred’ ripples around the space and people join the huddle to poke and smell the product. Owl obviously doesn’t want it; she’s aiming for the higher end of the market, or perhaps she is only selling for one grower because she owes them money (because a runner took a bag away and ‘just didn’t come back’).

Dealers may market only one grower’s cannabis or they may hold some from a number of suppliers, selling the different products (with different prices) as the market demands. They are experts at what they do, and assure me that they never have any problem telling one grower’s product from another’s, or keeping track of the various prices. They may make anything from $10 to $100 on an ounce, but generally it’s about $50 — however the dealers take cannabis from the bags for ‘sessions’ and this further reduces their dollar profit.

Dan says to me, ‘I made seventy-five on three ounces yesterday’. The woman with desert skunk says, ‘I made thirty dollars on two ounces’. Dealers think in ounces, but the price and the amount of cannabis can appear arbitrary to the casual observer, with varying weights of cannabis selling for strange amounts like $160 or $75. It seems that they adjust the price to reflect the amount they’ve used at a given point. A lot of the cannabis ostensibly for sale is actually being smoked socially in the ‘business setting’. The dealers and runners face arrest, rip-offs and constant pressure from buyers to lower the price. Another constant hazard for dealers is that
everyone wants a free smoke, many acquaintances are owed favours, and friends would be offended if they weren’t offered a ‘good deal’.

The social and economic aspects of cannabis are interwoven in Nimbin, where people may be, and certainly know, the growers, dealers, runners and (local) buyers. Even when they disapproved of marketing cannabis, locals clearly understood the economic incentives. Many of those I interviewed mentioned green cafes as a solution to many of the problems associated with the street market. Michael Balderstone said:

> What to do about the street scene? Let them be, make a bit more space and just let people be, give kids room. I think there should be more trees, and I think Council’s working towards that. Make some more tree space, green space, nature space, and take the cars a bit away. If they can do it I think it would help, but I think let people be. I mean bloody hell, let them smoke drugs in cafes and sell a stick of marijuana over the counter for twenty bucks, rather than have rip-offs and dealers hassling.

Rod, a young Victorian said: ‘Buy the pub, and maybe turn it into a ganja palace, something like that. Oh, keep the pool tables, and with maybe facilities for rehabilitation, or something like that, or with at least information about it. Yeah, just a place to go to smoke, play pool and eat and drink’. Bob Hopkins said:

> I’d really like to see the local government control and regulate the sale of drugs, as they do in the Netherlands. A little cafe like this could apply to the local government authority and say: ‘I want to sell pot’ ... It just needs to be worked into the culture in a different way ... I sort of feel that it would be a much more pleasurable experience for tourists to come to town here, come into a place where they can look at the range of pot that’s available, without having to make sort of dirty deals, you know, they don’t know the scene ... it could be a nicer experience of sitting down, sampling varieties of different sorts of pot ... and just different ways in which we can take responsibility for what goes down here with our community.

Even dealers agreed with a more organised system of drug outlets. Dee said:

> If there was a place for people to deal marijuana, a place for people to have smack and sit around on their couches and nod off if they wanted to, then no-one would be creating a scene where people needed to employ security guards, because people would have their place and other people wouldn’t get annoyed at them using their drug, just like they have a pub ... or like the newsagent selling their cigarettes, where they could pass some of what they grew in their herb garden on to somebody else who wants it, who lives in the city, who isn’t so fortunate to have a herb garden but wants to relax at night because they’re stressed out from looking at computers and going blind all day.

David Heilpern said, ‘I’d like to see cultivation of personal amounts be lawful, for up to ten plants. That way, there would be very little reason to supply. I would like to see that the only sort of supply that is unlawful is supply ... for money. Because I think that [taking] the cash economy... out of the whole cannabis thing is pretty good karma and common sense ... The lawful supply for money is another option and you know, maybe when I retire, I’ll start a cafe and call it Cafe Amsterdam’.

In late 1995, following yet another community meeting, the Nimbin community was reported as supporting a ‘drug traders’ market and a ‘safe house for intravenous drug users’ as well as more youth facilities and family
welfare services (*Northern Star* 18 November 1995, p. 7). The community apparently put the idea of green cafes into practice around 2000. The price of cannabis in the cafes was reported to be substantially lower than street prices, at $8 to $10 per gram, and the cafes contributed 10% of this to the community as a ‘green tax’ (*Northern Star* 19 May 2001, p. 15; see also Canales c. 2000); Growers received $180 from each $280 ounce, leaving $72 for the cafe’s overheads and profits (*Northern Star* 19 May 2001, p. 15). However the Nimbin ‘social experiment’ with cannabis cafes, designed to get the dealing off the streets and to sell cannabis for a ‘fair’ price, ended abruptly in 2001. The *Echo* reported that: ‘35 police officers raided the town armed with search warrants and sniffer dogs (*Northern Rivers Echo* 31 May 2001, p. 6). A letter to the *Echo* described the raid:

I was having lunch in the Rainbow cafe when the police came in and told everyone to remain where they were and keep their hands in sight. I was told that the sniffer dog had indicated I was carrying drugs and that I was to be searched ... I was not carrying illegal drugs and have not smoked cannabis for a long time. As a sufferer from anxiety disorder I find it difficult, at the best of times being amongst people ... I drove home with great difficulty, feeling overwhelmed by feelings of rage and despair ... I question whether it was lawful for me to be detained because of where I had chosen to have lunch and then searched because a dog might not have been able to distinguish between largactil and cannabis (*Northern Rivers Echo* 31 May 2001, p. 6).

As in the nineties, police claimed community support for the cafe closures. However, it appeared that local businesses were overwhelmingly in favour of the green cafes continuing. Local real estate agent, ‘Archie’ Archbold, canvassed business people’s views; he asked 42 proprietors whether would they prefer regulated cannabis supply through street dealing or through green cafes (I presume that the businesspeople felt able to say ‘neither’). He told *Echo* readers that the cafes were supported by 40 of the businesses (*Northern Rivers Echo* 31 May 2001, p. 6).

Coomber (1998) notes that the attribution of ‘badness’ to a drug is ‘influenced by moral, racial or a localised fear of the unknown ... [and] has as much, if not more, to do with who is using the drug than it has to do with the drug itself (Coomber 1998, p. xii). In counterpoint to the growers and dealers, the smokers and smackies, are the law enforcers, who are regularly accused of waging a war against the alternative community.

**THE DRUG WAR**

There is ample evidence that Nimbin has been subject to a ‘drug war’. As David Heilpern told me during his taped interview: ‘The police get away with things in Nimbin that they would never, ever, get away with anywhere else in Australia, Kings Cross, anywhere’. Many people in the region have pointed out that the regular, invasive police operations appear to be based in negative attitudes towards the alternative community — particularly residents of multiple occupancies. For example, Operation Rainforest, conducted in the area in 1992, was widely criticised for using a police helicopter with a skull and crossbones symbol attached to the door (eg de Launey 1996a; *Northern Rivers Echo* 30 March 1995 p. 5), and Nimbin residents regularly complain of harassment from police officers dressed in black jumpsuits who buzz their homes in low-flying helicopters.
A drug economy

It seems difficult to justify these expensive, large scale operations, as the actual drug seizures are obviously for personal use (that is, most charges are for small amounts of cannabis). As one Tuntable resident, Neil Cassidy, wrote to the local paper: ‘If the police are so concerned about pulling in huge crops of marijuana, how come they have spent three days hovering over Tuntable Falls where consistently all they seem to have pulled out is between 3 and 10 plants at a time’ (Northern Star 1 April 1995, p. 7). Similarly, Robin Osborne, a reporter with a local paper, commented about Operation Rainforest:

15 arrests were made and cannabis claimed to be worth $6 million was seized. This translated into an average of $2000 per plant — something of an exaggeration, according to observers, given the number of small seedlings in the haul. Police in Sydney were unable to estimate the operation’s cost but told the Echo that the Plantation Unit judged success by the ratio of seized drugs to costs (Lismore Echo 18 December 1992, p. 4).

This article was accompanied by a photo of a Plantation Squad officer holding up some small seedlings from the back of a truck containing cannabis, with the caption ‘many small seedlings, such as those pictured above at Tuntable Falls, had no monetary value but were included in the marijuana claimed by Operation Rainforest police to be worth $6 million on the market’ (Lismore Echo 18 December 1992, p. 4).

The Nimbin drug war is not confined to the detection of crops. In 1995 the police operation code named El Dockin caused a furore; it was unprecedented in both its duration and intensity, as police literally laid siege to the valley over several months, with police road blocks which arbitrarily stopped and searched vehicles and their occupants, including parents driving their children to and from school, and coaches full of dismayed tourists (see, for example, the Northern Star 3 June 1995, p.3). As parent Louise Graves complained to the local paper:

I am writing as a response to the continual police presence in Nimbin. The subject must be becoming monotonous to your readers, as it surely is to us. Why this siege of Nimbin’s inhabitants? Recently I was pulled over at 8.30 in the morning by motor bike policemen while I was attempting to drive my children to the school bus! The situation is out of hand when simple morning domestic routine is interrupted for no real reason at all ... however in every town and city throughout Australia one will find heroin, marijuana, pills, alcohol and any other drug that seems (by the media) to be long only to Nimbin ... The police activity is inept. No heroin dealers are busted and the trade is as healthy here as it is in Lismore, Goonellabah and Byron Bay. To one who lives in Nimbin it feels like we are besieged’ (Northern Star 25 May 1995, p. 6).

Within the village people were stopped on the street and strip-searched. The local papers covered the war quite effectively, reporting both claims and counter-claims. Senior police denied public strip searches and harassment. Chief Inspector Sanderson assured Star readers that any threat to close down the Rainbow Cafe was ‘certainly not said with his authority’, and he claimed that only people who volunteered were being searched in ‘semi-secluded public places’ (Northern Star 3 June 1995, p.3).

Despite the mounting local criticism, the police maintained that they had community support. For example Chief Superintendent Collins was reported as calling complaints about harassment of Nimbin residents ‘anarchy’ and ‘a wanton disregard of the law’, and he stated that: ‘Blind Freddy could see there is a significant drug problem in
Nimbin and the community itself was demanding greater action from police, so I am not overly concerned about a minority who want to complain when police simply are doing what they are paid to do’ (Northern Star, 24 May 1995, p. 1). A short time later Chief Inspector Sanderson told the press: ‘that certain media coverage of policing methods is “not a true representation of what’s going on ... If it was having an adverse effect on business, I’d be concerned, but that’s not the message we’ve getting” ’ (Northern Rivers Echo 8 June 1995, p. 3). However the press also reported the growing complaints from business and locals, which cast doubts on police protestations:

Cathie McIntosh, owner of Choices Cafe, said police were dragging tourists away from their meals at cafes to search them for drugs. She said the cafe’s takings had been halved and she had been forced to sack half of her 20 staff ... since the police operation, El Dockin, had begun ... “I’ve seen male tourists standing on the verandah of a hall across the road from the cafe in their underwear while the police put their hands down their pants searching for drugs” ... Ms McIntosh said “All this in full view of customers who are eating and drinking on the verandah of the cafe”. Julian King said the Rainbow Cafe was going bankrupt only two weeks after it had reopened, with customers staying away because of the constant police harassment (Northern Star 3 June 1995, p.3).

In June 1995 David Heilpern told me that:

Despite the outcry of all community groups, delegations to the police commander and complaints from the business community the operation has continued and we are told will continue until they “get the drugs out of Nimbin”. The complaints I have received are many and varied but ... include motor vehicle as well as full body searches. Most of these are, in my view, illegal; I have clients who have been searched nine times in three weeks, with no result. I have clients who have had police fondle their genitals looking for drugs in public. I have many clients who have been searched in public toilets, out the back of shops and in the pub ... there is a “police state” feeling. At no time have the police denied to me that the searches are random.

These heavy-handed tactics turned the bustling village into a semi-deserted landscape, inhabited by increasingly angry residents and business people. In late June, reporter Jenny Rogers told readers that: ‘Northern Rivers police have no plans to shift Operation El Dockin out of Nimbin — instead the Operation will intensify ... police denied rumours that the Operation was coming to an end amid claims of police harassment of residents. El Dockin is now entering its 4th month’ (Northern Star 19 June 1995, p.1). The business community had circulated a petition calling for police to take a ‘less heavy-handed approach to policing drugs in the township’ and the Rainbow cafe proprietor was quoted as saying: ‘they just seem to be out to harass people who don’t fit into the mainstream’ (Northern Star 6 June 1995, p.3).

There was widespread criticism of police tactics, culminating in an investigation by the Office of the Ombudsman (Heilpern 1995; Northern Star 10 June 1995, p. 2). The Echo observed that: ‘an intentionally lit fire at the Nimbin police station ... was quickly extinguished ... passions have been aroused in the village since the start of the Ell Dockin [sic] anti-drug operation four months ago’ (Northern Rivers Echo 29 June 1995, p. 1).

Over the months of El Dockin police and community reports continued to be at variance, and the financial costs (like the public-relations costs), were staggering. Inspector Beaumont was quoted as explaining the discrepancies
between earlier police cost estimates and public challenges to the figures the police had provided to the media. He admitted that the original costing for the operation ($40000) did not take into account police wages and motor vehicle costs, but represented ‘out-of-pocket expenses incurred outside the normal police budget allocation’ (*Northern Star* 3 June 1995, p. 3; see also *Northern Rivers Echo* 29 June 1995, p. 1). Perhaps because of the high costs of Nimbin operations, and because police arrest data for operation *El Dockin* provided a familiar picture, with the majority of arrests (around 80%) for small amounts of cannabis (Heilpern 1996; *Northern Rivers Echo* 29 June 1995, p. 1), two senior police officers, Chief Superintendent Collins and Chief Inspector Sanderson felt obliged to defend the operation by claiming ‘community support’ for their law enforcement practices (*Northern Star* 24 May 1995, p. 1; *Northern Star* 3 June 1995, p. 3). For example, at the end of June, Chief Inspector Sanderson told one local paper that ‘public support for the Operation “greatly outnumber complaints” ’ (*Northern Rivers Echo* 29 June 1995, p. 1). In reality, there was little evidence of community support, as indicated in the previous chapter by results from my household survey and taped interviews, as well as from contemporary newspaper reports, and the Lismore City Council (1993) Main Street survey (where ‘more police’ was selected by 3% of respondents).

David Heilpern gave me several examples of the problems created by this drug war on young people. In one instance he described the effects of police tactics on a heroin user:

> I’ve had a client for six years now, a lovely person, who has been struggling to get off heroin for a long time. She’s the victim of child sexual assault, she’s the victim of a series of evictions and things like that, that were traumatic for her, but, mostly it’s the child sexual assault that she suffers from, I guess. She had been off it for twelve weeks, which is the longest we’ve ever, (we are a group of people who try and help her) had her off heroin. And the police picked her up, and internally searched her. The first thing she did, when she got out of the police station was go and get a taste ... And if she dies, as far as I’m concerned, the blame lies at the door of the police.

Alongside a discernible trend towards reducing penalties for personal use of illicit drugs (and particularly for cannabis) there are increased penalties for producing and selling illicit drugs. In the late nineties the NSW government proposed a maximum jail term of 20 years for anyone dealing drugs (other than cannabis) three times in one month, no matter how small the amounts of the drug. Lismore’s sitting member, National Party MP Bill Rixon, was reported as commenting that cannabis should be included, as it was just as dangerous as other illegal drugs and far more dangerous than alcohol or tobacco (*Northern Star* 2 July 1998, p. 3).

Most arrests in Nimbin are for small amounts of cannabis (and probably even smaller amounts of heroin). While the ‘tough on drugs’ political image obviously has appeal, the ‘dealers’ who will be punished by these tougher supply laws are likely to be people who are working to supply their own drug habit. One newspaper story illustrates a heroin arrest and punishment: ‘A man arrested on heroin charges during an undercover drug operation at Nimbin was jailed yesterday for ... [a total of] 11 months ... the Court heard that [he] had acted as the “middle man” in supplying heroin to two undercover police by obtaining the heroin from another supplier and selling it to the police with $10 added to the purchase price’ (*Northern Star* 28 June 1996, p. 5). I was told
at the time that the arrested man had been begged by the ‘buyers’ to find them some heroin. And what happens when the heroin user or the young cannabis dealer reaches prison? David Heilpern explained the results of his research into the effects of prison on young offenders (who are the ones typically jailed for drug offences):

I’ve been conducting research into sexual assault in prisons, in conjunction with the University of NSW, Southern Cross University and the Corrective Services Department. That research has involved interviewing over three hundred prisoners aged 18-25 within the NSW prison system. My research shows that one in four of the 18-25 year olds have been sexually assaulted while they have been in custody, and just under one in two of them have been assaulted other than sexually. Of course, many of those who have been assaulted sexually were assaulted non-sexually too. The result means this: that if someone goes to jail in NSW aged between 18-25, there’s a one in four chance they’ll be raped while they are in jail ... What that means in terms of recidivism is enormous, because you let them out of prison, having been brutalised by the state ... Then how they come out of prison is as very violent, angry, disturbed young men. That’s what we are seeing, we see that at Nimbin, we see that everywhere, they are brutalised men. A lot of my older clients, perhaps you’d call them more ‘professional’ growers, have been in jail before ... They’ve told me horrendous tales of thirty, forty years ago, about getting raped in prison too, so I don’t think there’s anything new.

Many non-violent and otherwise law-abiding people, and their children, are alienated from the protection that most of us expect from the legal system, and they are both fearful of, and vulnerable to, many forms of violence. A woman told me that she was charged over cannabis found in the house when she requested police assistance to return home to collect personal possessions in a potentially violent situation. A father who had been arrested at his home (in a particularly violent manner) and subsequently jailed for cultivation, was very angry that his children now feared police officers. The ‘firepower’ behind these crop grower arrests is quite disturbing. One grower described what is apparently a ‘typical’ arrest to reporter Jenny Rogers:

The phone rang about 7am and I was ordered to come outside with my hands up. Carloads of police in army gear with war paint on, hanging off the side of four-wheel drive vehicles came up my driveway toting machine-guns. There were about 16 police cars and at least 100 police. I was ordered to lie face down on the ground and they handcuffed me so tight it was painful. Then they got my wife and kids outside, and lined them up like they were going to be executed’. Apparently the police had ‘bungled the raid by going to his neighbour’s house first’. The grower commented: ‘All this brutality just to search for a few plants (Northern Star 1 March 1997, p. 3).

Members of the counter-culture regularly complain of breaches of civil liberties, from the infamous 1976 raid on Tuntabe Falls when residents were transported to the police station in cattle trucks, to the 1995 El Dockin operation and beyond. The counter-culture is vulnerable to police harassment because they smoke cannabis; as David Heilpern said to me: ‘Anyone can bust anyone for cannabis because everyone uses it in Nimbin anyway’. Michael Balderstone told me, ‘It’s a funny one, us living in this “jail without walls” — we know we are not criminals, so there’s a strong sense of injustice and a lot of anger and mistrust of authorities. I mean, if you really like pot you’re a criminal for life. You bring your family up in it’.

One of the effects of law enforcement activities in Nimbin was that, despite (or because of) ongoing arrests and widespread paranoia, the sense of community in Nimbin was strengthened, as was the opposition to the existing
cannabis laws. The drug symbolised all that was ‘different’ between the alternative community on the one hand, and the police and more conservative sections of society on the other. This opposition was expressed in protests, in media events and press releases, in formal complaints, in the growing support for HEMP, and in the growing popularity of the Mardi Grass Festival (Chapter Six).

There were some unfortunate coincidences in law enforcement practices during the mid-nineties. For example, in early 1995 the *Northern Star* (1 April 1995, p. 1) reported: ‘Operation Dragon was not retribution for the election campaign of independent candidate Prohibition End. Operation Dragon involved 20 officers from the DEA, the dog squad, air wing, major crimes squad and local police’. This raid on Bob Hopkins MO was, according to another local paper (*Northern Rivers Echo*, Editorial, 30 March 1995, p. 5), ‘a coincidence’ and not related to his successful court appearance a couple of days before (‘The Trial of Prohibition End’, Chapter Six). Operation Hubbard was a four day police operation that set up road blocks around Nimbin in 1998, and accidentally coincided with *Visions of Nimbin* — a craft fair held to highlight the creative side of Nimbin (rather than the ‘drug problem’). Police conducted more than 1,800 random breath tests and charged 38 with traffic offences during the road blocks, but Superintendent Audsley described it as an ‘unfortunate coincidence’ that the operation occurred during *Visions of Nimbin*. He was quoted as saying that: ‘Due to unforeseen circumstances, the operation had to be delayed a week and then coincided with the expo ...It’s regrettable that the operation took place on the same weekend, but a lot of planning had gone into it and the results speak for themselves’ (*Northern Rivers Echo* 24 September 1998, p. 3). The newspaper report continued: ‘One mother was reportedly breath tested 4 times in one day, while others were tested while driving their children to school’ (*Northern Rivers Echo* 24 September 1998, p. 3).

Like other Nimbin residents, Michael Balderstone looked to legislative changes for solutions to many ‘problems’ associated with the drug market: ‘If people were allowed to grow their own pot, as much as they wanted, heaps of other drug problems would disappear, I believe. I’d let them grow any plant they wanted ... And then heroin would be smoked, no need for needles which are only because its so expensive ... money is the bottom line!’. Many people spoke of changes to drug laws, and people often mentioned green cafes as an alternative to dealing on the streets of Nimbin. For David Heilpern, lawyer, the solution was also a legislative one: ‘Ninety five percent of drug charges are cannabis. Very, very few arrests are heroin in this area, despite the fact that it is the major problem; when I say the major problem, I’m talking about major health, illegal drug problem. I certainly have noticed that policing heroin requires a lot more police work than policing cannabis’.

Community views of law enforcement were ambivalent. While there was strong opposition to the quite violent and invasive (‘martial’) tactics of special squads, local police were often praised for their sense of community policing. Lawyer David Heilpern told me:

I want to say that if the laws change, I think that the relationship between the community and the police will improve massively. There’s just no trust there. I must say [the local officer] developed an interesting sort of *modus operandi*, which I gather that some of the more genuine police are also doing now too, which is basically turning a blind eye to anything
relating to cannabis. Really the only people who are busting for cannabis now are the drug enforcement agency, the drug squad from Ballina, and the helicopters. Apart from that they’re leaving it alone, and the local police know why that is, it’s because if they don’t leave it alone they’ll be at war.

Dr Helliwell, the local GP, commented:

When is this all going to end, all the Nimbin street scenes and things like that? I don’t know, I think that we’re really going to have to endure cyclical patterns of misbehaviour until we see a change in the drug laws ... I think we’ve almost reached a point of no return ... I think it’s gone too far now, because there’s too much changing, and our community is getting too many tourists coming here now. We have such a reputation throughout the world about cannabis. But in the end I think that we’re going to have to sit this one out, until some substantial change in the drug laws happen.

As the ‘drug war’ intensifies, so too will the opposition, and there appears to be a very real danger among younger generations of complete alienation from our legal system. Rod, a young transient, illustrated the younger generation’s views of the law enforcers and the green economy when he said:

I’d like to live in the bush around here somewhere, and build free-energy machines ... I’d have one connected to cars, so we can just drive them around and it will look unsuspicious ... If you wanted to run marijuana from a crop to somewhere, or from somewhere so somebody could sell it (I’m trying not to mention anything here) ... Yeah, you could sort of zoom along in your car, and pass by the cops. Then, when they start to chase you, just take off into the air. That would spin out a few police.

Overall, the law enforcement efforts in Nimbin would benefit from more cultural sensitivity and community-based policing, although it is often difficult to tell who is doing what in this cannabis using community (that is, whether the person is marketing or swapping or examining cannabis). The economic and the social are intertwined in Nimbin, and I explore the drug culture in greater depth in the next chapter.

* * * * *
I have argued in the preceding chapters that drugs cannot be considered in isolation from their political and cultural contexts. In this chapter I will explore Nimbin’s cannabis culture in greater detail, drawing from the household surveys for information about drug use in Nimbin, and from my participant-observation for descriptions of an MO tribal meeting, the trial of Prohibition End, and the judging of the Growers’ Cup at the Mardi Grass, to offer insights into the day-to-day life of the alternative culture.

Central to my understanding of ‘Nimbin’, the drug ‘war’, and the drug ‘problem’ is the information from my household survey and participant-observation that Nimbin is essentially a cannabis culture, with a strong tradition of protest. HEMP spokesperson Michael Balderstone said to me: ‘So many people arrested for drugs are good people, not criminals’, and lawyer David Heilpern explained in his taped interview ‘... what [the drug laws are] doing is making a police state. You see, when 70% of 15 to 17 year olds are using cannabis, and then (I’m guessing) 80% of people in the Nimbin area use cannabis, if it’s illegal it means the police can search anyone, anytime. And who they choose to search, what people they choose to bust, is totally a matter of police discretion, and that really frightens me’. His estimate of cannabis users in the Nimbin area is probably quite accurate, as the results from my drug use survey indicate.

THE CANNABIS USERS

The urban counter-culture brought not only their environmental ideals but also their drug use to Nimbin, and Grahame Dunstan provides an example of the baby boomers’ attitude to drugs in the sixties and seventies:

The drugs were central to this changing consciousness — cannabis, LSD and when we got to the country, mushrooms. They were the drugs that really shook us up! Back in 1967 when I was president of the University of NSW Student Union Council, as it was called then, I was on my way to the annual formal dinner where the Students’ Union sat down with the Vice-Chancellor, the Registrar, and the Bursar, you know, all the senior bureaucrats, and it sort of celebrated student life. It was a tradition we’d borrowed from Cambridge and Oxford. I was dressed up in a dinner suit, and as the President I was the host. On the way I stopped at a friend’s place, a student house just across the road from the gates of the University. They had gone to India and the East ... and come back with hashish ... I remember floating across the gardens of the University. Sir Phillip Baxter, the Vice Chancellor of the University, was also head of the Australian Atomic Energy Commission, working to create a nuclear industry in Australia ... Anyway I got up at the dinner and ... went into an attack on him. No more Mr Nice Guy of student politics ... I was the president of the Labour Club at university, and Bob Carr formed another club called the UNSW ALP Club, because we were super-radical against the War, and he wanted a much more staid ALP front at the University. A ladder up
into the ALP machine. He gets to be Premier and hang out in Macquarie St, conservative as ever. I get to hang out in Nimbin, radical as ever ...

When I arrived here to organise the [1993 Aquarius] Festival I rented a farm house for $7 a week ... we walked into this home with no doors. The backyard was overgrown and there, at the foot of the back steps, was a circle of gold top mushrooms, and we looked at each other and said: ‘I think we’re meant to be here’. So we cooked them up and went to a town meeting ripped off our faces. That’s how we used to do things in those days ... So what have I got to say about the cannabis culture? The Aquarius festival wouldn’t have happened without marijuana. It was a kind of sacrament. It was used at all our meetings. It was an inspiration. It changed my life, and a lot of the best ideas we had for the Aquarius Festival came from the marijuana ritual. The sacred herb did liberate the creativity.

This ‘sixties’ level of experience with illicit drugs is reflected in the quantitative results of my household survey. Over two thirds of the adults in Nimbin had used cannabis at some time, and most were current users. An important point to bear in mind when reading the drug use results is that they are certainly conservative; the sample is restricted to village and rural households (it excludes MO residents), and it is biased towards older residents (three-quarters of those who were interviewed were aged over 35, including 23% aged 55 and over) and towards women (58%), all of which contribute to a more conservative pattern of drug use in my results.

There was no difference between average number of visits to obtain interviews with cannabis users and non-users (an average of 1.6 calls for both groups). My Nimbin survey queried experience with nine drugs (Appendix III), followed by questions about patterns of drug use, such as when the drug was first and last used, and was it injected (see also the questionnaires in Appendix I). The following results are for combined village and rural households compared to national results.

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<thead>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol (full glass)</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco (full cigarette)</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallucinogens</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamines</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecstasy/designer drugs</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroin</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever injected any drug</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘Lifetime’ drug use refers to any experience with the drug, and is the statistic that appears most often in government reports and the popular media. There was a high level of illicit drug experience reported by Nimbin respondents, compared to contemporary (and more recent) national studies. A higher proportion of people in Nimbin reported injecting drugs illegally at some time in their lives, compared to national figures, but the actual
number is small (14 people) and most have not injected in the past year. Despite the higher lifetime prevalence of all drugs, the ranking of drugs was the same as the national pattern of drug use, from the most popular (alcohol), to the least popular (heroin).

As noted earlier, age is the single most important indicator of illicit drug use; the following table presents lifetime drug use by age group.

### Table 6.2
Ever used drugs in Nimbin combined village & rural h/holds, by age (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug: %</th>
<th>18-34 (n=29)</th>
<th>35-54 (n=63)</th>
<th>55+ (n=27)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol (na = 2)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco (na = 2)</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallucinogens</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamines</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroin</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injected illegally</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As with national patterns, more younger people have experience with all the drugs listed (except for hallucinogens), but experience with illicit drugs is high for both the younger (18 - 34) and middle (35-54) age groups. Notably, almost nine in ten people aged 18 to 34, and close to eight in ten people aged 35 to 54 have tried cannabis. Such a high level of experience with illicit drugs is especially noteworthy given that three-quarters (76%) of the sample are aged 35 and over. Despite the high levels of experience with illicit drugs, few have used illicits aside from cannabis in the past year. Table 6.3 provides the proportion of people who have used particular drugs in the past twelve months, given as a proportion of those who have ever used the drug; the same information is then given in Table 6.4 as a proportion of the total population (including non-users), because NCADA and other research regularly cite ‘recent’ drug use as this statistic.

### Table 6.3
Drug use in past 12months (as a proportion of those who have ever used) combined village & rural h/holds, by age (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug: %</th>
<th>18-34</th>
<th>35-54</th>
<th>55+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallucinogens</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamines</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroin</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injected illegally</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While experience with heroin (and with injecting), are higher in Nimbin than in national samples, very few are currently engaged in either behaviour: 17% of the sample have ever used heroin and 20% of that 17% have used in the past year; further, the actual numbers are small, with four respondents injecting any drug in the past year (three of whom had also used heroin). In all cases, the actual number of people in Nimbin who have used illicit drugs other than cannabis is very small relative to their experience with a range of drugs. Most people who have ever used alcohol, cannabis and tobacco are currently using them. Generally speaking, younger people are less likely than older people to have given up using a particular drug.

**Table 6.4**
Drug use in past 12 months (as a proportion of the whole sample), combined village & rural h/holds, by age (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug:</th>
<th>18-34</th>
<th>35-54</th>
<th>55+</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallucinogens</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamines</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroin</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injected illegally</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most striking feature of Nimbin’s drug use pattern is the high proportion of cannabis users, and, unlike the usual pattern, men and women were equally likely to have used cannabis in the past year (86% and 83%).

**Table 6.5**
Cannabis use in Nimbin, combined village & rural, by gender (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug use:</th>
<th>Female (n=69)</th>
<th>Male (n=50)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis ever used</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used past 12 months</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less often/ no longer use</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used past week</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used day of interview</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually use daily</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Proportion of those who have ever used cannabis.

As discussed earlier, Donnelly and Hall (1994) note a consistent pattern of cannabis use in population surveys: prevalence is higher among men than women, and use decreases with age. National patterns suggest that most people use cannabis infrequently, with, for example, three quarters of women and two thirds of men using less than weekly or no longer using in 1993 (Donnelly and Hall 1994, p. 30). Unlike these results, in Nimbin one third of women and a little less than one half of men used less often than weekly. However women used cannabis less frequently than men; one third of men and 12% of women who had ever used cannabis ‘usually’ used daily,
although numbers are small (12 and 5). So unlike national patterns at the time, equivalent numbers of men and
women regularly use cannabis but men were twice as likely as women to use cannabis daily.

In summary, close to three in every five people in the village and rural surrounds admitted to using cannabis in
the past year, and two thirds of people who have ever used cannabis had used it within the past week, which is
generally considered to be heavy use (Didcott et al 1998; Donnelly & Hall 1994), although only a small number
of people usually used cannabis daily.

Table 6.6 provides information about use of hallucinogens, amphetamines, and heroin, by gender. I found a
smaller proportion of women in Nimbin reported using these illicit drugs, and women were more likely to have
given them up.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug: %</th>
<th>Female (n=69)</th>
<th>Male (n=50)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hallucinogens ever</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallucinogens past 12m²</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamines ever</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamines past 12m²</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroin ever</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroin past 12m²</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inject ever</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inject past 12m²</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the Nimbin community has extensive experience with illicit recreational drugs, a relatively smaller
proportion had experience with heroin, and expressed as a proportion of the total household sample, only 3% of
Nimbin residents had used heroin in the past year. Most people currently were only using the same three
recreational drugs as the rest of Australia: alcohol, tobacco and cannabis.

The household surveys highlighted the marked demographic differences between those who used cannabis and
those who didn’t (‘non-users’), and they appear to profile quite distinct cultures, as indicated by differences in
age, education, employment status, length of time in the region, and most importantly, in their use of drugs.
These differences are shown in the following tables.

Most demographic differences are directly related to the age difference between cannabis users and non-users.
Those with no cannabis experience were, on average, over 20 years older and had lived for a much longer period
in the region. Twice as many cannabis users were ‘in the workforce’ (61%) than non-users (32%) while more
non-users were retired (47%) compared to cannabis users (1%). ‘In the workforce’ is an ABS category
comprised of people who are working and those who are looking for work (‘unemployed’). Male non-users were
much more likely to have trade qualifications (31% compared to 17%), and conversely, many more cannabis
users had some tertiary education (‘some’ includes TAFE qualifications and partial degrees).
Despite widespread cannabis use, some members of the alternative community were ambivalent about cannabis, and there were suggestions that at least some cannabis users had problems. Grahame Dunstan illustrates this ambivalence:

We are forced to defend it as part of the prohibition stuff, and not enough information is getting out about the long term effects of marijuana in the community, of how it generates paranoia (and some of it caused by prohibition because it’s illegal, rip-offs, and surveillance, helicopters and this sort of stuff). It creates so much division, people cease to be creative, they seize up, they stop. The “green-necks”, marijuana conservatives, are the worst kind. People think because they’ve raved about something when they were stoned, that it’s the same as doing it. You go to a public meeting there and you can bet that one third of the audience are stoned, there’s incredible madness there, things slop around. On the other side there’s incredible revelations, it’s often wonderful theatre, things pop to the surface that would never come to the surface at a meeting in Goonellabah where everyone was being earnest and considerate and going by the rules of the meeting, and never saying what’s bubbling inside them. The things that do get organised in Nimbin are amazingly effective. The End Prohibition campaign for example, it really does go with creativity, like nowhere else in Australia.

Lawyer David Heilpern, for instance, said:

Actually, one thing that really pisses me off is when they talk about Nimbin HEMP or my own views as being pro-marijuana, because I’m not pro-marijuana. I don’t think marijuana is the be-all and end-all, and in fact you know, I would like everyone using drugs really responsibly, and I don’t see that in Nimbin. In Nimbin I see some people using cannabis irresponsibly, too much of it. I mean, I know what it’s like to be stoned every day, and for me it’s not a very good head space to be in.

Despite a substantial body of research literature on cannabis use, little is known about heavy regular use in Australian community (non-volunteer) populations, although the Didcott, Reilly, Swift and Hall (1997)
research into heavy cannabis use on the NSW north coast provides valuable information about a volunteer sample. My research will not answer longitudinal questions, but it does offer perspectives on drug risks; for example, how do Nimbin’s cannabis smokers fare on measures such as heavy use, mixing cannabis with tobacco, and failure to meet one’s responsibilities.

**DRUG RISKS**

There is widespread interest in the dangers associated with long term cannabis use, but the research often relies on paid volunteers. I extracted a sub-sample of 59 long term (at least 10 years), ‘recent’ (past 12 months) cannabis users, who were part of the larger household sample drawn from the Nimbin area. Note that MO drug use is not presented or discussed — drug use only refers to residents from individual households in the area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persons:</th>
<th>Household sample: n</th>
<th>Household sample: Median age</th>
<th>Long term users sub-sample: n</th>
<th>L.t. users: Median age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total persons</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were 29 women and 30 men in the long-term sub-sample, and ages ranged from 18 to 60, with a median and mean age of 39. Fully half of those who participated in the Nimbin household survey (which included drug users and non users) were recent, long-term cannabis users. The mean length of residence for the total sample (ie Nimbin cannabis users and non users) was 13 years, the mean residence for the long term users’ sub-sample was 8 years. All cannabis users first used it at a median age of 16 (mean 20), while the long-term sub-sample first used cannabis at a median age of 17 (mean 19).

There are very few differences between the long-term cannabis users and all householders, because half the total sample were long-term users. One major difference is that more long-term cannabis users are unemployed and more of the total sample are retired — this is because the non-users are included in the total sample and the difference reflects the age differences between users and non-users (eg people who are retired cannot be unemployed).

The next table presents information about cannabis use, cannabis with tobacco, ‘heavy’ cannabis use, and failure in meeting one’s responsibilities. There is little difference among cannabis users in the proportion who have given it up: overall 15% of those who have ever used cannabis no longer use it compared to 13% of long term users, and when asked if they would use cannabis more, less or the same if it was legal to do so, an equally small number of households (5%) and long term users (5%) said they would use cannabis more often. Most people who have ever used cannabis, regardless of length of use, believe that legalisation would not affect their pattern
of cannabis use, and this belief is supported by research into cannabis use following decriminalisation in South Australia and overseas (Donnelly and Hall 1994).

Table 6.9
Cannabis use in Nimbin, combined village & rural, by gender (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug use: %</th>
<th>Female (n =69)</th>
<th>Male (n= 50)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis ever</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis p 12 months¹</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis p 12 months²</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis past month¹</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used cannabis &amp; tobacco in past month¹</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis in past week¹</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis in past week²</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis on day of interview¹</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Proportion of those who have ever used cannabis
² Proportion of the total sample, including non-users

As table 6.10 indicates, only a small proportion of people (11%) in the household survey reported that they had failed to do what was expected of them due their cannabis use, and only 3% of householders reported failing with both cannabis and alcohol (refer to Appendix I for questionnaires). Unfortunately, as with the similar question about alcohol, I did not ask for more details about the type of ‘failure’ (following NCADA).

Table 6.10
Fail responsibilities in Nimbin combined village & rural, by gender (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fail: %</th>
<th>Female (n =69)</th>
<th>Male (n= 50)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fail to do what’s expected¹</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fail to do what’s expected²</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Proportion of those who have ever used cannabis
² Proportion of the total sample, including non-users

The methods and aims of the Didcott and associates’ research (Didcott, Reilly, Swift & Hall 1997) were very different to mine; their study recruited a volunteer sample of heavy current users through snowball referral, from Nimbin residents as well as from other areas such as Bellingen (as discussed in Chapter Three). My Nimbin sub-sample was extracted from a door-to-door household survey). However, some general comparisons will be made to unravel some of the differences between volunteer users and community samples of cannabis users who may never volunteer for research, or approach treatment services.

The Nimbin long-term sub-sample first used cannabis on average 21 years ago, compared to 19 years in the Didcott and associates sample (Didcott et al. 1997). I had equal numbers of men and women, and the mean age of my sub-sample was 39, while around 60% of the Didcott and associates sample were men, and the mean age was 36. Most of their sample (given as 91% on p. 23) were aged over 30, as were most of mine (88%). The next table presents drug use for Nimbin’s long term users and for the Didcott, Reilly, Swift and Hall (1997) north coast sample of long term heavy cannabis users.
Drug cultures

Table 6.11
Lifetime drug use among long term users:
Nimbin household sub-sample & Didcott et al. 1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ever used these drugs: %</th>
<th>Nimbin long term users (1994–‘95)</th>
<th>Didcott et al. (1996)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallucinogens</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamines</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecstasy/designed drugs</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroin</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever injected illegally</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Didcott and associates’ sample was entirely comprised of ‘heavy users’ (usually used cannabis several times a week or daily); for example, 60% usually used cannabis daily, while in my Nimbin sub-sample half as many (29%) usually used daily, and conversely, 3% of the Didcott and associates sample used weekly compared to 41% of the Nimbin sub-sample. Most differences between the samples are attributable to the recruitment criteria, as Didcott and his colleagues recruited more males and exceptionally heavy cannabis users.

Both samples report experience with a range of illicit drugs, and Donnelly and Hall (1994) note that the best predictor of ‘heavy’ cannabis use (ie weekly or more frequently) is use of other illicit drugs (Donnelly & Hall 1994, p. 98). More Nimbin respondents reported experience with alcohol and tobacco use, while more long term cannabis users in the Didcott and associates’ sample had used most illicit drugs (for example, 75% compared to 61% the Nimbin sample had tried amphetamines, and 42% compared to 30% in the Nimbin sub-sample had tried heroin). Again, the differences probably reflect the heavier cannabis users recruited specifically by Didcott and his associates, and the higher proportion of women in my household sub-sample of cannabis users. The next table presents drug use over the past month for both long-term user samples. The results are quite similar.

Table 6.12
Drug use in past month: long term users in
Nimbin household & Didcott et al. 1997 sub-samples (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Used in past month: %</th>
<th>% Nimbin long term users (1994–‘95)</th>
<th>% Didcott et al. (1996)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>95¹</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco</td>
<td>75²</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallucinogens</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamines</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecstasy/designed drugs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroin</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ No answer = 1; ² No answer = 2

Didcott and his associates reported less current use of alcohol and tobacco compared to Nimbin long term users, and roughly equivalent patterns of current use of the illicit drugs. As with other north coast baby boomers, the
long-term cannabis users in these samples had extensive illicit drug experience, but generally they preferred cannabis. What risks are Nimbin householders taking with legal drugs? In the case of alcohol, few people in Nimbin (12% of the population, mostly men) reported that they usually drank seven or more drinks on a drinking occasion.

A similarly small proportion of drinkers (14% of the population) reported that they had failed to do what was expected of them in the past year, due to drinking. Men were twice as likely as women to drink five or more standard drinks on at least one occasion in the past two weeks, and to usually drink seven or more drinks, but equal proportions of men and women said they had failed in their responsibilities because of alcohol (eight women and nine men). The proportion of ‘failures’ with cannabis and alcohol, although not high, are higher than the 2% to 10% of the population that other authors have suggested experience drug problems. However, ‘failed’ may have referred to a single instance of missing work or an appointment with a ‘hangover’. I should have clarified this question for both alcohol and cannabis.

There is no evidence that, in general, people in Nimbin are particularly likely to fail in their work and personal obligations through their drug use. Only 3% of the total household sample reported ‘failure’ with both cannabis and alcohol. The data suggest that, like their national counterparts, Nimbin men are more likely than women to engage in risky use of the legal recreational drugs, although in all cases the actual numbers are not large. A small number of Nimbin residents may have unspecified problems with alcohol or cannabis, and current use of the legal drug tobacco is high.

Lifetime tobacco use in Nimbin was higher (79%) than the population rates of 72% (in the 1993 NCADA survey (Commonwealth of Australia, 1993d) and 63% in the 1995 survey (Commonwealth of Australia, 1996). Nimbin men were more likely than women to have used tobacco on the day of interview (62% compared to 55%), and overall, 58% of those who had ever used tobacco had smoked on the day of interview. Twice as many tobacco users have given up their drug, compared to cannabis users, due in part to effective social sanctions against tobacco. However, comments made to me during the Nimbin survey suggested that some people were using tobacco in conjunction with cannabis to spread a limited amount of cannabis further, and such people may not acknowledge tobacco use in a survey because they do not consider that they are tobacco users. Therefore tobacco use may be a little higher than reported here.

Roger Jones, reporting on the 1993 NCADA survey, found that regular tobacco smokers, past and current, were more likely to have tried cannabis than occasional and non-smokers, while Donnelly and Hall (1994) found experience with tobacco to be a strong predictor of experience with cannabis (and probably most other illicit drugs). In Nimbin slightly more than half of ‘current’ (that is, used in the past month) cannabis users are also current tobacco users; this is a similar proportion to that reported by Donnelly and Hall (1994) for Australians generally. Among Nimbin households fewer cannabis users had used it on the day of interview (around a third of those who have ever used cannabis), compared to tobacco users who had used tobacco on the day of interview (six in ten of those who have ever used tobacco), which fits the often observed pattern of tobacco as a drug which
is more likely to be used daily, and cannabis as a drug that tends to be used weekly or less often (Donnelly & Hall 1994).

Given the high level of cannabis use in the region, I also asked the local doctor, David Helliwell, about any health problems he’d noticed during his thirteen years as Nimbin’s GP. He replied:

I think the most frequent cannabis related illness I see is what I call “bongers’ chest”, which is basically acute bronchitis, or asthma/bronchitis, that’s induced by heavy smoking and deep inhalation. At times I will see marital discord around it ... The men tend to smoke more dope than the women. At times we see, rarely, it’s not frequent, but we will see cases of cannabis-induced psychosis, particularly with people with underlying psychiatric disorders, either manic depressive illnesses or schizophrenia, where heavy marijuana use seems to exacerbate the symptoms. I guess we will see the problems with circulation happening later on, or the incidence of lung cancer happening later on, as people get older. But mainly, as I say, it tends to be related to just respiratory problems, acute or chronic bronchitis, and social/interpersonal problems.

As I mentioned in Chapter Three, there were few health problems among ‘heavy’ users in Jamaican research (Beaubrun 1983; Rubin & Comitas 1976) and in the local study by Didcott and associates (1998) in north-eastern NSW. There is a growing body of literature and research results that suggest some significant health benefits associated with cannabis use (eg WPUCMP 2000; Grinspoon & Bakalar 1998; de Launey 1997).

Factors other than the drugs themselves can influence the development and continuance of drug ‘problems’. Social and cultural factors appear to influence drug experiences, regardless of the drug or the society, and Dr Helliwell described functional drug use in Nimbin:

One of the more interesting things that I’ve looked at while I’ve been here, is what’s functional use? Because one of the problems we face in the area of illicit drugs is defining functional use, or finding normal [community] populations ... I mean generally what most people who smoke dope frequently, on a daily basis, say, is: “I only smoke in the evenings”. And that seems to me to be a very, very, important part of defining functional use with marijuana. A lot of people will smoke dope on a daily basis, but during the day they’ll stay straight, get busy, do all the things that they have to do, and instead of coming home and having their tinny [can of beer], they basically come home and have a joint instead. I know a number of people who work hard as carpenters or teachers, who literally say that “I come home, I have a joint instead of the two cans”. That generally seems to be one of the important rules that people set themselves, it seems to work for them.

It should be borne in mind that most illicit drug use Australia-wide occurs among people in their teens and twenties. The Nimbin community has never avoided difficult issues, including the use of cannabis by young people. Grahame Dunstan described one example of a direct and open dialogue with young people about functional drug use:

One of the big discussions on the weekend was what’s the appropriate age for the boys of this community to be smoking cannabis. There was real concern that one of the older boys had offered a six year old a drag on a joint. I mean, cut it out! That was unreasonable, a ten year old said that wasn’t appropriate, and there was this big discussion between the boys and the men about what was appropriate. No resolutions, but an honest discussion. And the boys were
coming back and saying “look, when did you smoke marijuana?” and I said I didn’t smoke till I was about 25 and I was at University, and all that kind of stuff. And he said “Well, if you were living in a community where it was smoked every day, maybe you’d have a different attitude, and you would have started younger”. So, what can I say to these boys? They’re absolutely right and maybe we’d have different attitudes.

This community was saying: “OK, let’s talk about dysfunctional behaviour on drugs. How will you know when your behaviour is dysfunctional for yourself and this community?” So, that was the question that the boys were working on, that they’ve gotta come up with and tell us what’s dysfunctional. How will we know? Will it be that they won’t chop the wood? That they don’t get their homework done? Just give us some parameters for us to watch you on. We’ll see how that goes. Basically, what I liked about it was an open discussion, and how the men were engaged with the boys, even though they were rolling all these joints while talking. The boys are just role modelling. They’re good boys and they’re going to be useful citizens.

Nimbin’s cannabis culture engaged with many of the difficult issues around illicit drug use and drug marketing. This engagement has included protests, attempts at regulating the cannabis market, a street code for public behaviour, and a willingness to engage in frank and open discussions with the their young people. Nimbin’s counter-culture has a deserved reputation for creative solutions, tolerance, sharing, and civic responsibility. Notwithstanding their good intentions, and personal and collective abilities, the community doesn’t always achieve what they strive for. Not long after the El Dockin operation, the Nimbin community developed a street code that focused on avoiding nuisance in the main street. It included rules for public behaviour for users of both alcohol and illicit drugs, and for the control of dogs, skateboards, and drug dealing. Local police believed the code had ‘improved the situation’ (Northern Rivers Echo 20 January 1996, p. 1), but when I asked residents they generally expressed less satisfaction; and as mentioned elsewhere, attempts at regulating the cannabis market through cannabis cafes were blocked.

Apart from the picturesque village buildings and the drug market, Nimbin boasted something else unusual, and no discussion of the interplay between drugs and culture in the region would be complete without a consideration of the multiple occupancies. The next section draws from responses to the MO household survey, and from participant-observation as described in ‘a tribal meeting’. Aside from a small number of special questions for MO residents in the household survey questionnaire, my understanding of the alternative community was entirely dependent on participant-observation.

**MULTIPLE OCCUPANCIES**
There are groups of people living on multiple occupancies (MOs) throughout the north coast, notably at Bellingen, Mullumbimby, Main Arm and Byron Bay as well as in the Lismore local government area, which includes Nimbin.
A local newspaper estimated that the far north coast contained around 80% of all communally owned land holdings in NSW (Northern Star, 17 October 1994, p. 4), while Margaret Munro-Clark (1986) pointed out that the north coast had the highest concentration of intentional communities in Australia and their presence there in large numbers caused some social stress (Munro-Clark 1986, pp. 135, 139). Grahame Dunstan agreed: ‘As my friend Paul Recher pointed out, there is a higher concentration of counter-culture owned land around here than anywhere else in the world. Because of the MOs and because of the numbers of people, the counter-culture values of the seventies took root here like nowhere else in the world, sustained itself as a culture, and grew’.

And while MOs are to be found throughout north-eastern NSW, it is likely that Lismore local government area has the largest concentration of multiple occupancies in the state and probably in Australia, with sixty-two registered with the Lismore City Council in 1995 (as well as some unofficial ones). The registered multiple occupancies in the district owned more than 3,660 hectares of land (Lismore City Council 1995). By the mid-nineties the Nimbin area contained at least 27 multiple occupancies, among them the Tuntable Falls Coordination Co-operative, which is larger and older than most Australian communities, and was founded by the baby boomers who attended the Aquarius festival.

In the eighties Margaret Munro-Clark (1986) conducted research into MOs (she called them ‘intentional communities’), most of which were in north-eastern NSW. She suggested that the movement in Australia was closely associated with student radicalism (Munro-Clark 1986, p. 54), and Grahame Dunstan told me something similar.

Munro-Clark cited an earlier study into 20 Australian communities which found that 32% of residents had university degrees compared to 4% in the general population (Munro-Clark 1986, p. 123). My research indicated that (20 years later) 14% of MO residents compared to 12% of householders had university degrees. However, over half of MO residents had ‘some tertiary education’ (which includes TAFE qualifications and partial university degrees) compared to a third of Nimbin householders. Comparisons in terms of tertiary education are difficult, because the new Southern Cross University in Lismore provided educational opportunities to increasing numbers of the north coast population over the nineties.

Like Featherstone (1992), Munro-Clark (1986) was aware of the long tradition of alternative communities, and she pointed out that beatniks were sharing ‘psychedelic drugs, pop music, and eastern mysticism’ in the fifties (Munro-Clark 1986, p. 60). The major difference between earlier protest strands and the baby boomers who moved to the north coast in the early seventies was, of course, in their numbers. In describing north coast multiple occupancies, Munro-Clark highlighted the tensions between the counterculture and the established farming community; she said that the ‘intentional communities were an affront’ to the farmers’ work practices and values, and there were several conflicts over environmental issues, particularly rainforest logging (Munro-Clark 1986, p. 139).
The local reactions to the alternative communities around Nimbin bore many similarities to the racism described by Des Manderson (1993) and discussed in earlier chapters. Munro-Clark described how the local newspaper accused the MO communities of living in ‘sub-standard dwellings’ and failing to meet existing building regulations (Munro-Clark 1986, p. 133). Lismore Council issued demolition orders for the alternative community’s homes, and health and building inspectors publicly claimed that ‘since the new settlers had arrived in the region, their (communitarian) living conditions caused hepatitis and exotic diseases previously unknown to the area’, although there was no evidence to support these claims (Munro-Clark 1986, pp. 135-136).

Munro-Clark described the counter-culture’s buildings as including domes, tepees, and converted cattle bales, and ‘many incorporated elements of fantasy or personal symbolism, such as segments of brightly coloured glass in patterns on walls, stained glass windows, river rocks, adobe’ (Munro-Clark 1986, p. 162). Fifteen of the thirty-six communities she surveyed mentioned problems getting approval from local councils for their buildings; at the same time, the MO residents reported that they were reluctant to use conventional ‘experts’ in their building (Munro-Clark 1986, p. 162). The results of their labour were beautiful homes made of mud bricks, river stones, and soft-toned timber, that were often invisible among the forest trees and ferns.

Two Nimbin MO residents were interviewed for Nearly Normal Nimbin, the Jenni Kendall and Paul Tait documentary (first screened on SBS Television, 2 November 1998). They described their appeal to the Land and Environment Court against a Lismore Council demolition order on their home (on Bhodi Farm, an MO close to Tuntable Falls) because it didn’t have one wall. When the Council’s QC asked: ‘Mr Seed, what do you do about vermin?’ Mr Seed tried to explain that having one wall ‘missing’ from his home allowed free interaction with the forest environment, none of which were ‘vermin’; he explained: ‘...Sometimes even the potoroo will come in’, and the QC asked ‘What’s a potoroo?’ to which Mr Seed replied: ‘It’s a little furry marsupial’. The QC was reported as responding ‘A little furry marsupial comes into your home?’ to which the resident answered: ‘Yes, it’s great! That’s why I haven’t got a wall’.

After lobbying from both sides, the State government intervened through the Planning and Environment Commission, and state regulations were amended to facilitate multiple occupancies (Munro-Clark 1986, p. 136). Munro-Clark described how the government also provided technical assistance to MO residents through a group from the Faculty of Architecture at Sydney University led by Colin James; this group submitted recommendations to the state government about feasible alternatives to conventional construction techniques, as well as advising the communities on health and safety requirements for local council building approval (Munro-Clark 1986, p. 136). By the early eighties the alternative culture in the Nimbin region had stimulated a number of innovative changes to existing environmental, land use, and dwelling construction regulations in NSW.

Munro-Clark suggested that in the eighties there was greater respect and more peaceful co-existence between the old and the new settlers, which she attributed to the alternative community’s access to decision making, both through effectively lobbying state and federal governments, and through multiple occupancy residents successfully standing for election to Lismore council (Munro-Clark 1986, p. 136). As well, she noted that the
residents of multiple occupancies provided ‘valuable cash inflow to local shops’ (Munro-Clark 1986, p. 138). In conclusion, Munro-Clark describes the alternative sector of north-eastern NSW as ‘a new kind of ecological niche’ with the ‘rare character of being an Australian cultural niche in which a low-cash income and simple standard of living are acceptable for the well educated middle class’ (Munro-Clark 1986, p. 198).

One notable point about the north coast MOs appears to be their diversity, as evidenced by two local council surveys. In 1994, following an audit of MOs, Lismore Council was told that ‘The only generalised statement one could proffer about the multiple occupancies that I have visited since the inspection process has commenced, is that each is unique. Not only unique for reasons of differing locations, topography, etc but also systems of management, size, internal stability and approaches to environment management (list not exhaustive)’ (Lismore City Council 1994, p. 9).

This was echoed in a 1995 report tabled at a Lismore City Council meeting (Post development approval inspections of multiple occupancy developments): ‘It would be grossly misleading to over generalise about multiple occupancy’ (Lismore City Council 1995, p. 45). Munro-Clark confirmed this view when she said: ‘The co-ownership of rural land is a means to individualistic lifestyles. Among these groups individual autonomy is vigilantly guarded ... Personal privacy is stressed above communality and such co-operation as does occur is the outcome of ad hoc agreements among friends rather than being a pillar of group structure’ (Munro-Clark 1986, p. 180).

In 1995 the Lismore area’s sixty MOs (two were waiting registration) had between them 700 approved building sites; half of the communities had approved sites for 5 or fewer dwellings, while six had 20 or more sites, including one with 181 approved sites. Not all building sites contained dwellings, and so most MOs have quite small populations; and of course many members of the counter-culture live outside the MOs.

I surveyed a volunteer sample of MO residents (see also Appendix III), using the same questionnaire as the household surveys. There were often quite marked differences between the views of the MO sample and those of the single households (Chapter Four), and my results illuminate some of these differences. The MO sample, with equivalent numbers of men and women, achieved a better gender balance than the household surveys. A slightly smaller proportion of the MO residents were unemployed (14%) compared to householders (18%), none were retired, and substantially more MO residents had some tertiary education (52% compared to 34% of householders).

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Table 6.13
Demographic information: MO volunteers

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I asked a small number of additional questions for the MO volunteers who participated in my household surveys. For example, I asked residents why they were living on a multiple occupancy. The most common reason related to the concept of ‘community’ (34%), with low cost housing also important (21%), as was sharing resources (14%), and personal things such as ‘It’s a nice place’, ‘I fell in love’, ‘To grow my own’, and ‘The freedom’ (17%) (refer to Appendix III). No one mentioned ‘self-sufficiency’.

I also asked MO residents what were the three main advantages of living on a multiple occupancy. As with the first question, many mentioned the social and child support aspects first: things like ‘having an extended family’, ‘support with children’, and the importance of ‘community’ were often mentioned. The next most common first answer reflected economic advantages such as cheap land and affordable housing. Other people stressed things like ‘personal freedom’, the ‘diversity of people’, or ‘the unity of purpose’.

As Munro-Clark (1986) had already pointed out, the strand of the counter-culture that collectively purchased land in north-eastern NSW was comprised of a variety of people with a range of perspectives and goals. This was confirmed by answers to my question about their personal beliefs or ideals. Answers included: ‘I am an idealist’, ‘People are more important than possessions’, ‘A simple lifestyle’, ‘Community enhancement’, ‘A spiritual environmentalist’, ‘Total anarchist’, ‘Buddhism’, ‘Pan-theistic’, ‘A planetary entity’, ‘Vegetarian-ecologist’, ‘I’m for a non-violent, anti-drug world’, and ‘Self responsibility’. There was great variety in people’s ideals, which suggests a diversity of thought and goals among people who are living communally, rather than a particular ‘type’ of person with a clearly shared purpose, which was, perhaps, the style of earlier/other communities.

I asked MO residents if they felt that their ideals had been met. Three-quarters said that their ideals had been, while one quarter said that they hadn’t. Despite having their goals/ideals met, fewer people felt that they would always live on the multiple occupancy; respondents were evenly divided, 33% said they would always stay and 38% said that they expected to move elsewhere.

I asked residents for the three main disadvantages of living on an MO. The first mentioned disadvantage also reflected a variety of views; the most common complaints related to the community decision-making processes (31%), while others mentioned problems with neighbours, lack of facilities, and discrimination against MO residents, and 17% said that there were no disadvantages.

The Tuntable Falls community, near Nimbin village, has been visited by journalists in search of the hippy vision almost as often as has Nimbin village. Tuntable Falls community is one of the largest and longest-established MOs in Australia. Margaret Munro-Clark (1986) said of Tuntable that ‘Its particular interest lies in the demonstration it provides of continued instability within a relatively stable anarchistic community’ (Munro-Clark 1986, p. 126). Munro-Clark said: ‘Indeed the diversity of [Tuntable’s] population is a marked characteristic of the community. As a recent newspaper report expressed it: ‘There are professionals, philosophers, gurus, freaks,
misfits, ex-Vietnam officers, craftsmen, bushies, nihilists, adventurers, mixed-up kids of wealthy parents and political figures, numerous single parents, feminists, environmentalists, peaceniks, and save-the-planet missionaries” ‘ (Hawley 1982, cited in Munro-Clark 1986, p. 129).

The Tunttable MO was originally established on 700 acres near Nimbin soon after the Aquarius Festival in 1973; the purchase price was raised by selling $200 shares in the property, an old dairy farm. Now Tunttable has its own pre-school, primary school, fire brigade, community hall, shop, restaurant and youth space on around 1,000 acres of rainforest, as well as property in Nimbin village. This large anarchist multiple occupancy has expanded and prospered since Aquarius.

There are two ways to live on Tunttable, one is to own a share and build or buy a house, the other is to rent an existing house from the owner. The number of building sites on Tunttable’s 1,000 acres is limited by the terrain, as most of the land is steeply sloping heavily-forested mountains, and only some areas have electricity and/or vehicle access; not all the council-approved sites have been built on yet. An early Tunttable rule was that while the land was owned communally (separate parcels of land could not be sold), houses represented individual labour and expense, and could be sold or rented. I was told that there were some limitations, for example, exorbitant profits should not be made, the annual levy must be paid, and Tunttable residency criteria applied; people who wanted to live on Tunttable Falls (regardless of whether they owned a share or not), had to have a sponsor and a place to live for 12 months, to experience the often harsh living conditions on this anarchist MO, and to enable the neighbours and the community in general to decide whether it would be a suitable permanent arrangement. Both the application and the outcome are discussed at ‘tribal meetings’.

Journalists sometimes had difficulties with Tunttable rules; for example, ABC television reporters complained (7.30 Report, 24 September 1998) that no one on Tunttable would speak to them until they attended a ‘tribal meeting’, which, presumably, the reporters could not wait for.

After the stormy town meetings I had attended, I found the tribal decision-making process to be a delightful experience. Next is a story that describes a tribal meeting on Tunttable Falls MO through my eyes, to illustrate the often vast cultural differences between the decision-making styles of alternative and conservative cultures. Compared to more conventional meeting styles a Tunttable tribal meeting was like a day-long party. During her taped interview Katie Love observed that ‘Tunttable is now closed to the extent that they’re only giving shares to their own children, and Tunttable has always accommodated heaps of people. It’s not always ownership, sometimes it’s a rental, but it has helped the [housing] problem a lot, and so have a lot of the [other] MOs’. It was during the tribal meeting described next that the historic decision was made to close Tunttable to further membership and most new site developments.

On a Sunday morning in the spring of 1995 I leave the Nimbin valley and drive up the winding mountain road to attend a tribal meeting of the Tunttable Falls Co-ordination Co-operative Incorporated. There’s no obvious beginning to Tunttable, suddenly the shop parking lot appears on my left. There’s a single-decker bus on blocks
in the parking lot, along with a dozen or so cars. I am completely surrounded by forested mountains. The shop was originally built to provide residents with essential foodstuffs that were purchased in bulk for the Co-operative (particularly rice in the early days). The range of goods expanded over the years because the nearest shop is around fifteen kilometres away in Nimbin village.

The shop stocks supermarket products, fresh foods like bread and milk and vegetables, hot snacks, and residents’ produce and crafts. The veranda, on two sides of the shop, is covered with flowering vines and there are benches and tables, a pot-bellied stove, public telephone and notice boards. The meeting agenda is on display. The Tuntable shop is part of the free internal phone network and you can ring most residents from there. Inside the shop I pay for a coffee; we have to make our own, so I spoon sugar and instant coffee into a cup and feel the electric jug to check its heat. Sometimes a python hangs from a tree near the shop’s entrance but it’s not here today.

Past the shop, further into the valley, is the community hall with its red cedar walls and stained glass windows; it has been slowly and lovingly built from recycled materials over several years. The hall is used for tribal meetings and social events such as birthday parties, dances and fund-raisers. I sit on a grassy hill overlooking the meeting space in front of the hall, with the shop behind me. In today’s warm weather the meeting is outside and three chairs and a small table are set up in the open space beside the hall for the Chair, Secretary and Treasurer (office bearers are required even for anarchist incorporated organisations). Everyone else sits on the grass or perches on stacks of wood on the partially completed hall veranda. Clothing is faded and idiosyncratic; many of the men are dressed in soft pants or sarongs with bare chests, the women also wear soft, faded pants or long dresses and shirts, along with interesting hats, vests, colourful scarves and ornaments. Not everyone is a resident, some of the visitors are probably shareholders, others are friends. There’s a hillbilly feel to the meeting, probably because lots of men have long beards and long hair and wear wide brimmed hats (and they perch on the hall’s exposed beams and stacks of wood in groups). There seems to be more men than women.

People are drifting towards the meeting space from the shop, carrying hot drinks and stopping to chat with other residents, some of whom, it seems, they haven’t seen for anything up to a year. People gathered around me on the grass with food and drink and muted conversation. Shandor is weaving a crown of vine leaves for Tony (the Chair). Shandor tells me that Tony thinks he’s Caesar (the power of the position has created a dictator); he throws the garland and Tony catches it, laughs, and wears it for a while. Outside the shop, a mob of children are playing a ball game and their screams and yells make it hard to hear. Someone calls out loudly ‘Shut those kids up!’ and a couple of people leave the meeting to talk to, and play with, the children. There’s no discussion about who should do what. The meeting lasts most of the day, and the issues are discussed at great length because the residents aim for consensus. I am told that they do vote, but it’s not usually necessary. Everyone can speak on an issue, and they are heard without interruption or argument (although some groups of people are talking softly, feeding children, and wandering off to the shop or even home, to return later).
The open air gathering is like a picnic. People keep meeting people and disappearing for a chat, a smoke, or a hot drink. Joints are passed, tobacco borrowed, food shared, and the inevitable children come and go. Time rolled on and people talked about road repairs, the fire truck, work quotas and the feasibility of building in an undeveloped hamlet if a dam was put in there to provide water. One item intrigued me: it was whether or not to reinstate ‘angel duty’. Teal explains to me that every resident has to perform a work levy for the multiple occupancy each year. The usual work is road repairs, new road building, fire fighting, office/administrative work (including the management committee positions), land clearing (of weeds and introduced species) and forest regeneration. For a while ‘angel duty’ — cooking, cleaning, and/or shopping for other residents who were ill or otherwise incapacitated — was considered acceptable for the work levy. But, Teal explains, it was abolished because people abused it; it seems that some people clocked up service hours with their friends, essentially doing nothing. However, the basic idea was good and today a more strictly controlled form of angel duty is proposed. Harry wants the maintenance work he carries out on the fire truck to be considered for the work levy too. The list of acceptable community jobs is expanded, and I walk to the shop to buy a Coke.

Around 2 pm a lot of people appear to be drifting towards the meeting ground; the next issue is obviously important. The space around the hall is filling and my little hillock is packed with people chattering softly. A young woman (sixteen? eighteen?) addresses the meeting with a request for a membership share and the right to live on Tuntable. She explained that she was raised on Tuntable but her parents had moved away; now that she was old enough she had returned. People confirmed that she was a ‘Tuntable child’, and a sponsor said she could live with her for the necessary year. Another young woman stood up and spoke against the proposal; she was concerned about over-development of the community’s painstakingly restored rainforest. She pointed out that she and other children of residents would want their own home sites, and she proposed that no new people should be accepted. The discussion ranged over several related issues (such as possible new development sites), and a lot of people spoke.

In effect the tribe was presented with a range of scenarios, resulting in a complex analysis of a very important issue. The tribal meeting’s decision would impact on the wider Nimbin community, because the MO had absorbed many of the village’s homeless and needy over the decades since it was established, and there were few other housing options available in Nimbin by the end of the nineties. The meeting was effectively setting a ceiling on its medium term growth, and the decision meant that many shareholders would never have the opportunity to live on Tuntable, as available houses and new sites became rarer.

The meeting wound up around 4 pm, and I headed for the parking lot. I appreciated the individuality and good humour of Tuntable residents. I appreciated the willingness of all the multiple occupancy residents I met to welcome me into their communities and often into their wonderful, unique homes, and I particularly admired their sense of humour and playfulness, their relaxed and supportive committee processes, and their beautiful environments.
Over six in ten MO residents had full time care of children compared to less than four in ten householders. When full-time and part-time care of children are combined, over seven in ten MO residents are parents compared to a little over four in ten households. Children were a central feature of all Tuntable activities, and this MO had established its own schools. Katie Love helped to start the pre-school in 1979, as she explained to me: ‘Because there were a lot of children on our community, the Tuntable Co-Op, I started a playgroup, and then we got a pre-school [where Katie was the first teacher] ... I thought the parents needed childcare, and they did! A lot of the teenagers that I deal with now, we have a little eye-to-eye contact and yeah, they know that I knew them when they were three’.

Two years later, in 1981, the energetic Tuntable parents established the Tuntable Primary School, because, as one parent told me, they didn’t want their children travelling ‘all that way to Nimbin by bus twice a day’. The school’s philosophy reflects the beliefs of the community, with an emphasis on self-paced learning, good communication skills, art, ‘earth survival skills’ and shared responsibility (Tuntable Falls Primary School Manual 1994). The school manual cites one founding parent’s view of the school’s goals as: ‘the founders of the school wanted to provide ... a loving, extended family where our children would learn the co-operation and respect for the earth that were the ideals of those who set up the co-op in 1973 ... one huge advantage that we have in putting our philosophy into practice is the very low teacher:child ratio we are able to maintain. This is partly due to our belief in parent involvement’ (Tuntable Falls Primary School Manual 1994, pp. 4-5). Some Nimbin residents told me during the door-to-door survey that they were less concerned about the drug trade as about the alternatives’ children. ‘It was after dark and they only had shirts on, I wanted to put them into pyjamas and tuck them into bed’ one resident said to me while completing the survey; ‘The children were playing in the street’ another told me.

Not surprisingly, given the high number of parents, children are very important to MO residents. People ‘look out’ for each other’s children, and there’s no tolerance where the safety of their children is threatened (despite some concerns about their welfare — although there are doubtless some parents who need support to care for their children, as elsewhere in society). One day I was standing in a garden talking to an MO resident, and I admired what I thought was an art work, a mobile of flat blue river rocks suspended like fruit from a tree in the yard. The resident looked at me strangely and explained that the slowly turning stones weren’t art, they were a warning. They symbolised a rock spider (paedophile) and they hung there as a warning to the previous resident: ‘He was forced to move, and to any others’. On another occasion I was sitting in Alsopp Park during the Mardi Grass. A small child was wandering around the giant joint and a person sitting nearby asked me: ‘Is he lost?’ ‘No he’s a Nimbin child’ I replied, and the person nodded. Nimbin children are rarely alone or lost — everyone knows them and they know everyone — people will ‘look out’ for them. There is a substantial number of male solo or part-time parents in the area, and strong male involvement in child-raising partnerships. Bob Hopkins explained to me some of the benefits for parents on a multiple occupancy:

Positives of a multiple occupancy are a sense of sharing, of guardianship of the land. The thing that I like about the community where I live is that it’s really very much a family. You don’t even have to like the people in your family, [but] there is some binding there. You
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don’t have a great deal to do with each other that’s not intensely communal, a community where everyone gets on with their own particular thing, but there is this quite tangible feeling of family there ... Yeah, it seems to me we’ve all got kids just about, and this is maybe what causes it to have that family sense. You’ve got a whole range of kids to a greater or lesser degree. There is this sense that those kids can trust you, come to you, that sort of feeling.

Invariably, I found the older MO children I met to be assured, articulate and often colourful; hair might be dyed red or green, clothes might be made of velvet or tulle or hand-painted cotton, and faces were often painted. One young women who lived on a small MO regularly sat in the Rainbow Cafe painting friends’ and children’s faces. Her artwork was lovely, and she did it without charge because she enjoyed it. On one occasion a small boy from a group of tourists proudly returned to his parents with tiger stripes across his cheeks. I left the cafe that day with a blue oval on my forehead, blue circles around my eyes, and gold tear drops on my cheeks, and I began to understand the attraction of face painting.

Multiple occupancy residents have been targeted for many criticisms, ranging from the ‘illegal and unclean’ accusations in the seventies and early eighties to complaints about MO’s paying unfairly low council rates, or ‘shirking’ their civic obligations such as fire-fighting. These sorts of accusations in the local press were invariably hotly contested by the ‘alternatives’, and there did not appear to be much of substance in them (like the complaints about services for injectors); for example, Tuntable community maintained its own fire truck, along with active involvement in the local voluntary unit. In one newspaper article, Lismore Councillor Diana Roberts defended MOs, saying that they had been subject to ‘myths based on misunderstanding and ignorance, and also some malicious misinformation ... Many of us on MO’s are not only establishing a house in an affordable way, we are also creating a sense of community and seeking a quality of life in a sustainable way’ (Lismore Echo 11 August 1994, p. 6). The article added that the Pan-Community Council of MO’s had commented that: ‘It was at a loss to understand the emotive and sometimes vehement attacks against MO’s’ (Lismore Echo 11 August 1994, p. 6). MO resident Bob Hopkins (Prohibition End) came to symbolise many of the differences between the cannabis-smoking counter-culture and the more conservative elements in the Nimbin community. The trial of Prohibition End, next, describes this Nimbin activist’s experiences with the law.

THE TRIAL OF PROHIBITION END

Bob Hopkins was a prominent figure in Nimbin in the nineties, often appearing at rallies dressed as ‘The Plantem’. In 1995 he changed his name by deed poll to Prohibition End (so it would appear as END Prohibition on the ballot paper), and stood as a candidate against the long-term sitting National Party member in the state election. He polled quite well given his single issue platform — as the Echo commented: ‘There was a remarkably strong vote ... for the pro-cannabis candidate Prohibition End, also known as Bob Hopkins. He scored 7.4 per cent of the total 27,099 votes lodged and defeated MP Rixon on primary votes in Nimbin’ (Northern Rivers Echo 30 March 1995, p. 1). Further, Bob was a prime instigator of the Mardi Grass Festival, which started as a protest (ff), and for many Bob became an iconic cannabis crusader; as The Plantem, in his green body costume stamped with cannabis leaves, he was hard to ignore. Bob, like many baby boomers, used
the media effectively to agitate for change. For example, he told me: '[One day] I was picketing the *Northern Star* because they had printed some really shoddy stuff on drugs in Nimbin. They wouldn’t print my responses, so I went down to the stationary shop to picket. It was a day where I was talking to people, getting this idea, you know, hang a banner on the back, banner on the front, and just talk to people as they go by, just annoy the *Star*, have a bell and just yell all day’. Bob’s lone protest resulted in media exposure for his side of the drug story. He said:

Yeah I learned to use the media. I’d already got the idea that the media was there to be manipulated. I insulted just about every reporter and radio journalist, (probably still continue to do so) ... I have a bit of an adversarial approach to things ... in those days it was really just standing up. I’d started this group called Nearly Normal Nimbin, we’d hold irregular meetings, and there’d be a few real hard-core pot smokers, a few loonies, and there was no real movement, it was just a front. We played politics behind this Nearly Normal Nimbin group. You could issue press releases and it all looked like there was a movement. [Rory Metcalf from the *Northern Star*] did an article about the group. A friend of mine who had cancer, and was dying volunteered himself. He came out, he was the first one who sort of came out and said “I use pot; I use it because it just makes my dying and my chemotherapy treatment easier”. His story was featured in the front page of the *Northern Star*, and he died shortly after that.

Bob’s problems with the police started in the early nineties, when his own radicalism was strengthened by what he perceived to be injustice. He described to me his first step ‘into the limelight’ in 1993:

There was a feeling of stepping out, and also there came this feeling like a bright light which just sort of hit me like a spotlight ... I’m a real accidental activist, I didn’t intend for any of this to happen. It was no conscious effort, it just happened and continued to grow. It’s all changed, and I can’t help but have this feeling that the change that has been happening throughout the whole sort-of-war, seems to have been linked to what we’ve been doing here. In some ways I feel that Nimbin is in part responsible, it played a real active part in changing people’s consciousness ... 

I painted a banner, which just said ‘Legalise Marijuana’, and hung it in the main street, which used to hang banners advertising bands and events and concerts ... and one night it disappeared ... So, what happened was that the banner didn’t come back, so I went to the police station and said to the Sergeant: “I know that this guy has taken my banner”. We talked about it, and I said: “Look, all I want is my banner back, I’m not really into making trouble, I just want my banner back”. So he said: “All right, I’ll go and talk to him” ... I came back to see him the next day. I said: “OK, did you get my banner?” “No”. “Why not?”. “He’s burnt it”. “OK, I want to press charges against this guy for theft and damage to property”, and he said: “No, I’m not prepared to do that”. So I then went to Chief Inspector Charles Jurd. He was the head of the Lismore crew. We’d met, sort of, at these [community] meetings, but I’d been standing up and he knew me. I went to him and said: “Look I want my banner back. That’s all I’m asking. The Sergeant at Nimbin just won’t initiate charges against this guy”, and Jurd said: “Look, stop making trouble. You keep doing this and ... we’re going to put you away”. I put all this stuff into a complaint to the Council for Civil Liberties, He’d said it in such a way that the hair on the back of my neck just crawled, and I was really scared.

I didn’t quite know what to do because I was still operating by myself, and people were sort of supportive of me, but no one was prepared to stand out ... after that meeting I started agitating, talking to the press ... I ran an alternative meeting in the Hall the following Saturday, which got a small attendance, and people talked about pot. You know thirty, forty,
fifty people came along and just openly talked about it. It was all pretty basic then ... We didn’t really know much.

Nimbin’s demonstrations tend to be playful and dramatic, and invariably attract media attention, and Bob’s arrest and trial is an excellent example of the counter-culture’s protest style. On April first 1994 there was a protest rally outside the Nimbin police station. As with all such protests, the Nimbin community had music (mostly drums) and there was a strong sense of carnival — people stalked around on stilts juggling coloured balls, there were children and dogs running around, food to share, and the universal symbol — a cannabis leaf — was everywhere, on clothing, faces, banners. According to reporter Darren Coyne: ‘A large media contingent was present (as always) when around 150 people marched from Alsopp Park to the [Nimbin] police station, calling for the revision of drug laws ... even though protesters openly smoked what appeared to be marijuana in the police station grounds, Chief Inspector Sanderson said that police had no intention of wading in among a crowd of demonstrators at what proved to be a peaceful rally. “Police have the discretion to take action ... at the present moment we’re concentrating on the suppliers”’ (Northern Star 2 April 1995, p. 1). At that rally Prohibition End (Bob Hopkins), dressed as a jester, saved police the trouble of ‘wading in’ — he presented himself for arrest.

The police station door was firmly closed and people began sitting down in colourful groups on the police station lawn while others overflowed from the street onto the roadway. Some protesters on the police station’s roof were setting up what looked like a sheaf of cannabis stalks. Bob Hopkins, dressed as a jester, and accompanied by his solicitor David Heilpern, dressed in a suit, walked up the steps onto the police station veranda and rang the bell. When faces peered around the partly open door, Bob presented himself to them, waving some stalks of cannabis and smoking a joint. He was hustled inside and the door firmly closed after him. Prohibition End was released after questioning, and a few months later he was summonsed to appear in court over the April Fool’s Day ‘smoke-in’. He pleaded not guilty to one charge of possession of cannabis and one charge of self administration of cannabis (both very minor drug offences that generally attracted a small fine or a community work order). No bail was required, and Bob was released on his own word to attend future hearings. At that first hearing the police prosecutor told the court that he intended to call David Heilpern as a prosecution witness, which effectively prevented him from acting as Bob’s solicitor.

Then in mid December, the bail rules changed: Magistrate Lyndon insisted that Bob sign a declaration that he would not use cannabis while on bail. When Bob decided that the condition was unacceptable, the previously condition-free bail was revoked, and he was transported to Grafton Jail (160 km from his home). This must have been a disturbing experience for the gentle middle-aged man, who had only been charged with using a very small amount of cannabis. David Heilpern pointed out that Bob was receiving harsher punishment on remand than if he had been found guilty of the charges, and he described the new bail conditions as ‘unprecedented’ (Lismore Echo December 1994, p. 5).

Finally, in March 1995, a few days before the state election in which he was a candidate, the charges against Prohibition End were dealt with. The media were invited and demonstrators obligingly posed for the cameras
outside the courthouse; they held up frames painted to look like prison bars with signs reading ‘The law is the crime’, and ‘the Plantem Junior’ obligingly posed for the cameras with two almost life-sized wooden figures of the Plantem. Two real cannabis plants sat on the low wall outside the court, a backdrop to the protesters, and they remained there all day despite a regular flow of police officers walking between courts and the police station.

The legal response to Bob’s ‘joint’ certainly contrasted to the police response to more than one joint’s worth of cannabis sitting outside the courthouse. As one editorial commented: ‘Meanwhile, outside the Lismore courthouse, two large marijuana plants, pots of pot so to speak, were completely ignored by passing policemen ... [Such actions] symbolised the highly selective policing of the cannabis laws that is presently the unwritten order of the day’ (Northern Rivers Echo 30 March 1995, p. 5). Darren Coyne reported that ‘some of his supporters harvested heads from a marijuana plant, smoked joints or taunted police with cries of “Just doin’ my job”. No arrests were made’ (Northern Star 25 March 1995, p. 3).

Inside, the courtroom was packed with spectators, and (disconcertingly) I was ushered to the prisoners’ dock, where I sat with several other visitors until public seating became available. Prohibition End sat with his solicitor and barrister in the front row of the public seating; he was dressed in a soft white suit made from hemp, and spent most of the case sitting with his head bent forward, with the muffled sounds of his supporters outside singing.

After such a long and dramatic remand period (with accompanying press coverage), the trial was over remarkably quickly. Bob’s barrister successfully argued that continuity of possession had not been demonstrated within the testing laboratory (so the sample that was tested and certified to contain THC might not be the same vegetable matter that Bob had been smoking at his arrest). His barrister further argued that the fact that Bob had admitted to smoking pot was not sufficient evidence, because he might have been mistaken or merely boasting. Magistrate Barkell dismissed the charges, and once the verdict reached the street the sounds of cheering and whooping could be heard inside the court.

A couple of days after the trial and the state election where Prohibition End was a candidate, Bob Hopkins’ multiple occupancy was the target of a large-scale police Plantation Unit raid, complete with helicopter and around ten ground vehicles. The raid was described by Sergeant Beaumont as a coincidence, it ‘had nothing to do with Bob’ he told the Echo because ‘the police don’t even know where he lives’ (Northern Rivers Echo 30 March 1995, p. 1). No large crops were detected. Bob described it as ‘sour grapes’, while the Echo’s Editorial commented:

Then on Monday came a large scale police operation by the Plantation Unit, a well resourced outfit whose tactics, down to the skull and crossbones once carried on a helicopter door, have been alleged to be intimidatory; as public accountability seems not to be on their agenda, it’s impossible to know the truth. It seems highly unlikely that it was a mere coincidence that the community inhabited by Mr. Hopkins was a prime target of the raids, despite police protestations to the contrary ... regrettably, [the major political parties] remain willing to give enormous discretion to an arm of the bureaucracy which — witness the recent Royal Commission on the
police in Lismore, and other events — is not always noted for its probity’ (Northern Rivers Echo
30 March 1995, p. 5).

And the counter-culture remained firmly in the spotlight.

The protests became institutionalised in Nimbin’s famous Mardi Grass. The following story describes one festival, and includes the judging of the Growers Cup (the secret gathering to judge the best cannabis grower for the year).

THE MARDI GRASS
Nimbin’s Mardi Grass — what is it? A protest? A religious festival? A public celebration of an illegal drug? An excuse for a party? A coming out of the hemp closet? All of these things. Bob Hopkins, HEMP activist and political candidate, described the origins of the now famous Festival. Bob told me:

The first festival [in 1993] came about because of what happened here. There was some busts on the street one day, a couple of kids got picked up, you know, it was just the annual end of season arrests again. It was just before May, it was in April, about this time. They’d sorted their list of people who sold pot to undercover cops, then it was pick this one up, pick that one up. Now, it so happened that about two o’clock in the afternoon, this one young girl got picked up, and for whatever reason the cops made the mistake of arguing with her on the footpath, and she got loud. If they had just hustled her away, she would have passed unnoticed, but a crowd gathered and then she started to resist arrest, wouldn’t go. By this time a big crowd had gathered, people on the other side of the street all yelling, and the police car faced this way. In order to get back to the police station it had to go down, turn around, and come back up the street.

The crowd was getting ugly, the police quickly got in their car and drove away. The crowd was only ugly in so far as there were a lot of people and they were yelling. There was a real fusing response, I mean people were worked up and the cops had to come back through this to get to the police station. The crowd was there, it was up and running, because it had been there simmering all day. It was the fear, and this breaking of the fear, that went down. Anyway, they did come back, the crowd’s all yelling, I mean, this is probably only a hundred people or so, but in the main street of Nimbin a hundred people looks pretty big. Sure, these were the dealers, but there’s still this support for the underdog or something. This whole bunch of kids marched off, down the street, down to the police station ... It got bad press, this day at the police station with the kids [a couple of hundred people pelted the police station with tomatoes and eggs], so I issued a press release, saying that I was holding this march on May the first, which would be a festive, joyous celebration of the way we felt about the drug laws, rather than this angry negative response.

This was 1993, and again this was just something that I put around, sort of promoted the idea, it was really easy to organise. We started off down at the Bush Theatre at one o’clock. I’d designed all this stuff, there was about 50 or 60 people down there, and I thought: ‘Oh fuck’, because I really wanted a memorable number of people, and there I was down there with 50 people. OK, 50 people is not bad, but its not a massive indication of opposition to the drug laws. So we set out.

We had a few props, we had Jimmy and his horse and cart, and he took off, he was gone down the street. But we had drums and trumpets, and we just went into it. It was sort of like a trance, this walk. We crossed the bridge. I can remember people coming from the sides and there were people along the way as we marched up the hill with the brass and the drums and tubas. And it was just noise, but we were dressed up in costumes and people had signs and people had flags.
We got up to the park (we weren’t allowed to use the park), we got up there and I turned around and suddenly the crowd had swelled. There would have been at least one thousand people there. It was just this feeling, wow, we were there! … for all these people who had never made a declaration of themselves as pot smokers. But it became like this incredible initiation ritual, or some sort of rite of passage, the energy that was there! It was an affirmation … We swirled around, marched down to the police station with a big joint we’d constructed, made a few passing gestures at the police station. The police weren’t to be seen the whole day. We’d talked about all this with the police, and they’d very wisely chosen to not confront us. We’d said that this was what we were going to do, and it was such a liberating experience …

The second festival, and every following year, was characterised around here by these monumental advances in consciousness change, in the way that people were relating to pot and to themselves.

Protests in the sixties and seventies were notable for their mix of music and activism, and the carnival aspect of baby boomer protest came to Nimbin with the counter-culture. As Grahame Dunstan said: ‘I noticed what was really changing people’s hearts and minds were all those things associated with the counter-culture; that protests were kind of a celebration where people would come out and strut their stuff” (he meant the use of music and ‘dressing up’, the party ambience of many protests). However, in Nimbin in the nineties the issue was not the environment or the Vietnam war, it was about recreational drug use, and its genesis was the arrest of local dealers. If the protest tactics were the same around the globe, Nimbin provided some exceptionally good examples of cultural protest as art.

The Mardi Grass, like the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, started as a protest, a ‘coming out’, but grew into a major festival which now attracts thousands of local and overseas visitors. The second Mardi Grass was attended by around 3,500 visitors (Lismore Echo 5 May 1994, p. 3) and the next year an estimated 6,000 arrived in Nimbin for the festival (Northern Rivers Echo 18 May 1995, p. 4). In 1996, three years after the first parade, the Mardi Grass was officially listed for overseas visitors as an Australian festival. A local paper mentioned that 10,000 were expected in that year, and despite torrential rain, around 7,000 visitors made it through the floods (Northern Rivers Echo 13 June 1996, p. 2).

Nimbin is at its most colourful for the festival, and green is a prominent colour. The parade features the dancing Ganja Faeries, fire eaters, jugglers, clowns, drums and pipes, a unicycle rider, a cardboard helicopter, and the Giant Joint — 24 feet of paper on a bamboo frame, which wafts smoke as it is carried ceremoniously down the street. The Plantem is prominent in his mask and green body suit, and Jimmy Willing brings his gipsy wagon and hand carved puppets to town. Earlier in the day a circle of people rolled joints from a huge pile of cannabis spread on the floor on newspapers. After Sunday’s parade the Plantem will tell the ecstatic crowd: ‘We cleaned up after the Harvest Ball last night, and we found a lot of lost property. We can’t find the owners so we’ll give it away. Here you are’ and he will dip into a carton and throw handfuls of joints to the crowd. Visitors dive for the gifts, but locals disdain this activity: ‘It’s only leaf” they tell me. One year, during the speeches, a sweating cameraman from a major national television network said to no one in particular: ‘Has anyone got a joint?’ He was handed one, inhaled deeply a few times, and passed it back with thanks, before disappearing into the crush around the stage, his camera held high on one shoulder.
It is Saturday night and Nimbin is celebrating the 1996 Mardi Grass. This Mardi Grass is marred by torrential rain which has caused widespread flooding. By Friday night several swollen rivers had cut northern NSW from southern Queensland, and rising local rivers and creeks were isolating towns such as Nimbin from all the main centres. On this Saturday night the townsfolk and visitors were filling the Nimbin streets despite the relentless rain, and the main street is packed. It is difficult to move and I slowly weave my way through the dense crowd to get to the Rainbow. There’s bunches of what appears to be dried cannabis plants on the roof of the Rainbow Cafe. Someone tells me the plants are Stinking Roger, a weed that resembles cannabis. Vendors of cannabis heads and cookies are everywhere. It is one of the few occasions when the hills people come to town, and virtually everyone has dressed up. Cannabis leaves and green body paint are prominent; faces have a cannabis leaf painted on forehead or cheek, and garlands adorn green hair.

In the Rainbow Cafe a real cannabis plant is borne around the back garden and onto the roof by a man in green body paint and a loin cloth. The atmosphere’s electric, and it is hard to tell what’s organised entertainment and what’s unexpected individual contributions to the festival. The Rainbow started as a soup kitchen and meeting place for organisers of the Aquarius festival. The property was acquired for ‘a non-exploitative price’ by the Tuntable Committee, and has been leased to a succession of proprietors ever since. The cafe re-opened in 1995 after expensive and lengthy renovations. It’s like a large barn inside, with wooden tables and a small stage where people often jam; the walls are painted with scenes from the area and indigenous art. The kitchen and food counter are in one corner. There are more wooden tables and benches in the back garden and a view across the valley to the Nimbin Rocks and the mountains beyond. I take a table in the back garden under an overhanging tree. The tables have candles on them and the dancing yellow lights create a fairyland of the garden’s vegetation and people in fancy dress. I order a coffee and roll a joint and start to blend in.

Over successive Mardi Grass festivals the activities and displays have developed and increased. There are joint rolling competitions, ‘pot’ art, workshops and panel discussions, the Harvest Ball, and on Sunday the Grand Parade winds down the main street. One of the more secret events is the judging of the Growers Cup, where locally grown cannabis is judged on appearance, taste and potency. I had asked earlier if I could attend the judging of the cannabis Growers’ Cup, and I was told first one, then a second, address. At (hopefully) the correct time, I made my way to (hopefully) the correct location, and after the door-ward checked with the organisers, I was admitted to a large room containing about 40 other people. After the torrential rain outside, the room was warm, with soft lighting. A crowd of people were milling around a long central table with the entries: cannabis heads on white saucers, displayed with small white cards containing identifying numbers and sometimes (variety) names. There were around 22 cannabis entries that year.

The judges were a mixed group, 20 judges were chosen by draw following the sale of raffle tickets. Some were locals, many were not; some were young, but most were in their thirties and forties. There was one problem: more than 20 people claimed they had won, and after some discussion the final line up of judges was 25. As well as the judges and organisers, the room was packed with interested observers who were fortunate enough to know
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the closely guarded time and venue. People gathered in groups and jostled to look at the exhibits. Someone called for attention and explained the rules: the judges would examine each entry and rank them for presentation (appearance, texture and smell). When everyone had completed the physical examination, each judge would smoke part of a joint from each of their top three selections. The judges would then select the best heads out of their three samples, and all the judges’ choices would be tabulated to find the overall winner of the Growers Cup.

The judges moved around the table, along with a crowd of observers two layers deep. I was encouraged to smell entry number eleven, named by the grower ‘Strawberry Fields’; the cannabis smelled a little like fruit and roses. The judges were asked to call out their own number and the numbers of their three selected entries. The most popular entries at that stage were (in order) eleven, six, ten and sixteen. The joint rolling was organised: ‘Judges number two and sixteen, you picked entry number one, come and share a joint. Who picked number two? OK, come over here’. One judge called out ‘To hell with this, lets declare them all the winner and just mull up everything on the table and smoke the lot’. People laughed. Judges grouped to share an entry. Some preferred to smoke from bongs and were given small samples of their selections.

The noise and smoke increased as small groups of judges shared joints and discussed merits. They passed the samples to the audience as they continued the judging process. The room took on the appearance of a cave, with bare wooden walls, soft golden lights, and a heavy haze of smoke over all. The laughter and talk grew even louder, and someone moved around the room with a video camera (I smiled broadly and waved at its glassy eye, wondering who would view the film). One of the organisers says to me: ‘I was a judge last year. I crawled out of here’.

I couldn’t understand how anyone could discriminate between the entries after the first joint, but the atmosphere was heady and convivial, a warm sharing of cannabis, opinions and laughter. Numbers ten and eleven were being discussed everywhere; a lot of people tried these entries, and new joints were rolled. A small circle of judges nearby inhaled deeply and waved joints around as they talked animatedly; a women in the circle held a joint out to me saying ‘Try number six’. Someone calls out ‘Who’s trying number 10?’ He is moving on to his second selection already. The room is almost foggy with smoke, and a local beside me observes: ‘This is like an ark, slowly sinking’. He has brought two well dressed visitors from Queensland with him. He tells me that they have driven by circuitous back roads to avoid the flooded roads and reach Nimbin, and he thought they deserved a reward. The co-ordinator calls out ‘We’ll take a break, let you all mellow out a bit, then we’ll start on the next lot’. A jovial judge says to everyone: ‘We could change Nimbin’s name to Nazareth. We could export cheeses — cheeses of Nazareth’. He's lost his green score sheet, ‘I can’t remember what my third pick was’. More laughter. People keep knocking on the door but only a very small number of supplicants are admitted. Some people, mostly judges, are taking photos of the cannabis on the table. Given the secrecy surrounding the event, I am surprised by the proliferation of still and video cameras in the room.

After another hour or more the judges are asked to call out the number of their preferred sample, the results are tallied on a white board in front of the interested crowd, and the winning entry is declared. Number eleven has
won (‘Strawberry Fields’). The Champion Grower is a young man. The prize appears to be a plastic ornament depicting the apostles at the Last Supper holding bongs, although I don’t look closely (the prize is less important than the prestige). I am told that last year the Champion was an older woman who won both first and second prizes for different varieties. Some growers pride themselves on their special strains, often name them, and breed successive generations carefully. The remaining cannabis on the table is packed into a bag. Raffle tickets have been sold for this prize. Now that people can actually see the bag, the last tickets sell quickly and the raffle is drawn. The Queenslanders who braved the flood are leaving, saying goodnight to everyone. They’ve been invited to stay at a local’s house over the festival weekend; Nimbin’s famous hospitality has not been dampened by the rain.

Reluctantly I leave the warm conviviality and step back out into the rainy night. As well as an important rallying point for many cannabis users, and a widely covered media event, the Mardi Grass illustrates the important role cannabis has in Nimbin’s cultural life, with the displays of cannabis art, joint rolling skills, a growers’ marathon (that includes lugging heavy bags of fertiliser up a steep hill), pantomimes, and the Cup.

As the cannabis leaf is a widely used and understood symbol for the drug (even the Police Plantation Unit wear it on their shirts), so helicopters have become a symbol of police oppression in Nimbin. Helicopters particularly offend members of the alternative community, and they parody them during the Mardi Grass. The helicopter symbolised police invasions, and has been a focus of the community’s resentment and ridicule for some time. A cardboard helicopter with an ‘officer of the law’ inside can always be seen dancing down the main street in the Mardi Grass grand parade, and I attended a pantomime in the Nimbin village hall during one Mardi Grass, where the Ganja Faeries performed what might be described as a ‘helicopter spell’.

The hall was full, people packed together on chairs facing the stage, while the children ran around the perimeter and crawled between the seats. The curtain went up and the Faeries, dressed in strategically placed cannabis leaves and little else, with green garlands in their hair, swayed to the music of a soft flute; centre-stage a very pregnant Faerie, with a cannabis leaf painted on her smooth brown belly, danced with slow fluid movements. The cardboard police helicopter arrived, two ‘policemen’ in uniform inside. The police stepped out of the helicopter and looked around at the ‘plantation’. The Ganja Faeries swayed, dancing to stronger music of pipes and drums, and the police fell to the floor while the Faeries continued to dance. After a musical interlude the officers woke slowly, stood, smiled, swayed with the Faeries and left. They forgot to take their helicopter.

Grahame Dunstan complained about police helicopters to *Echo* readers:

> The police helicopter on stilts in the Nimbin Mardi Grass Parade ... has given sign of the deep anger and resentment that exists in regard to the annual helicopter raids of the NSW Police Plantation Unit. The roar of a surveillance helicopter hovering over houses, backed up with 4WD ground support of armed police, turns these otherwise peaceful hills into a war zone ... Last season a small but organised blockade of the ground support vehicle in the Nimbin hills proved very successful. We need more of this —citizen actions all over the Rainbow Region to resist the Plantation Squad helicopter raids. The more artful and funny the better. We
need to send a clear message to Macquarie Street [state government] that we’ll no longer accept the oppression of their cowboys of prohibition in our skies (*Northern Rivers Echo* 23 May 1996, p. 5).

Journalist Jenny Rogers described a ‘counter-attack’ on the police plantation unit:

The Police from the Sydney Plantation Unit were still asleep in a Lismore Motel when protesters chained themselves to police vehicles with bicycle chains. The provocative direct action was a protest against a week of police helicopter cannabis raids ... Plantation Unit police, recognisable by a distinctive marijuana emblem on the sleeve of their T-shirts, milled around the car-park, some videotaping the protest. ... at the same time a small group of protesters staged a rear-guard action at the police helicopter ... a female protester chained herself underneath the helicopter ... police said she would be summoned for hindering police. They will also seek legal advice on whether to charge the woman with the more serious offence under Civil Aviation Authority regulations of tampering with an aircraft. ... A spokesperson said “this was to let people in the community know that police are using unreasonable and unacceptable tactics by targeting communities [MOs] with helicopters and traipsing all over people’s land with dogs and cars, with no prior written permission” she said ... Chief Inspector Sanderson dismissed claims that the Plantation Unit was targeting alternative communities. “We are targeting commercial quantities of cannabis. If the alternative communities are involved with commercial cannabis production they will be targeted” (*Northern Star* 18 January 1995, pp. 1, 4).

The *Star* article quoted David Heilpern as claiming that the actual costs of the helicopter raids ‘amounted to thousands of dollars an hour for police, vehicles, dogs and helicopters ... after all, most people would rather the police concentrated on road safety and child sexual assault instead of helicopter raids’ (*Northern Star* 29 October 1994, p. 3). A (woman) grower said something similar to me during our interview:

The whole dealing scene takes the attention off the real social issues; no one sees past the streets ... known paedophiles in this town — no backup or help. Transport: women stuck up in the hills, what if they’re sick? Some of the money they’re putting into *El Doc* should be given instead to the Neighbourhood Centre. There’s no money for support, but plenty of money for police to do wheelies on motorbikes and take helicopter joy rides over communities. Some of the youth come from the city as street kids, we get the ones who’ve been horribly abused. No room here for anything but police charging dealers. No help for the junkies, they can’t trust anyone.

During our interview, David Heilpern described a successful case that he had defended, which resulted from a helicopter raid: ‘I guess the most satisfying one has been the helicopter raids. We ran a test case, based on the legality of helicopter raids without search warrants, and the [police] case was thrown out. As a result of that, the helicopter raids have been much more tentative, many less arrests, admittedly probably more seizures, but certainly less arrests and that’s been a pleasure’. However, police operations don’t appear to have changed much in the twenty-first century; one MO resident expressed the same sense of invasion that many had complained about in the nineties:

On Tuesday December 12, my husband was circled by a police helicopter just above tree height as he hung the washing on the line ... The next day I was taking my two small children, aged 3 1/2 and 4 weeks, for a walk on our property when the helicopter returned and started to circle me. It was so low I could see the men inside — and extremely noisy ... the next thing you know the ground force arrived — red faced, adrenalin pumped, tearing
through our property in their 4WDs like the favourites in some kind of insane rally, insisting that I had marijuana crops on my property. At this point my great displeasure at police harassment was revealed and I insisted that a search warrant be provided. After much heated debate, with my two frightened children clutching at me, they informed me they would get a search warrant but they would have to hold my children and I in custody whilst they did so. All this time the helicopter still circled overhead ... In the end for the sake of my children — not my democratic right — I relented and let them search the property. They found nothing. (Northern Rivers Echo 12 April 2001, p. 6).

Complaints about a low-flying police helicopter during one operation were answered by Detective Sergeant Keane, who said that, ‘police had dispensation from the Civil Aviation Authority to fly at low altitude and tried to avoid populated areas’ (Northern Star 1 April 1995, p. 1).

These examples of the different perspectives towards cannabis use and marketing in Nimbin highlight some of the problems that can occur when one culture is very different from the existing status quo. While the previous chapter discussed the drug economy from grower to seller, this chapter moved into the social-cultural arena. From drug use to multiple occupancies, from residents’ experiences with law enforcement, and Nimbin’s joyous cannabis festival, I have described, and hopefully better understood, Nimbin’s drug-using culture.

The final chapter will discuss the research methods and results, and offer some conclusions about Nimbin’s ‘drug problem’.

* * * * *
CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION: WHAT DRUG PROBLEM?

What is Nimbin’s drug problem? The answer depends, in part, on the drug of interest, but more importantly it depends on your definition of a ‘problem’. While there is no single definition, some useful and meaningful perspectives on this important social issue include quantified indicators, such as death, injury, arrest rates, the economics of black markets, the demographics of drug use, and estimates of ‘social costs’. Qualitative perspectives include: people’s opinions about drugs, media-generated moral panics, the effects of social marginalisation, and the role of drug cultures. In this chapter I will reflect on the mixed methodology and review the main results, which include residents’ views on drugs and law enforcement, the role of the media, the drug users, the drug market, and the relationship between drug problems and drug cultures. My results highlight the central role of the drug culture in any consideration of the drug problems. Drawing from the Nimbin research and my reading, I suggest legalising the recreational drugs to bring them under the dual controls of supply legislation and social norms.

METHODS REVIEWED

I used a number of quite different research methods to overcome some of the problems inherent in research into drug black markets and illicit drug use in a highly visible community. The methods included a mailed back survey of injecting drug users; a structured door-to-door (‘household’) survey; taped unstructured interviews with prominent people and key informants; semi-structured interviews with crop growers; and participant observation over several years. I also drew information and images from a variety of disciplines (including cultural studies, law, political-economy, psychology, public health, and sociology), and from a variety of sources (including the mass media, government reports, primary sources, and academic literature).

The mixed methods and interdisciplinary sources provided multiple perspectives on a complex issue. The household survey (a quantitative methodology), and the interviews with crop growers and street dealers about the black market (using qualitative methods), produced the most useful information. The background history also proved to be very important to my understanding of the alternative community, yet I collected it almost inadvertently during the taped interviews, and in casual conversations during the multiple occupancy surveys.

I used a self-completed mailed-back questionnaire for my survey of injecting drug users (see Appendix II). The questionnaire was distributed with a pre-paid and addressed envelope by needle exchange workers, and seventy-two injectors responded. Nimbin and Lismore were surveyed as one site because the Health Department’s services and statistics (like other government services) did not separate ‘Nimbin’ from ‘Lismore’, but I marked ‘Lismore’ on the questionnaires to be distributed in Lismore and ‘Nimbin’ on those distributed in Nimbin. At
that time I was anxious to design research that was obviously anonymous, and I was interested in the needle distribution site, not place of residence. So, unfortunately, I cannot tell which respondents were local Nimbin injectors and who were ‘tourist’ injectors. Respondents’ use of needle exchange services in other locations (such as Kyogle or Byron Bay) suggests that most of those who answered the ‘Nimbin’ questionnaire were Nimbin locals.

The anonymous mail back method was less demanding than subsequent face-to-face interviews. With appropriate support from key people, this method can encourage ‘invisible’ individuals to participate in a survey when otherwise they would not have, but the response rate tends to be very low compared with other methods. The response rate for the injectors’ survey (26%) would have been even lower without strong support from staff at the Lismore-Nimbin needle exchange services, who enthusiastically distributed the questionnaires — probably because they were consulted during its design — and particularly to the excellent rapport the Nimbin outreach worker enjoyed with local injectors. As well as a low response rate, the reply-paid method required funds for postage, and the distribution critically relied on the active co-operation of needle exchange staff.

Further research might obtain information on injectors’ health, their use of the black market to support drug habits, the strategies they use to control their drug use, and the medicinal uses of cannabis (for example, to manage withdrawal). The use of small focus groups may be an easier and more effective method of gaining information about injectors, although the anonymous mail-back method did reach a group of hidden, current injectors who may not have been accessible to more visible interview methods such as focus groups. Ethnographic methods also offer an alternative to the anonymous mail back survey, although, like focus groups, ethnography tends to focus on a small number of people.

My household (door-to-door) survey provided me with important information about Nimbin residents. Unexpectedly, the household survey also required extensive knowledge of ‘Nimbin’ — in terms of its geography, its ‘boundaries’, its mountains and roads, its homes, caravans and idiosyncratic owner-built dwellings nestled in the rainforest or in backyards. I came to know ‘Nimbin’ at both the abstracted level of ABS census data and council maps, and at the physical level as I walked around the area to conduct the survey. And as I attempted to define Nimbin’s boundaries for the household survey I learned that even the most basic assumptions (for example, that a place called ‘Nimbin’ existed) really depended on what was included or excluded from the ‘model’.

I found the household survey method particularly demanding and difficult. I felt like a door-to-door salesman because I had to capture people’s attention at their front door before they refused to participate, and then hold their interest throughout the comprehensive questionnaire (containing around eighty questions). Early in the research I dropped two demanding and fairly irrelevant questions, and I still have not used the results from some questions. I was often wet, cold and tired as I trudged around Nimbin’s village streets and isolated rural properties. Further, the survey method was expensive, with petrol for daily visits to the village and costs for...
primary data such as the ABS special data extracts for Nimbin village and environs, and the NCADA national survey results.

Aside from the demands of the design and face-to-face interviews, the data entry from questionnaires into computer spreadsheets was tedious (around 150 questionnaires with over 80 questions on each, followed by error checks); and then there were tabulations, multiple comparisons with national and census data, and record keeping (which included the careful mapping of households as interviewed, refused, not at home, or empty, along with information such as number of visits). Despite the intense emotional, physical and intellectual demands of the household surveys, they captured a great deal of original information about the population of Nimbin that was not available through other research methodologies or other sources (including ABS census data). I had more confidence in conclusions and interpretations derived from this than from any other source, including the participant observation method, because the household survey was systematic, captured a large sample (148, including 40% of the total adult village population), and the gaps and biases in the information were clear.

Whatever the popular beliefs about Nimbin’s drug use, my household surveys provided, for the first time, demographic and drug use information that influenced my and other peoples’ perceptions of Nimbin (see Appendix III). Notably, my research has provided information about Nimbin’s established cannabis culture and relatively low rate of use of other illicit drugs. Nimbin is not so much an ‘illicit drug’ culture as a cannabis culture. This information inevitably provided a context for my subsequent research, and strongly influenced my interpretation and discussion of results. Further, the community’s drug use patterns, when matched with demographic information, clearly illustrated the differences between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ (conservative and alternative) residents. The household surveys also provided information about residents’ opinions about drugs, ‘drug problems’, law enforcement, and government responsibilities, and provided respondents with an opportunity to express those opinions.

Of all the face-to-face interview methods, the sixteen in-depth taped interviews with key members of the alternative community were the least demanding. I explained the research, told the participants their rights, turned the tape recorder on, gave them control of the recorder — and then I basically sat back and relaxed. As well as operating the tape recorder, the interviewees chose the interview environment, and they were encouraged to talk about things that interested them, so the method was very participant-focused. After all the interviews were transcribed I gave respondents their transcripts to edit, to ensure that errors were corrected, that the attributed words were acceptable to the people who had uttered them, and that there was a record of the interviewee’s exact words rather than my interpretation of them. Only a few people chose to edit their transcripts, although some people edited their transcripts several times (and two people were unavailable, as noted in Appendix IV).

The unstructured taped interview method was the easiest to conduct, and it was potentially very accurate, but there were some problems. It was expensive to employ someone to transcribe the tape recordings, and I still had to edit the transcripts afterwards for spelling and grammatical errors, and again each time someone changed their
transcript. If, on the other hand, the researcher does the transcription from tape to page themselves, as I did with the first interview, they will find the work extremely time-consuming. Further, some people (such as crop growers) are unlikely to consent to a taped interview. While the highly structured household survey provided me with a population profile, the taped interviews provided the voices, the idiom, the histories, the aspirations, the issues, and the personalities of individuals. Compared to other interview methods, the taped interviews promoted a less self-conscious interaction between me, as ‘the researcher’, and the interviewee, and the taped interviews provided the opportunity to establish my credibility with new contacts in the community. The household survey had not reached any of the people who participated in the taped interviews, yet many were articulate public figures in the local and wider communities, and their knowledge was essential for diverse, rich and detailed insights into issues that were important to the Nimbin community.

The anonymous mail back method that I used for the most difficult-to-reach groups (injectors and crop growers) had mixed results. The method was relatively successful in accessing injectors in Lismore and Nimbin, but it failed dismally with crop growers, with only two replies out of a possible sixteen (12%). Perhaps growers were worried about being identified, or did not want to divulge information to an unknown researcher, or perhaps there was no motivation to complete the questionnaire.

The snowball method worked better in recruiting crop growers, perhaps because they could ‘check me out’ first, through friends or in person. The snowball method involved asking third parties to refer people to me, and then I asked those I had interviewed to recommend me to their friends. I obtained six interviews fairly quickly, and this method may have attracted more growers if not for the concurrent police operation El Dockin, or if I had set aside more research time to further develop rapport and trust among the networks of crop growers.

The face-to-face crop grower interviews (using rough notes as a record) were the most emotionally demanding of all the interview methods for me, as I constantly felt that I had to convince the grower that I was not a police informer. It is difficult to know how truthful their answers were, particularly about the amounts of money earned. During the often hurried interviews with growers I would skip questions that I thought might lose the nervous interviewee even sooner (especially questions about growing techniques, legal penalties, and income). The interviews were generally short and the growers were generally suspicious, but two people were more helpful, and spent time explaining cannabis cultivation to me, perhaps because the interviews were conducted in their own homes during relaxed ‘sessions’, or perhaps because they both claimed not to be growing any more. The only obvious way to validate the grower results was to circulate them widely for comment (to the growers and other local ‘experts’, and to international peer review). Hopefully, my research into cannabis cultivation will stimulate further research into illicit drug production in Australia, both for comparison and to build on our current understanding of the dynamics of the supply side of illicit drugs. The results from this sort of research will always be difficult to validate, but that is not a sufficient reason to avoid it. Future research might investigate the expanding hydroponics sector of the cannabis market, or explore the localisation of cannabis supply systems, inter-generational drug marketing careers, or the social and economic effects of different ‘styles’ of black market.
While all the other methods focused on the individual participant in a highly structured framework, the participant observation method embedded me in the cultural life of Nimbin, as I shared cannabis in ‘sessions’ and participated in their colourful and playful protests-cum-media-events.

The ethnographic method gave me the richest glimpses into the daily lives, the protests, and the celebrations of Nimbin’s alternative culture, and so provided insights that surveys and interviews could not. I found that sharing of cannabis with the alternative community opened doors, reassured potential participants, and ultimately improved the quality as well as the validity of my results. The ethnographic sections of my thesis (such as my description of the Mardi Grass) were the easiest to write. Unfortunately, I was not a particularly skilled observer, and I found it difficult to reconstruct social experiences without detailed notes (which I’d only taken on a small number of occasions). In retrospect I would have benefited from a better understanding of ethnographic research, including documentation and reconstruction of experiences and events.

There is no doubt that participant observation was particularly valuable in establishing my trustworthiness and credibility with the culture. The more secretive and/or stigmatised the group or activity, the more difficult it will be to make definitive statements, and the ethnographic research method is likely to produce the best results in these situations. It overcomes major obstacles to recruitment (fear and suspicion), and offers some validation of people’s statements and assumptions, but results are limited by scope (the size of the group) and perspective (the researcher’s). A major drawback with mail back, snowball and ethnographic methods for sensitive research is that they all depend on initial contacts within the culture.

As discussed in Chapter One, research into illegal drug markets is potentially dangerous and so I avoided research into the heroin market. Ironically, however, the extensively used household survey — of ‘ordinary’ people in their own homes (which sounded safe enough) — provided most of the unnerving surprises that I experienced during my research. For example, on one occasion during the village survey I had some difficulty in leaving a house where the single male occupant was quite agitated and had locked the front door, and after that experience I tried to conduct interviews with single men on verandahs or front steps. On another occasion, during the rural survey, I was threatened by a household of ‘cannabis hillbillies’ with death if I was ‘an undercover’, and I proved my bona fides by sharing chocolate cannabis cake and cones of quite strong heads with the household, while I explained my research and swapped cannabis stories. I continually confirmed my membership of the cannabis culture by participating in cannabis sessions with members of Nimbin’s alternative community, and by (potentially) exposing myself to arrest along with other cannabis users. Most of the problems I encountered during the household survey arose because they were conducted in private settings, while the taped and grower interviews were generally conducted in public places in the village (mostly cafes, but also in the park and hall). Equally importantly, the door-to-door survey was random while the other interviews were self-selected — only particular people were asked to participate (rather than everyone) and they had ample opportunity to refuse before they met me, so that I only spoke to people who were willing to talk to me. This was not the case with the household surveys where I achieved a high response rate by ‘selling’ the survey to reluctant residents (for more details refer to appendix III).
Conclusion: What drug problem?

My research into illicit drug use in a small, highly visible community created a number of ethical challenges, but for me, the basic ethical question in social research is: ‘What are my obligations to the participants?’, and my design decisions frequently reflected my answers to that question. As an example of an ethical dilemma around confidentiality at the research planning stage, the university ethics committee (correctly) pointed out to me (6 May 1993) that ‘police may well be entitled to any information gained on the dealers’. This is in clear conflict with any guarantees of anonymity I might make to research participants. I decided that my credibility (not to mention my conscience) would suffer from a failure to ensure confidentiality if I promised it to participants, and so I decided not to comply with that particular legal obligation if the choice should ever arise. This ethical problem has the potential to seriously compromise research across a range of disciplines. Among the more formal strategies that I employed to ensure confidentiality were the following: locked storage of raw data; anonymous participation in all phases (with the exception of six taped interviews with prominent people); a sealed, self-completed drug use section in the household surveys; an anonymous self-completed, mailed back survey of drug injectors; and my willingness to validate and negotiate participants’ concerns about confidentiality at all times.

Confidentiality was central to my research design and that continued into the fieldwork. One example of a post-design decision based on confidentiality concerns occurred during my MO interviews. At a tribal meeting some people expressed concerns about the association of drug use with the particular MO, but I took the point further, and guaranteed not to report MO drug use at all, as discussed elsewhere. Another example of decisions made ‘on the run’ (but not related to confidentiality) was my refusal to run cannabis into a ‘dry’ Nimbin (under police siege during El Dockin) despite pressure and the risk of losing a key contact — although my motive for refusing was solely based in self preservation, not in the morals/ethics of the situation.

Anonymity was one aspect of research into illicit drugs; a closely-related aspect was trust. Recruitment was the biggest problem in all phases of my research in Nimbin, and I blamed this on the large-scale police operations that were conducted throughout the research period; in 1995 the El Dockin operation was particularly punitive. During his interview, Bob Hopkins described local paranoia: ‘The fear is this sort of huge thing that seemed to overwhelm this whole community. People would be paranoid to have sessions at a time where there was the possibility that undercover cops were in our midst. Everyone was a potential narc’. One crop grower commented to me: ‘Neighbours and friends try and help each other, but nowadays mistrust is so widespread it’s coming between once friendly neighbours ... you don’t know who to believe’. In an environment of mistrust and fear, my participation in cannabis ‘sessions’ affirmed my trustworthiness, my membership of the drug culture, and so, indirectly, affirmed the confidentiality of the research.

I tested my research standards by encouraging diverse and widespread scrutiny and criticism of my results. Using a broad definition of ‘peer review’, I provided research participants, other individuals, groups, local papers (The Nimbin News and Northern Star) and national media with research results and copies of papers; as well, I
submitted papers to peer-reviewed publications and conferences. This exposure of results to public, peer and participant scrutiny reinforced my confidence in my results, as well as in my research standards.

All the research phases were more difficult to actually conduct than I had expected when I designed them. Aside from the difficulties inherent in the subject matter (illicit drugs), and the demands of any field-based face-to-face methodology, I had very little pre-existing local research or information to guide my expectations, to build upon, or to compare with, and so my research required particularly careful attention to design, conduct and interpretation. In this situation, the mixed methods were particularly useful, as I was able to cross-validate information and the different methods often filled in gaps; I also gained valuable experience with a range of research tools.

To summarise the effectiveness of the various methods: the household surveys provided important information about Nimbin’s population; the taped interviews provided more detailed information about the community’s history, along with some good information about the street market; mailed back and face-to-face interviews with injectors and crop growers provided insights into the needs and aspirations of two very secretive drug cultures; and the participant observation method provided me with a sense of the ‘living’ culture (and many enjoyable experiences). Combined, the mixed methodology produced a rich, multi-dimensional picture of a complex and difficult subject.

REVIEW OF RESULTS

I have offered a number of different perspectives on ‘drug problems’, including: health-based definitions (notably death and injury), people’s opinions, the politics of cannabis and heroin (particularly as expressed through black markets and law enforcement), population patterns of drug use, media-induced ‘moral panic’, as well as the social dimension of drugs — particularly the cultural contexts of drug marketing and use, and notions of ‘functional’ drug use. Each of these perspectives will be briefly discussed next, with reference to my research results.

In terms of death and injury in Australia, tobacco and alcohol remain the most problematic, although throughout the nineties there was evidence of a sustained reduction in both the use of, and the deaths associated with, these popular drugs. The indications of more responsible drug use were due largely to effective educational campaigns, minimal legal controls (compared to prohibition), and the development over time of new social norms for acceptable use of alcohol and the unacceptability of tobacco use. Heroin overdose remains the major cause of death from illicit drug use.

Measuring physical harm is relatively straightforward, but people’s views on drug ‘problems’ are as diverse as professional definitions, and tend to reflect factors such as age, gender and personal drug experience, as well as survey design factors such as perceived confidentiality and the phrasing of questions. Bearing in mind the
limitations, my household and taped interviews provided information about residents’ views on the drug
‘problem’.

Only 5% of the 1993 NCADA national sample, and 3% in the Nimbin household sample, mentioned cannabis
first as a ‘community concern’. Further, seven in ten residents in Nimbin, and all multiple occupancy residents,
supported the legalisation of cannabis. On the other hand, heroin worried around a quarter of all household
respondents across a number of differently worded questions, although ‘heroin’ probably included concerns such
as careless needle disposal, public overdoses, or even more general problems that were not related to heroin at all,
such as street violence or loitering groups of untidily dressed people — sometimes public nuisance is attributed to
particular drugs. However, the vast majority of Nimbin’s residents were more concerned about environmental
issues, unemployment, commercial development, or raising children; they rarely thought about drug ‘problems’
until prompted. Further, the obsessive focus on Nimbin’s ‘drug problem’ in the eighties and nineties tended to
swamp consideration of improvements to the village amenity. While public opinion offers useful pointers to a
community’s issues, the information is limited. Drug use patterns offer a different perspective.

There are reasonable grounds for confidence in the drug use data from the household survey, notably: the low
refusal and high contact rates; no reported use of the fictitious drug Quadrinol; and the self-reported high levels
of lifetime experience with a range of illicit drugs. Aside from a blurring of gender and age differences in
cannabis use, the drug use pattern in Nimbin (from the most popular to the least-used drugs, as well as most
gender and age differences) parallels the Australian pattern. Therefore, as discussed in Chapter Four, I have
confidence in the drug use results, within the limitations of an age bias (towards older people) and a slight gender
bias (towards women) — which certainly produced a more conservative pattern of drug use in my results than
would be the case with a more representative sample. As well, the drug use of multiple occupancy residents is
excluded, but MO residents comprise a significant proportion of the Nimbin population; for example one of the
largest MOs, Tuntanle Falls, has only a slightly smaller population than Nimbin village. More information about
the drug use patterns of younger Nimbin residents would have been particularly relevant and informative, and
future research might investigate the drug experiences of second generation members of the alternative
community compared with the homeless youth who arrive in the village from the cities.

Unlike most contemporary research results, women in Nimbin were equally as likely as men to have used
cannabis in the past year and in the past week; however, like other research results, they were much less likely
than men to use cannabis daily. More information would be useful, such as any gender differences in social
contexts or rules for the recreational use of cannabis. Another fruitful area of cannabis research would be an
investigation into the medical uses and health benefits (if any) of cannabis for HIV-positive users (de Launey
1997).

In Nimbin there were clear differences between residents who used cannabis and those who did not, with users an
average of twenty years younger than non-users and more likely to be tertiary educated and/or employed, while
non-users (not surprisingly, given the age difference) tended to be retired. Cannabis users had lived in the area
Conclusion: What drug problem?

for a much shorter time on average than non-users, and they reported experience with a range of illicit drugs. There were many similarities between the long-term users in my community sample, and the sample of north coast long-term cannabis users in the study by Didcott, Reilly, Swift and Hall (1997) such as equivalent mean age, higher education levels than the general population and equivalent rates of experience with a range of illicit drugs. Given the similarities in the profiles of the two samples, and the partially shared pool of long-term cannabis users, it is likely that Nimbin’s long-term heavy users are similarly as healthy as the general north coast population. This assumption is supported by the comments of the Nimbin doctor, and by research in other cultures.

If cannabis users are not particularly problematic, surely junkies and ‘hard’ drugs are? Fairly or not, links had been made between heroin users and problems such as discarded needles, drug overdoses, theft and violence in Nimbin. However, some people may have confused Nimbin’s heroin users with a small number of careless or inexperienced injectors, or with Nimbin’s homeless, or with ‘runners’ in the street drug market. Even the services associated with heroin use were objects of fear for some sections of the Nimbin community. The methadone program and the needle exchange service in Nimbin (as elsewhere) were criticised frequently and there were calls for their removal from a small but vocal group of business people who were convinced that the methadone program was attracting heroin users to Nimbin (the ‘honey pot’ effect), and that the needle exchange was responsible for carelessly discarded needles. In reality it is unlikely that these services attract drug users to Nimbin, because both services are available everywhere, and NSW has a particularly extensive and diverse range of free services (Reilly & de Launey 1996a, 1996b); as well, Nimbin’s methadone program serviced around 27 people living in the immediate district at the time of my research (which is not a particularly large number). Furthermore, urban centres provide more choice between services, and greater anonymity, than a small rural village could offer. So there is no ‘honey pot’ effect, at least not from the drug services. As Robson (1999) pointed, responsible injectors who might teach safer use to new injectors are hidden (because the drug is illegal), and as the injectors themselves told me, even accessing services can be daunting or impossible. And research focuses on the problematic users, who become representative of all users of that drug.

Rural injectors have fewer options and may be more vulnerable to negative community attitudes than urban injectors; thus marginalisation can exacerbate, or even create, drug ‘problems’. Responses to illicit drugs are not always logical or well informed, and the most vocal opposition to heroin users and their services has come from conservative sections of the farming and business communities. Some members of the alternative community shared these views, but most were more tolerant or pragmatic.

Most injectors who completed my 1993 Lismore-Nimbin survey reported safe needle disposal of one sort or another, and this result was supported by the needle return figures from the Lismore-Nimbin NSEP — which ranged from 70% to 90% of distributed needles at the time of my research, with most of the remainder buried or otherwise safely disposed of. Where comparisons could be made, my Nimbin-Lismore survey of injectors produced similar results to earlier national and state-wide surveys and local NSEP statistics (in terms of service needs, drug use, needle disposal methods, and dangerous practices). There is no evidence that north coast drug
injectors are more careless or at risk than injectors elsewhere. There seemed to be two groups of injecting drug users, one comprised of stable, organised injectors and another group who thoughtlessly discarded needles in public places and had the bad taste to overdose in the public toilets. There is some support for the claim by Nimbin injectors and health workers that visiting injectors (‘touro’ injectors) were responsible for most of the ‘problems’ (and they would be in the best position to know). On the available evidence it seems likely that most Nimbin injectors have developed ways of living with other members of the alternative community, including safe needle disposal and acceptable ways of funding their drug use. Local injectors might reasonably be expected to use their drugs in their own or friends’ homes rather than in toilets and other public spaces, although it must be remembered that local injectors who are young, inexperienced and/or occasional users may also use Nimbin’s public spaces and dispose of needles carelessly.

Safe injecting rooms might be expected to remove many ‘problems’ that some members of the Nimbin (and wider) community have identified, such as discarded needles, shared needles leading to life-threatening diseases, and drug overdoses. Most of the problems directly associated with the use of heroin in Nimbin and elsewhere seem to derive largely if not entirely from its illegality (and, one might add, from the illegality of opium), and some form of legitimate opiate supply seems desirable given the current situation. However, if legal avenues of supply do not exist, The Netherlands experience suggests that it is better for everyone if injectors buy from, and use in the home of, a known and reliable supplier in a safe and unpressured environment.

There is evidence that most of the problems associated with injecting drug use (such as drug overdoses and carelessly discarded needles) result from the illegality of the drug, the marginalisation of users, and the lack of appropriate and low threshold services. Furthermore, close to half of those I surveyed had insecure housing, but many were reluctant to leave the Nimbin area (which had little available housing). It is quite likely that many ‘drug problems’ associated with heroin users are derived from other (non-drug) factors.

The drug problem may in fact refer to the ‘flotsam’ — the homeless, those with problematic drug habits and/or other physical, emotional or mental problems. People with the greatest needs might easily attract attention in the tiny village. From this perspective the ‘drug problem’ is actually poverty and inequities in access to health care, secure housing, recreational and educational opportunities and so forth. Nimbin’s small (village) population meant that there were fewer support services and resources than the area may actually have needed for many of the people attracted to Nimbin throughout the later decades of the twentieth century.

Illicit drug use per se challenges older and more conservative world views, and drugs are often symbols of the marginal groups who use the drugs. Cannabis and heroin (and other drugs) serve as symbols for particular lifestyles and drug cultures. As Kellehear and Cvetkovski said:

It is not always clear which dislike came first: dislike for the group or for the drug often associated with them ... [and] people may displace their fears onto particular groups in society (such as drug users) because the practices of these groups remind them of issues they may not want to confront. These issues may be fears that these other groups keep alerting us to —
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poverty, sexual deviance, racial integration, or left wing ideas’ (Kellehear & Cvetkovski 1998, pp. 50, 59).

This is a particularly apt description of many of the ‘drug’ problems associated with Nimbin. This representation of drug users as described by Nik Lintzeris (1998):

The conceptualisation of the drug user as an ‘outsider’ existing on the fringes of mainstream society, has been similar to the way in which individuals associated with other areas of human behaviour — madness, sexuality and criminality — have also been subject to the process of demonisation and ‘othering’ (Foucault 1967). This conceptualisation of the drug user has fundamentally shaped drug policies throughout most of this century ... frameworks reiterated ... a theme of the drug user as inadequate, criminal, pathological, or morally weak, an individual constitutionally incapable of coping with the world without using drugs. Alternatively, these frameworks view the drug user as someone who consistently puts their own pleasure and satisfaction above other obligations — the drug user as hedonist, as escapist and irresponsible (Lintzeris 1998, p. 260).

There is often a racist component to fears about illicit drugs. For example, Manderson (1993) described ‘white Australia’ racism in the nineteenth century, which linked opium smoking with Chinese immigrants, so that early Australian drug laws applied specifically to the Chinese pattern of recreational drug use (that is, opium prepared for smoking rather than in proprietary medicines and beverages). Even if not overtly racist, there is sometimes a ‘skid row bum’ component to people’s fears, where the effects of homelessness and poverty are confused with the effects of the drug. When someone is homeless and poor there are attendant problems (including poor diet and minimal health care). Some people might believe that if the drug was eliminated then the problem of tattered people hanging around public places would also disappear. Drug ‘problems’ often disguise the broader social needs of the homeless, the dispossessed, the emotionally-damaged, the socially marginalised and problematic drug use is generally associated with other problems. Robson notes: ‘Certainly a history of broken homes, emotional deprivation, or physical and sexual abuse is very common indeed among drug unit attenders’ (Robson 1999, p. 214).

Aside from the problems experienced by vulnerable individuals, many other ‘drug’ problems may be traced to drug policies, and particularly how they are implemented ‘on the ground’. Social issues such as poverty, housing, child support, or access to social resources will also influence ‘drug’ problems, although I have focused on law enforcement. While government policy, judicial sentencing and public opinion move towards the social reintegration of illicit drug users, this is almost invariably counter-balanced by a corresponding toughening of legal sanctions for drug dealers and drug traffickers.

Further, particular racial or cultural groups are often over-represented in drug arrest and imprisonment patterns; this may be a consequence of police priorities, or because some groups are more visible or more accessible. In the Nimbin region many people complained that police operations were unfairly directed against the alternative community, and in particular the residents of multiple occupancies.
The value of the seized cannabis is regularly disputed, particularly the practice of valuing small or male plants at $2,000 each. One multiple occupancy, the Tunttable Falls community, is regularly targeted for police Plantation Squad operations, despite residents’ claims that the seizures are always small amounts for personal use. Police overestimations of the value of cannabis seizures (for example, Lismore Echo 18 December 1992, p. 4) may be explained the observation that the Police Plantation Unit evaluates its ‘success’ by the value of the drugs it has seized relative to the costs of the operation (including accommodation costs) (Lismore Echo 18 December 1992, p. 4).

The Nimbin drug market appeared to be less of a problem then some law enforcement practices. Despite police claims of community support for their intensive operations in the area, I found no evidence that local opinion supported law enforcement practices in the detection of cannabis cultivation or marketing. On the contrary, law enforcement has created widespread dissatisfaction in the local community and alienated many drug users from the protection of the legal system. There were many instances of what appeared to be a repressive ‘drug war’ against members of the alternative community, and community dissatisfaction was captured in the rural household surveys, the taped interviews, crop grower interviews, and participant observation, as well as in other sources such as local newspapers. In contrast, a law enforcement strategy based on harm reduction would focus on the reduction of deaths and public nuisance as in The Netherlands, rather than on ‘soft’ drug use and marketing, while a ‘community policing’ strategy would focus on the role of the community in setting policing priorities. It is notable that in Australian population surveys, and in my Nimbin household surveys, more people supported ‘more education’ (undefined) as a response to illicit drugs than supported other responses, including ‘more police’, and this attitude was also reflected in the Lismore Council’s survey (LCC 1993).

The 1997 Wood Royal Commission into the Police Service noted: ‘Where wide discretion is left [to police officers], or unpopular laws are preserved, a window for abuse and for corrupt practices inevitably opens. Thus it is a generally accepted conclusion that police corruption is a likely social cost of the legislative creation and maintenance of victimless crimes’ (NSW Government 1997b, p.34). Most discussion about illicit drugs fails to consider the long-term implications of harsh penalties for, and elaborate police operations against, small-time independent growers and dealers. All too often the ‘Mr Bigs’ of the drug world are actually members of socially marginalised, non-white or impoverished groups with few alternative sources of income. Police activities are largely directed against the easier targets, and so have the ironic consequence of ensuring that illicit drug markets pass into the hands of more ‘organised’ and violent criminal groups (as also illustrated in the American experience with alcohol prohibition).

The crop growers I interviewed spoke of crop thefts, violent armed robberies, unpaid credit, theft of money, overly violent arrests, unreported crimes, widespread suspicion and fear of police. The Nimbin street drug market shares commonalities with others around the world, because black markets create particular social problems, regardless of where they occur; they include: the market dominance by stronger forms of the drug, corruption, secrecy, violence and marginalisation of users and suppliers. Nimbin provides one more example of the sorts of problems that originate from the criminalisation of drug use, from poor farmers through poor sellers.
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to poor users paying inflated prices, with a small group reaping enormous profits and a legal system enforcing the unenforceable. The general features are the same regardless of whether one looks at Nimbin or at Bolivia, Cabramatta, New York, Glasgow or Jamaica.

It must be noted that the production and marketing of illicit drugs have very real economic benefits. Illicit crops are often the major source of income for peasants in producer countries, and are a very important feature of the recreational activities and the economies of richer nations. The cannabis market alone involves large amounts of money, and cannabis tends to be the first or second major cash crop for most western countries (including Australia and America). As elsewhere, north coast cannabis growers and illicit drug dealers are often supplementing very low incomes, as well as supplying their own (and their friends’) recreational drugs, which otherwise would be prohibitively expensive. The shift to more concentrated forms of a drug is illustrated in Nimbin, where mixed bags of leaf and heads were the most common commodity in the eighties, and this was followed by the more expensive ‘bush’ heads in the nineties, then the market was increasingly dominated by ‘hydro’ at the close of the century. Illegality and rising prices has created a conflict between the ‘old’ hippies’ reverence for, and ritualised sharing of, cannabis, and the effects of prohibition with attendant high prices.

Despite protracted attempts to ‘rid’ Nimbin of illicit drugs, the drug market flourishes — although other, possibly more expensive and certainly less regulated markets would appear if the Nimbin market was ‘closed’. Regardless of the level of criminal involvement, black markets will be the inevitable and unstoppable response to a sufficient level of demand for a commodity. As Wodak and Owens (1996) concluded: ‘It may be forced to shift from one neighbourhood to another, from one province to another, from one country to another, or even one continent to another, but the drug trade can only grow while such vast profits are there to be made’ (Wodak and Owens 1996, P. 37).

In the early days of settlement in the valleys around Nimbin, the counter-culture may have grown cannabis for their own use, perhaps with a ‘patch’ for the car registration, the kids’ shoes, or the roof, and some put in a crop to set themselves up in a legitimate business or to buy some land. According to some informal sources, in the seventies and early eighties friends from the cities would drop by for a few pounds of dried cannabis that was generally a mix of leaf and heads (see also O’Brien 1979). As demand grew locally for smaller amounts than pounds, it was safer to insert a middle person (in effect, a market) between the grower and the stranger who wanted to buy an ounce or less of cannabis heads. Thus the drug trade in Nimbin is like those in Colombia and Afghanistan, with ‘value adding’ through the packaging and marketing of growers’ produce. In Nimbin the packaging often involves laboriously ‘trimming’ heads to produce what could best be described as tight balls on a stalk (which I am told is aesthetically pleasing, and ‘the touros like it that way’). By the time of my research in the nineties the Nimbin market was quite formalised. People who wanted to sell drugs (usually cannabis) could go to Nimbin, and people who wanted to buy drugs (mostly cannabis) could also go to Nimbin.

As discussed elsewhere, there appears to be a trend towards (re-)embracing the user while demonising the supplier, although this ‘normalisation’ still worries many people. At the end of the twentieth century,
recreational drugs and their users cross national boundaries, so that users of particular drugs ‘recognise’ each other anywhere in the world through a whole complex of appearance, style, language and drug ‘savvy’ (experience). Tourists learn where to ‘score’ their drugs when they visit other towns and countries — indeed, tourists go to particular sites because these places are drug markets, and in the case of Amsterdam, some large tourist hotels have brown cafes on the premises for the convenience of their guests. The demand for cannabis and its ease of cultivation, had induced many people grow and sell it in north-eastern NSW, so that ‘dealers’ and ‘traffickers’ may be otherwise law-abiding people, who occasionally become suppliers. Nimbin growers and sellers are like the SP bookmakers of earlier times: they are supplementing their incomes, the illicit money benefits the local economy, and they enjoy a large degree of community support because they are a part of the community and are servicing a need within their community. Nimbin’s ‘street scene’ is less like one in the Bronx or Cabramatta than like a north coast village market, with vendors of cannabis, jewellery, food and various arts and crafts hoping to attract the custom of north coast locals and Australian and overseas tourists, who visit the town daily in numbers that would please any market organiser.

As well as commonalities among drug markets world-wide, Nimbin has features that are possibly unique in drug markets. One unusual feature of the Nimbin market is that the site is a tiny rural village rather than a large urban centre; another is the (relative) absence of the problems typically associated with lucrative drug markets. Nimbin has experienced problems, yet overall the community has achieved a more cohesive and (relatively) crime-free environment under poverty and prohibition than urban centres like Sydney’s Kings Cross and Cabramatta. It is likely that the alternative culture’s ethos of tolerance and anti-consumerism has influenced the style of Nimbin’s black market and so contributed to its uniqueness, but so too have the clientele influenced the market. They are mainly cannabis users.

The high level of cannabis use in Nimbin is probably not unique to that small segment of the north coast; the entire north coast probably contains a high concentration of cannabis users. There are quite dramatic variations in cannabis use in different Australian states (Laslett & Rumbold 1998, p. 39); for example, the Northern Territory has a notably higher level of use (55%) compared to Queensland (34%) (Bowman & Sanson-Fisher 1994), and regional variations within states might also be expected. The north coast has the highest cannabis arrest rate in NSW, with double the state average of arrests for cannabis use, and almost four times the state average for cultivation (Didcott et al. 1997, p. 4) and for this reason the north coast was considered suitable for the investigation by Didcott and his associates into long-term cannabis use. It has been pointed out elsewhere that arrest rates do not necessarily reflect patterns of use, but rather reflect police priorities and ‘visible’ groups (such as young people hanging about in public places); however, there is a popular perception — also held by the police units that regularly visit the region — that cannabis use and cultivation are very widespread on the north coast.

My research has provided some circumstantial support for this view. Further indications of the regional nature of the cannabis culture may be found in the strong regional support for the Mardi Grass, and possibly also in the
concentration of artists, innovators and entrepreneurs living on the north coast. As services for injectors are established where the injectors are, so perhaps do cannabis markets grow around the cannabis users.

And what role has the media played in Nimbin’s ‘drug problem’? Nimbin has been the subject of sensationalised media stories for over a quarter of a century, and successive headlines about Nimbin’s ‘drug problem’ in the local press suggested my thesis topic. I have presented many examples of lurid headlines and sensationalised drug coverage in the popular media, however, as already discussed, the vast majority of residents were more concerned about environmental issues, raising children, or unemployment, and they rarely thought about drug ‘problems’. There is no doubt that media stories can and do give the impression of representing broader concerns than in fact exist (see also Pennington Report 1996).

On the other hand, Keenan (1998) pointed to the media as an ‘important influence in the construction of our views of the appropriateness (or otherwise) of particular drug use’ and he pointed out that the media may be used as ‘a harm reduction strategy’ to spread health messages to the general population (Keenan 1998, p. 63). Furthermore, minority groups are becoming adept at using the media to publicise their own agendas. In Nimbin the alternative culture regularly attracts media coverage with ‘interesting’ protests. Drug lobby groups such as HEMP (for cannabis law reform) and NUAA (NSW Users and AIDS Association, the Sydney-based injectors’ group) have unprecedented opportunities to influence social policy and public opinion through the popular media offers a number of avenues for redressing media (mis-)representations; cannabis users are the best example, challenging misinformation by their sheer numbers, but even the much maligned ‘junkie’ had greater opportunities to influence the wider society at the end of the twentieth century, than at any other time in that notably anti-drug century.

In the case of Nimbin it is clear that the media have not always (or even usually) presented a balanced view of the community and its aspirations. However, the media also provided coverage of the alternative community’s grievances, a site where police activities could be challenged, and beliefs contested. Therefore, in Nimbin, the popular media have both helped to create and helped to challenge assumptions and fears associated with illicit drug use. My research has highlighted the fact that the popular media plays a number of roles in contemporary Australian society, and can be (even simultaneously) educational, sensational, advocate and opinion-shaper.

As well, the newer technologies support the exchange of news, information and warning globally while bypassing the mass media. By the end of the twentieth century drug cultures were no longer specific to one place, they were global, linked by networks of e-mail and web-sites of like-minded people, including HEMP, Amsterdam’s Cannabis Museum and New York’s High Times magazine, and e-mail magazines such as Weed Witches Ezine and Medical Cannabis Quarterly Ezine. Given the speed, spread and multi-media capabilities of internet communications, drug news can reach a wider audience, faster, than ever before.

Drug prohibition creates quite serious problems at the international, national and local levels, including widespread corruption and violence and a more mobile and dispersed black market economy. If illegality and a
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sufficient level of demand inevitably create a black market, then poverty and high profits inevitably ensure its continuation. Decriminalisation of cannabis use and safe injecting facilities will probably be introduced in all Australian states, in some form or other, by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, as in an increasing number of European countries. However, these measures do not address the drug black market at all, and I am convinced that the only way to directly engage with illicit markets is to legitimise the supply. If the drug market is the ‘drug problem’ then from most perspectives it seems that some form of regulated supply of currently illicit drugs is preferable to a drug black market. A failure to address the problems associated with the supply/production side of the illicit drug market will inevitably continue to create quite serious social problems. For example, the 1997 Wood Royal Commission into the Police Service stated ‘Perhaps most disturbing of all was the extent to which police admitted to being directly involved in the supply of cocaine, heroin and cannabis’ (NSW Government 1997b, p. 132). The Commission made very clear that when victimless crimes such as illicit drug use were legalised, then the cause of most of the violence and corruption associated with that activity also disappeared.

As many Nimbin locals suggested to me, an alternative for the supply of cannabis is the Netherlands’ model of cannabis cafes; such cafes would sell small amounts of cannabis for immediate consumption by the tourist, and would be supplied locally by small-scale growers, as discussed in Chapter Five. The Nimbin community’s brief trial of cannabis cafes was abruptly curtailed in 2001 with a series of police raids, yet the cafes offer a better regulated environment than the street market. In the case of the supply of heroin and similar drugs, the Swiss model of medically-supervised supply suggests a preferable alternative to prohibition; this approach should be coupled with well-funded and low-threshold support services (including housing). Results from Switzerland’s ten year trial of heroin on prescription indicated that government supplied heroin can dramatically reduce problems such as fatal overdose and crime, while increasing opportunities for education and referral to other services. The Netherlands has adopted a different approach, and a central feature is that drug marketing will be tolerated if it does not cause a public ‘nuisance’, sell to young people, or cross national borders. This desire to minimise nuisance has led the pragmatic Dutch to turn a blind eye to heroin dealing from private homes, and they found that dealers’ homes provided useful sites for outreach services for heroin injectors (such as needle exchange, education and referrals) (Zaal 1992; Grund, Kaplan & Adriaans 1991).

Nimbin’s ‘drug problems’ may result from conservative responses to drugs, their users and their markets, and the politics are similar worldwide, but Nimbin’s alternative culture has adapted to illegality in often quite unique way, notably in the community’s continual refinement of the cannabis market, and in the annual Mardi Grass.

CULTURE

There is abundant evidence that drug cultures can have a profound influence on the development (or not) of drug ‘problems’, despite illegality and punitive drug policies. The cultural influences, the social ‘institutional’ norms, have been shown to be even more important in defining responses to a given drug than either the pharmacological
effects of the drug or socio-economic factors such as unemployment or poverty. Social controls are essentially the ‘informal’, as opposed to the legislative, rules that explain and regulate drug use.

In Chapter Three and elsewhere, I have discussed examples of cultural influences on the formation and expression of problems associated with the use of cannabis, alcohol, and heroin, including the influence of peers on heroin withdrawal symptoms, and the development of a cannabis ‘amotivational syndrome’. For example, cannabis ‘problems’ in Jamaica were associated with the absence of well-established social controls and functional role models among middle class youth, rather than with the often extreme poverty of the cannabis-using rural poor (Beaubrun 1983; Rubin & Comitas 1976).

The same is true of ‘problems’ with alcohol, where the best predictors of a diagnosis of ‘alcoholism’ were social and demographic factors such as low income bracket or no suitable role models (Peele 1998), so that cultures and groups with well-developed norms for alcohol use were less likely to experience alcohol problems. Both Paul Robson (1999) and Wayne Harding (1998) have discussed controlled (or ‘functional’) heroin users, where rules such as restricting use to weekends, being employed, and restricting one’s circle of friends to other functional users and non-users, all contributed to their control over their heroin use. Grahame Dunstan described a tribal discussion about cannabis use among young people in Nimbin, and Michael Balderstone pointed out that:

There’s heaps of knowledge about drugs because there’s lots of experience walking the streets of Nimbin these days. These people give the only real advice about how to use drugs. There’s no-one else to follow. The whole western hippy movement took off into the dark and largely uncharted terrain, with LSD, pot and other drugs. We really didn’t have a clue and had to find our own way. Now at least we can talk to our own children about it — my parents freaked.

Nimbin’s alternative culture has a long history of illicit recreational drug use and a complex set of cultural norms for such use, including rules for who will share how much with who else in a ‘session’, and (as with those who ‘don’t have a head for ganja’ in Jamaica), those who do not use tobacco are accommodated in the sessions. Safety information (such as the relative harms associated with the use of bongs, joints and particular batches of cookies and new drugs) circulates effectively, both locally and globally.

The nineties witnessed many changes in Australian drug use (such as the rise in the variety and popularity of ‘rave’ or ‘designer drugs’) and in drug production (such as the rise of ‘hydroponic’ varieties of cannabis). The growing range of drugs in contemporary society demands quite sophisticated experience and knowledge, and still there may be changes from drug batch to batch. Prohibition will be an increasingly ineffective response to the proliferation of new drugs, and given the important role that the drug culture can play in ameliorating drug problems (even those created by prohibition), it would be foolish to ignore the social influences when discussing drug problems.

The cannabis culture was a political presence in Nimbin in the nineties. The pro-cannabis movement grew from small, local, reactive protest rallies, to the annual Mardi Grass festival, which attracts thousands of visitors to the
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...town every year for a riotous celebration of cannabis. In the late nineties Nimbin HEMP strengthened its ties with overseas pro-cannabis organisations, and established a national HEMP party with Michael Balderstone as the first President. HEMP candidates polled around 7% of the primary vote in the Lismore electorate (Prohibition End, in the 1995 state election), and in 2001 a little over 1% in a federal by-election in a marginal Victorian lower house seat (Grahame Dunstan) and in Lismore in a full federal election (Judy Canales). HEMP preferences were important to the final results in these marginal seats. HEMP has strong links with the broader environmental movement, and the north coast Independent MLC, Richard Jones, has taken a strong pro-cannabis stance.

The counter-culture’s ability to lobby, protest, contest, and publicise have helped to legitimise their pro-cannabis stance, and their ‘right’ to use their favourite recreational drug. Compared to cannabis users and their effective use of the media, I was struck by the lack of effective channels for communication and complaint available to heroin users. My Nimbin-Lismore survey of injectors offered some north coast injectors the opportunity to speak about their needs, and most respondents took advantage of the extra spaces I had provided throughout the questionnaire, while two also attached notes.

Nimbin’s HEMP Embassy, which in the early nineties had problems finding any space in the village, eventually moved out of a side alley into the National Heritage listed ‘Tomato Sauce Building’ in the main street. The new venue is large enough to house HEMP memorabilia (including the most recent incarnation of the giant joint, when HEMP retrieves it from the Victorian police) and legal hemp products. Opposite the HEMP Embassy is the Nimbin Museum with its maze of graffiti-covered walls, a half a Kombi, and other strange artefacts of the hippies who settled Nimbin and then profoundly changed the town’s destiny.

CONCLUSION

Keenan (1998) observed that: ‘Our beliefs regarding alcohol and other drugs and our understanding of their use are socially constructed, and as such, are constantly undergoing re-evaluation and change’ (Keenan 1998, p. 70). Responses to the use of cannabis and heroin changed significantly over the last decade of the twentieth century at the international, national and local levels. One such change is a clear trend towards greater tolerance towards drug users, offset by less tolerance towards drug suppliers. As the post-war generations make up an increasingly larger proportion of the population recreational drug use will inevitably appear to increase. This is because younger people (particularly those in their teens and twenties) are markedly more likely than older people to have experience with a variety of illicit drugs — for example, over half of all teenagers have tried illicit drugs compared to around 13% of those aged over sixty (AIHW 1999, p. 19), and younger people are more likely than older Australians to experiment with the growing range of synthetic ‘designer’ drugs. Moreover, multiple drug use is an increasingly familiar pattern regardless of age or gender.
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In Australia over the past few decades a combination of laws and social sanctions have been evolving and shaping our ways of using alcohol, and at the population level (that is, in general) we are more responsible users. There has been a consistent decline in population use of (pure) alcohol, and a trend towards drinks with a lower alcohol content, along with a reduction in health problems such as alcoholic cirrhosis and a reduction in social problems such as alcohol-related road deaths (Laslett & Rumbold 1998, P. 27; Commonwealth of Australia 1994b). It is noteworthy that the most successful approach to safe alcohol use has been the combination of minimal legal sanctions (basically laws relating to minimum age, quality control, and the safe operation of vehicles and machinery), and cultural norms in the form of functional role models and increasingly well developed internalised controls.

Concerns that legalisation results in an inevitable increase in the use of the drug, and an automatic increase in drug problems have rarely proved to be the case. For example, Rumbold and Hamilton (1998) noted that when hotels were given longer operating hours in the 1980s there was ‘strident’ criticism, but no subsequent escalation in alcohol-related problems, and as a result the licensing hours and outlets increased over the nineties (Rumbold and Hamilton 1998, p. 134). These authors also point out that a similar (non-)effect was observed with cannabis use in those Australian states where its use was decriminalised (Rumbold and Hamilton 1998, p. 134). If stronger forms of the drug are inevitable under illegality, is it also inevitable that legality will result (eventually) in milder forms of the drug, as patterns of alcohol use (and perhaps also tobacco use) suggest?

By most estimates (based on quantitative population research), somewhere between 90% and 97% of drug users are ‘functional’, regardless of the drug (Robson 1999; NIAD 1995; Hall, Solowij & Lemon 1994), and this is often despite the problems associated with economic deprivation, law enforcement and social marginalisation. As Robson (1999) suggests, most illicit drug users generally are using their drugs of choice without appreciable problems, and generally are doing what they need to do in the way of work and family obligations, and this is likely to be so in Nimbin too. Exceptions to this pattern of fairly responsible recreational drug use are likely to be found where there are other social/emotional problems that are really unrelated to drugs, or where there are no norms because of stigma, illegality, or inexperience. National and global illicit drug markets are the inevitable consequences of excessive institutional controls over popular commodities, and for this reason recreational drug use cannot be conveniently separated from the more difficult issue of drug supply. I have discussed criminal networks, the black market economy, police corruption, violence and property crime as examples of the problems arising from a failure to bring supply within social controls, and I have suggested that cannabis cafes and heroin on prescription offer more effective and less socially damaging supply alternatives for the two drugs under consideration (and other recreational drugs). Users of the ‘rave’ or ‘designer’ drugs, may be particularly at risk, because there has been little time to develop safeguards, and no reliable information about composition, dose and effects while their supply remains illegal. It is exactly this uncertainty about drug dose and composition that underlies most heroin overdoses. I suggest that the legitimate, regulated supply of the illicit recreational drugs would reduce or avoid most drug problems.
Nimbin’s drug experience is not so much an example of a ‘deviant subculture’ as it is a reflection of the post-war generations’ extensive drug experience. The community is actively engaged in defining and resolving local and global social ‘problems’, and nowhere else in Australia is there likely to be as much real estate in the hands of the counter-culture (a cannabis-using community that is not only competent but motivated). The alternative community in Nimbin cannot be accused of ‘dropping out’; rather it debates relevant and controversial environmental and justice issues in public forums, and actively seeks to shape society. Furthermore, the north coast cannabis-using population is largely supplied by local cultivation, with remarkably few problems — either in terms of health or crime. Nimbin provides an exemplary lesson in dealing with (no pun intended) both the (wider) social problems and people’s drug preferences. The community has many respectable role models, and many cultural controls to minimise ‘drug problems’.

A drug culture is not only important in promoting protective ways of using drugs, but also to understanding the likely responses to particular policies. When the drug is a part of both the economic and the social life of the community then attacks on the drug will also be attacks on the community. In Nimbin as elsewhere, having a ‘session’ (sharing cannabis) is an important part of many social gatherings, and sharing cannabis strengthens and extends social, as well as marketing, networks. Part of what is perceived by outsiders as the ‘street scene’ in Nimbin is drug dealing, but people are also congregating to socialise, and in a cannabis culture this includes examining, squeezing, sniffing, smoking, and seriously discussing varieties of cannabis. Prohibition is particularly impossible for Nimbin, and akin to imposing a total ban on alcohol in a wine producing area; ‘organised’ crime is not supplying the cannabis market on the north coast — cultivation and sales are virtually backyard enterprises.

I suggest that there are two major underlying influences on the experience of a ‘drug problem’, regardless of the drug or the place. They are: 1. Political influences — specifically the effects of government policy on black markets, law enforcement practices, and access to services and resources; 2. Cultural influences — particularly the beneficial effects of norms and functional role models for safe drug use, the effects of the community’s values on black markets, and the role/s of the drug in the day-to-day life of the culture.

These influences can operate with, or despite, each other, and can create or ameliorate many ‘drug problems’. However, while drug legality is recommended for many reasons, the over-riding influence on drug problems will be cultural. There is evidence that when use of a particular drug is embedded within a culture, when children learn the rules for appropriate behaviour, when they have respectable role models, and strategies for the safe use of a drug, then abuse, death and other ‘drug problems’ are reduced or disappear altogether, regardless of the legal status of the drug, or the socio-economic profile of the population. Drug policies can inhibit the rate of development, spread and effectiveness of social controls, but cannot prevent their development. Nimbin provides one example of the importance of the social dimensions. In the case of Nimbin’s alternative culture, government policy has created a number of drug problems and the counter culture has worked to minimise them.
In my research into Nimbin’s ‘drug problem’ I have clarified some issues and raised a number of others. I examined the notion of a ‘drug problem’ from several perspectives using a range of research tools, and I noted that the political, the social and the cultural profoundly effect the patterns, experiences, and ultimately the ‘problems’, associated with drug use. In conclusion, I suggest that we need to be very clear about what ‘drug problem’ it is that we are talking about.

* * * * *
What Drug Problem?
Cannabis and Heroin in an Alternative Community

VOLUME II: BIBLIOGRAPHY & APPENDICES

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ABS: see Australian Bureau of Statistics.


AIHW 1999 see Australian Institute of Health & Welfare 1999.


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C'lth of Aus: see Commonwealth of Australia.


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APPENDIX II

INJECTORS' SURVEY

METHOD

TABLES OF RESULTS

TRANSCRIPTS OF COMMENTS

PILOT RESULTS
METHOD

In 1993 I conducted an anonymous survey of drug injectors. The research was designed to investigate patterns of drug use and risk behaviours among injecting drug users in Nimbin and Lismore (see also de Launey 1993; Reilly and de Launey 1996a, 1996b). The Lismore area saw the first (and largest) non-metropolitan methadone program in NSW (NSW Government 1990b), and the first non-metropolitan Needle and Syringe Exchange Program (NSEP) was established there in May 1988 (Reilly 1990; Keys Young 1989). The Lismore-based needle exchange program operates from the Lismore Neighbourhood centre and the Nimbin Community Health Centre, with active outreach services operating from both centres. The data collection period for the Nimbin-Lismore survey was 13 May to 31 August 1993. A total of 72 completed questionnaires were returned from 274 distributed, for a combined Lismore-Nimbin response rate of 26%. Less than half (44%) were mailed back, the remainder were handed back to needle exchange staff.

The study employed a self-completed questionnaire (which included questions from the ANAIDUS 1991). The majority of my questions were developed in consultation with local health professionals, needle exchange staff and injecting drug users to address local issues. They included questions about use of various needle exchange models, satisfaction with services, and unmet needs. It was distributed with a return postage-prepaid envelope addressed to me. The Lismore-Nimbin survey was much shorter than ANAIDUS, and following a pilot study (n = 20) some questions were added and others clarified. Therefore, even the questions which are comparable to ANAIDUS (1991) invariably had clarifications and more response choices added to ensure that the injectors' would understand the questions. For example, ANAIDUS asked a series of questions for each of 11 drugs, commencing with: 'On what day did you last use [drug]?' while my Lismore-Nimbin study asked: 'Have you used [drug] in the past month?'. Despite different wording, both questionnaires provided information on drug use in the past month and so the results may be compared. The simpler set of questions about drug use in the Lismore-Nimbin study were designed to support self-administration of the survey.
Appendix II: Injectors Survey

The ANAIDUS questionnaire was developed by Darke, Tebbutt, Ross, Thomas, Larson, and Hall (1992), and results of the ANAIDUS study were published in 1992 (Australian National AIDS and Injecting Drug Use Study, 1991). As well, scales and methods derived from ANAIDUS were published with information about reliability and validity (Darke, Hall, Heather, Ward & Wodak 1991; Darke, Heather, Hall, Ward & Wodak 1991; Darke, Ward, Hall, Heather & Wodak 1991).

The aims of the research were detailed on the front cover of the questionnaire, anonymity and confidentiality were assured, and respondents were advised that they did not have to answer any question which they thought might identify them. Two or three blank lines were provided at regular intervals throughout the questionnaire, and half a page at the back, for comments and complaints. Around 70% of respondents took advantage of the opportunity and added comments, while one respondent attached a long letter (reproduced next). Results from the Nimbin-Lismore survey were published as a report for the NSW Department of Health (de Launey 1993) and copies of the report were provided to participating staff at the Needle and Syringe Exchange Program (NSEP) and AIDS Council of NSW (ACON). Copies of a short version of the results were provided to NSEP and ACON for distribution to their clients.

Questionnaires which were distributed in Lismore, from Lismore fixed and outreach NSEP and from Lismore AIDS Council of NSW (ACON), were marked 'Lismore' on the front, while questionnaires distributed in Nimbin from the fixed and outreach NSEP were marked 'Nimbin'. Questionnaires were distributed by NSEP workers in other North Coast centres, including (jointly, as with Lismore-Nimbin) Ballina and Byron Bay; Coffs Harbour and Bellingen; Kempsey and Maclean) between July and September 1993, but there was no close supervision of the distribution in these other centres, and the return rate was much lower than for the Lismore/Nimbin region. For example, 3 were returned out of the 150 that I mailed to the Hastings NSEP while the best return rate from the distant centres was Coffs Harbour's 18 questionnaires (close to Lismore's 22). However, no undistributed questionnaires were returned to me from the other north coast centres, so I cannot calculate the response rate from the actual number distributed in these centres. Data from the other centres generally are not included here, but some data have been provided for comparison (p. 14 ff).
Most of the returned questionnaires were marked Nimbin (50 out of the 72 returned); the higher Nimbin response rate is attributed to the confidence and trust enjoyed by the Nimbin NSEP outreach worker, and to the rapport and credibility that I established with injectors who participated in the pilot study. The study was conducted during a period of police surveillance and arrests. As well, injectors in the north coast region (including Lismore and Nimbin) were concurrently surveyed by NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA), with a shorter survey which focused on HIV/AIDS knowledge and sources of information.

Questionnaires were completed in social settings and in respondents' homes so that consultation and collaboration over answers cannot be ruled out. Some questionnaires were handed back to NSEP workers in unsealed envelopes. More Lismore respondents (73%) mailed their questionnaires back, compared to 32% of Nimbin respondents, who preferred to hand them back to the NSEP worker.

A lack of control over confidentiality, uncertainty over the validity of responses, sampling bias towards NSEP clients, and low response rates are acknowledged as major problems with this method of data collection. It should be noted that the Lismore-Nimbin response rate using this methodology is considered atypical given the poor response rate from the other centres. Factors such as proper supervision, active promotion, and rapport with the target group, are likely to improve the response rate for anonymous mailed surveys. Information derived from this method would ideally be supported by a smaller interviewer-administered survey. However the interviewer-administered method generally provides a cash reimbursement to participants for expenses associated with their participation which is a problem for researchers who do not have that level of funding. Small focus groups are also useful, although this method also requires funding.

The sample I obtained is not necessarily representative of the population of injectors in either Lismore or Nimbin. The method was selected to maximise the possibility of reaching hidden and possibly riskier injectors who may not volunteer for interviewer-administered surveys and who may not be using existing services. This aim appears to have been at least partially
Appendix II: Injectors Survey

successful, as two thirds of the sample reported no current contact with drug treatment services, and more than one-third had never used a drug treatment service at all.

On occasion I compare ‘Lismore’ with ‘Nimbin’ results, although it should be noted that ‘Lismore’ and ‘Nimbin’ refer to distribution points, and respondents were not asked where they lived.

It should be noted that because there is no reliable information about all drug injectors, and no sample can be considered 'representative' at present. Comparisons between my 1993 study in Lismore-Nimbin and the 1989 national ANAIDUS results are made only occasionally as the methodologies were different: my study was an unsupervised, anonymous mail back survey, distributed through NSEP and ACON (and therefore of needle exchange clients), while ANAIDUS was an interviewer-administered study of injectors who, in the main, obtained their needles from chemist shops; ANAIDUS respondents were compensated for their participation, respondents were urban injectors, half of whom were recruited from Sydney, and establishment of interviewer-respondent rapport was stressed. The aims of ANAIDUS included estimating the seroprevalence of HIV among injectors (using a blood test), obtaining data on risk-taking behaviour, and providing information to inform educational campaigns (ANAIDUS 1991, p. 4. The aim of the HIV Risk Behaviour Scale (HRBS), which was part of the ANAIDUS questionnaire, was to provide a brief interviewer-administered scale to monitor (over time) risk-taking behaviours among injectors (Darke, Tebbutt, Ross, Thomas, Larson, & Hall 1992, p. 181), while the aim of the Lismore-Nimbin survey was to investigate use of local services and risk behaviours among rural injecting drug users, including injectors who visited or lived in Nimbin. It is particularly difficult to find standards against which to compare a previously un-researched group of rural injectors.

There was a higher proportion of current injectors in my Nimbin-Lismore sample (91%) compared to ANAIDUS, where 66.5% of respondents reported injecting in the past month. The number of current injectors in the Lismore-Nimbin sample provides some confidence in the representativeness of the sample (of active drug injectors). Other comparisons are made with ANAIDUS and Keys Young results in the thesis.
Within the Department of Health, the regional drug and alcohol services, and the local needle exchange, provided some statistics for comparison with my sample, but not much data was routinely collected by the NSEP. Of most use to me was information about the gender mix of clients, and the needle return rates (which included returns from combined Lismore and Nimbin NSEP services and Lismore ACON). In the first six months of the second year of operation (1989) the NSEP service reported 1,026 client contacts, and distributed 31,523 needles with 65% returned (Keys Young 1989). Four years later, in the first six months of 1993, use of the service had increased almost four-fold, with 3,996 client contacts; in that time, 45,675 needles were distributed with a monthly return of between 74% and 96%. The current study was conducted between 13 May and 31 August 1993; over roughly the same four month period (as 1 May to 30 August) the service reported 2,411 contacts, 36,165 needles were distributed, with an average return rate of 74%.

There were equal numbers of men (51%) and women (49%) in the Nimbin-Lismore sample. Needle Exchange staff report a similar ratio of female and male clients on the north coast, although national and international studies generally report two to three times as many men as women (Frischer & Elliott 1993; Hall, Darke, Ross & Wodak 1993; Klee 1993; ANAIDUS 1991); two thirds of the ANAIDUS sample were men, and almost three quarters of the Sydney injectors were male. The median age of the Nimbin-Lismore sample was 32. The median age of women was 31, with a range of 18 to 69. The median age of men was 32 with a range of 18 to 44. Injectors are older, and the range is narrower than ANAIDUS (range 13 to 72) (ANAIDUS 1991). Lismore respondents are much younger, with a median age of 28 compared to Nimbin's 35. The combined mean age (31) resembles the mean age (32) reported for north coast injectors who use the NSEP service (Northern Star 17 April 1993). Bearing in mind the methodological limitations, the data appear to be based on valid, careful, and comprehensive self-report and offers a detailed profile of an heterogeneous group of North Coast injectors.

Tables of results are provided next.
# TABLES OF RESULTS
(raw numbers)

Table 1:
Number of different places lived in over the past six months:
single choice, \textit{na*} = 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of addresses:</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Nimbin</th>
<th>Lismore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lived in one place</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived in two places</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived in three or more</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* no answer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2:
Current accommodation, single choice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accommodation: n</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Nimbin</th>
<th>Lismore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Renting</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own home</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staying with friends</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tent, tepee, shelter in the bush</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3:
Overlap between 2 or more places and temporary accommodation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing: n</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Nimbin</th>
<th>Lismore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lived in 2 or more places and temporary accommodation</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or more places but not temporary accommodation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4:
Use of treatment services: current & past

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment: n</th>
<th>Currently in treatment</th>
<th>Past treatment</th>
<th>Ever treatment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total n (n = 70)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nimbin (n = 50)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lismore (n = 22)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5:
Use of drug treatment services, multiple response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug treatment services: n</th>
<th>n Current</th>
<th>n Past</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methadone</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outpatients counselling</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detoxification</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narcotics Anonymous</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapeutic community</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 6:
Main source of new needles, multiple response, (na = 3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Nimbin (n=49)</th>
<th>Lismore (n=20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>regular chemist</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>after-hours chemist</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fixed NSEP</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>outreach NSEP</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GP</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friends</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACON Lismore</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dealers</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 7:
Frequency of use of exchange models, combined Lismore/Nimbin, single choice, n varies (na = 1, 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MODEL</th>
<th>Regularly</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSEP fixed (n=70)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSEP outreach (n=70)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSEP volunteers (n=70)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACON (n=71)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemist (n=71)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital (n=71)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 8:
Use of exchange models by location: Nimbin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MODEL</th>
<th>Regularly</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSEP fixed (n=49)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSEP outreach (n=49)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSEP volunteers (n=49)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACON (n=50)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemist (n=50)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital (n=50)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 9:
Use of exchange models by location: Lismore

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model: n</th>
<th>Regularly</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSEP fixed (n=21)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSEP outreach (n=21)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSEP volunteers (n=21)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACON (n=21)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemist (n=21)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital (n=21)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 10:
Problems with needle exchanges, multiple response, (na =2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems</th>
<th>Total (n=70)</th>
<th>Nimbin (n=49)</th>
<th>Lismore (n=21)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not open when you need them</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy for people to see you are a user</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy for police to see you are a user</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too far away</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not conveniently located</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport is a problem</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police hassles returning equipment</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't like the needles available</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff attitudes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 11:
Preferred opening hours, ( na =2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Total n</th>
<th>Nimbin n=48</th>
<th>Lismore n=22</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early evening (6 pm -midnight)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late night(1 pm - 6 am)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early morning (6 am - 9 am)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morning (9 am - noon)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afternoon (noon - 6 pm)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekends</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 hours</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (excluding 24hours)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 12:
Benefits of needle exchanges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits: n</th>
<th>Combined</th>
<th>Nimbin (n=49)</th>
<th>Lismore (n =22)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust/like staff</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff non-judgemental</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy to get to</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff attitude better than other places</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free needles</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good place to get information</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13:
How to improve services, multiple response (na = 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Improvements to service: n</th>
<th>Total n</th>
<th>Nimbin (n=49)</th>
<th>Lismore (n =22)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OK as it is</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe using places (eg shooting gallery)</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filters</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open at weekends</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoons</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longer hours (eg open at night)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More current information about drugs</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling and advice</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More outreach</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education workshops</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 14: Needs from vending machines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vending Machines: n</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Nimbin</th>
<th>Lismore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 15: Heroin on prescription

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prescription: n</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Nimbin</th>
<th>Lismore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 16: Drug use in the past month, single response, (n varies)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug</th>
<th>Total n</th>
<th>Nimbin n</th>
<th>Lismore n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroin</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methadone</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tranquillisers</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamines</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallucinogens</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 17:
**Needle disposal, multiple response, (na = 1)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disposal:</th>
<th>Total n</th>
<th>Nimbin (n=49)</th>
<th>Lismore (n=22)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special disposal bin</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return NSEP</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threw away in black box</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubbish bins</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burn</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threw away wrapped up</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return Chemist</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gave away</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 18:
**Reasons for not returning needles, multiple response, (na = 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for not returning:</th>
<th>Total n</th>
<th>Nimbin (n=47)</th>
<th>Lismore (n=20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always return</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't want to carry fit pack</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of police</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't want to be seen by people</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowhere to dispose</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't care</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want to pass on</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 19:
**Use STD clinic if one came to your area?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use clinic:</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Nimbin</th>
<th>Lismore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have one already</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regularly</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix II: Injectors Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nimbin</th>
<th>Lismore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 20: Have you had any AIDS test/s?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Nimbin</th>
<th>Lismore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 21: Satisfied with pre-test counselling?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Nimbin</th>
<th>Lismore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No test</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Na</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 22: Services used for AIDS tests, multiple response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Services used for aids tests: n</th>
<th>n Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Haven't had AIDS test</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Practitioner in surgery</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACON (Lismore)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHADES (Lismore)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STD clinic</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 23: Chance of catching AIDS (na = 20)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chance catch AIDS</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Nimbin (n =36)</th>
<th>Lismore (n=16)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No chance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No chance</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifty-fifty</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix II: Injectors Survey

| Strong chance | 2 | - | 2 |
| HIV positive already | 1 | * | * |

Table 24:
Other sources of new needles (na = 4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source: n</th>
<th>Total (n=68)</th>
<th>Nimbin (n=47)</th>
<th>Lismore (n=21)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nimbin</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lismore NSEP</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byron Bay</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballina</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brunswick/Tweed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grafton</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyogle</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murwillumbah</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bellingen</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casino</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffs Harbour</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>none/ na</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 25:
HRBS scores, single choice, (na =4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HRBS rank</th>
<th>Total n</th>
<th>Nimbin</th>
<th>Lismore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above Average</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Average</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 26:
Needle sharing before another in past month, single choice, (na = 6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shared before another in past month</th>
<th>Total (n=61)</th>
<th>Nimbin (n = 31)</th>
<th>Lismore (n=20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once or twice</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three to five times</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 -10 times</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 10 times</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 27:
Gender and age by location for all centres

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Comb.</th>
<th>Nimbin</th>
<th>Lismore</th>
<th>Coffs-Bellingen</th>
<th>Byron Bay-Ballina</th>
<th>Hastings-Maclean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total numbers</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n aged 25 &amp; under</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comb mean age</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comb median age</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n Female</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female mean age</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female median age</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n Male</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male mean age</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male median age</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 28:
Use of treatment services: other north coast centres

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centre: n</th>
<th>currently in treatment</th>
<th>past treatment</th>
<th>ever treatment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ballina-Byron Bay (n = 9)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffs Harbour-Bellingen (n=18)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hastings-Maclean (n = 3)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 29:
Needle sharing after another in past month, single choice (na = 6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shared after another in past month: n</th>
<th>Total (n=61)</th>
<th>Nimbin (n = 31)</th>
<th>Lismore (n=20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once or twice</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three to five times</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 -10 times</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 10 times</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some respondents' comments are provided next.

**TRANSCRIPTS OF COMMENTS**
(not exhaustive, spelling corrected, transcribed in note form)

* Nim NSEP should provide a safe clean shooting gallery, would create a situation where a much greater percentage of needles would be returned.

* Nim People share hits on weekends because they can't get them anywhere else. They won't go to hospital because certain staff is rude.

* Nim Methadone should be more accessible, available when you need it (irregularly) so you don't have to pay for it, as it's good to come down on .. or organise a heroin program.

* Nim The methadone program is destructive and wrong. People need a self management program of withdrawal or maintenance according to their needs. More sympathetic understanding. The establishment must face the reality of the street.

* Nim Free AIDS testing constantly. More bleach pads available. Counselling available on request 24 hours. More information available.

* Nim I suggest the needle exchange should have it own operating place where people May use (hit up) there. Where there is privacy and the needles are collected eliminating disposal problems, and people hitting up in public places.

* Nim I think a vending machine is critical, although I suggest this is operated by tokens or a key handed out to users by outreach workers to stop children being able to operate the machine.

* Nim I feel they should give methadone users, especially older aged users (35+),heroin instead of methadone. Methadone is so hard to come off, weeks or so. Where heroin withdrawals only last a couple of days. It doesn't take so much out of you.

* Nim I myself think the exchange should provide filters, spoons and 24 hour or open extended hours. Five o'clock is a little hard to meet especially for people who work or live out of the Lismore CBD.

* Nim A place where we can meet and have tea and coffee and food to share and also to shoot up as well and have a sleep and music.

* Nim Kyogle hospital should be a needle exchange, as it's opened 7 days, 24 hours, per week. But instead, have had a hard time, and their attitude was far from helpful when asked them to exchange needles. I hope this helps the cause, but I strongly recommend a vending
machine for disposable needle packs, away from where children can get them, the same as condom machines.

**Nim** I think they do a good job at present. Other people's attitudes and fear of police are most local users prime worries. I've been using for 20 years and have now got it down to recreational use. The Done program is open to a lot of abuse (people selling take-aways etc). When will the authorities see the futility of their attitude to junkies? Legalise it in a controlled environment.

**Nim** The needle exchange is an extremely important service in a community where drug use is a reality. Before the needle exchange provided access to clean needles they were regularly cleaned and re-used and in emergencies re-used without cleaning. Risks were taken. People cannot take risks with HIV. New needles must be available, if anything, more accessible.

**Nim** Fine. Supply legal heroin and somewhere to use it.

**Nim** Not long enough service, ie 24 hours. Needs to be open at weekends. More disposal units needed in public toilets. Should push more for a shooting gallery. This would control the problem of needles being dumped all around town. Younger users need more information about hygiene. Good list of questions. Hopefully the survey leads to changes and improvements within the scene.

**Lis** Rooms for use in Nimbin or a house. Drying out house as well as using house would be a good idea. Somewhere to go to be sick and get it over with.

**Lis** I have tried but found them unsatisfactory .. too rigid.. no room for tailoring to suit the individual. [Re: Other drugs}: Some of the so called heroin sold around here would have little if any actual heroin but I do not know the names of the substances used in its place ..instead of a safe house for using in, I think a safe houses for drying out in would be more useful. A safe house where people could spend a week or more, paying rent and food money but could dry out in the company of others also trying to stop. Many people would try to stop using if they just had somewhere warm and dry and clean to lay down for a few days. For many people who live on the streets the vicious cycle cant be broken for lack of anywhere to go through the miserable process of drug withdrawal. ... please see attached sheet [letter]. Thanks for this opportunity.

**Lis** Encourage older users to educate others (young) Is the needle exchange working on prescribed doses of heroin instead of methadone. We need it. Methadone does more damage to my body and my family's routine for too long and forces you to be in contact with other addicts who you're trying to distance yourself from.

**Lis** Chemists should dispense needles in a non-judgemental way. Lismore's Mayor should shut up about the exchange. He is just broadcasting his stupidity and ignorance. .. You didn't ask me why I take drugs.

**Lis** Only give free needles to people who return their old ones. Stop people throwing them away on the streets. It might sound a bit rough but being a drug user if this was the case I'm
Appendix II: Injectors Survey

sure I would come up with a dirty needle in exchange for a clean one. They'll catch on we hope. Didn't really understand what Q21 meant [single hits of heroin on prescription].

Lis As I've stated in Q19, about the black box and being touchable like a walkman, I think that the syringes should be in a plain and not so recognisable packet. The time to obtain the needles etc should be more like hospitals and police stations, be available at all times as using is health problem This questionnaire does not ask enough questions regarding person's past using habits and changes with their behaviour, lifestyle and relationships etc. I was at high risk before the advent of your [NSEP] programs and this could be incorporated in a further study.

Lis The questionnaire should look more upon how the drug affects you.

Lis There should be shooting galleries for users. Some people are very careless about needles, some use too much so it could stop them ODing. It could be a safe place and would also stop people driving fast to get home to use. Also using then drive. Someone would stop a driver driving just as a drunk would be.

Hastings-Maclean Your privacy as a user is a must. Much more so in small town. General knowledge could mean your job and cause other repercussions. As far as sex goes I do not like condoms and would rather wait until my partner and I have had STD tests My main comment is: given the right circumstances with heroin users we will use a used needle. This is (in my opinion) without exception. It's a must to be able to have access to needles on a 24 hour basis without the worry of the police knowing.

Ballina-Byron Bay I find the staff in some hospitals can be rude and very judgemental when exchanging needles with them. I think they need educating using addicts are people, and have needs and feeling like anyone else in the community, they don't know enough about our situation/disease. I think the questionnaire covered most topics I could think of and gives a good range of answer choices. Well laid out and easy to understand.

A letter from one respondent is reproduced in full next.
Appendix II: Injectors Survey

Copy of letter enclosed with a completed questionnaire

I removed name, address and other personal details from the original to maintain the confidentiality which was guaranteed to all respondents.

I would like to further explain the need for a 'drying out house'. Many people feel, as I do, that the Methadone program does not offer help to people who do not wish to exchange one addiction for another. I applied for a short term Methadone program (two weeks) and was turned down. I do not want to become dependent on Methadone and believe it to be a more harmful and debilitating drug than heroin when used for any length of time. As short term programs are denied — and I do not want someone else telling me when I am allowed to reduce the dose — the Methadone clinic is no use to me at all.

For many people who wish to break their heroin addiction it seems an overwhelming obstacle when faced with no home, no support. I know that there are counsellors available, but the totally debilitating illness that drying out is, makes getting to these counsellors impossible. Practical help is what is needed for the first week — then counselling would be effective as the person starts to 'rediscover' themselves and to make choices about their lives in the future. The practical help needed would be a clean, dry, warm place where people can get through being ill without the pressure of dealing with the 'straight world', their work, family, etc. What usually happens is that you begin the process of drying out with all good intentions but dealing with the illness and the mental anguish unsupported — and often totally misunderstood by people around you — makes it just too hard, and so you up and 'score' so that you can deal with everything. If there was such a 'safe house' where you could book in for 2-3 weeks, pay your food and rent, and know that, OK, you have time out to get through this, great! I do not think that counselling in the very first week is useful — you're just too sick to attend meetings etc and it is a very bad time to place expectations of attending etc, onto people drying out. I think the practical help mentioned above, plus good food and peace and quiet are what's needed. Someone around to talk to is always good but people drying out must not feel pressured in any way as this is what makes them run back to heroin. The second week, once the worst of the physical symptoms are over and you begin to feel more able to cope — then counselling would be useful.

I know about the 'Buttery' but, once again, I tried to suggest that the pressure of the meetings and expectations are not the right way to go about being supportive. Obviously it does work for some people, but there are many, many people like me who cannot cope with this kind of regimented assistance, and need the kind of house I have described. Many of us lead 'double lives' because of the stigma attached to heroin use so that because we use in 'secret' we also 'hang out' in secret and this is impossible. For this reason a 'safe house' would be ideal.

There are so many users who live on the streets and it is impossible to dry out when you cannot even lay down and be left alone for a day or two. When you are vomiting, have diarhorrea, muscle spasms, soaring blood pressure etc, etc, etc, and are not in a house with a toilet, shower, bed, etc the obvious solution is to 'score' and end the symptoms as you just
cannot wander the streets in that condition. I would like to discuss this further with you as I really do believe that it would be of more value than a 'safe house' for using in. I feel that the kind of support programs in existence, while good for some people, are too regimented and demanding at a time when the least pressure is likely to send the person running straight back to heroin. Often the good intentions of people, due to ignorance, are so overwhelming as to seem pushy and feel like pressure — and the vicious cycle begins again. Pressure and expectations are the key words in assisting users to go straight, as it is the feeling of being pressured that drives users to keep scoring so that they can cope.

It is hard to sum up in words exactly what I mean by this — perhaps 'pressure' is not the right word but I cannot think of a better one at the moment, I do not mean to belittle the work of the 'Buttery' and other such organisations — there is obviously a great need for such places and I believe they do work for some people — but I think there is room for an alternative such as the house I have suggested as I know of many, many people who feel as I do. Perhaps there are such places in existence already — I would like to be involved in setting up such a house — but obviously, as I am an addict, I must find a way to dry out myself before I could be of any use to anyone else.

I work full time (16 hours a day) in my own business, live with straight people who are completely anti-smack. I can get time off to dry out but have nowhere to go to do it and it would not be tolerated where I live. I'm [ ] years old with an [ ] year old [child]. I am trying so hard to keep everything together and make a success of my business but I must stop using. I have two days off a week — not enough to dry out — and I end up having to use again to have the energy to work — the vicious cycle. I am feeling very desperate and suicidal at a time when I should be able to take some pride in my achievements. I am scared, lonely, and because of the double like I lead I cannot find any support for what is really wrong in my life — my addiction.

I am enclosing my name and postal address [deleted in original] as I would really appreciate it if you could advise me of anything you think could help me. I live [ ] so anything in or around this area — [ ] — that you know of would be great. I know that this is confidential and appreciate the opportunity to air my view. Obviously there are no simple solutions to heroin addiction and the physical ailments caused by drying out are just one side of it and in my case the mental torment is by far the hardest part — but the illness has to be overcome first so that you the physical strength to deal with the rest of it. I'm sure you've heard all this a thousand times before — I'll finish now. I would very much appreciate a reply from you if possible. I realise that this is not the purpose of the survey — but perhaps this could be forwarded to the right person/persons. Thank you.
Appendix II: Injectors Survey

Tables of results from the pilot study appear next.
PILOT RESULTS: INJECTORS' SURVEY
(raw numbers)

Only partial information is provided as the data are not used in the dissertation; (for more information, refer to originals).

Table P1:
Demographic information (n = 20)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender &amp; age</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n Female</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n Male</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40+</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table P2:
Accommodation: number of different places

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>n Places past 6 m:</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five or more</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table P3:
Use of needle exchanges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Regularly + Occasionally</th>
<th>Rarely + Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSEP fixed</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSEP Outreach</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemist</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACON</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### Table P4:
**Use of drug treatment services, multiple responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Type</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current + past</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table P5: Accommodation type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accommodation Type</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing Commission</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squat</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boarding house/hostel</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own home</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staying with family</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel/ halfway house</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent/own home on MO</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tent, tepee, bush shelter</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (friends/anywhere)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street/tent/tepee etc</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table P6: Needle Disposal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disposal</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSEP bins</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return to NSEP</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return to Chemist</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Throw away in Sharps</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threw away</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX III

HOUSEHOLD SURVEYS
METHOD

The 1994 Nimbin household survey involved a door-to-door survey of the whole of Nimbin village, and the 1995 rural household survey involved a random sample of the rural hinterland. As well, a volunteer sample of multiple occupancy residents also answered the same set of questions. The questionnaires used for these surveys were derived from the National Campaign Against Drug Abuse (NCADA) 1991 and 1993 questionnaires, with some additional questions of interest (see Appendix I).

There is a body of literature based on the NCADA surveys. Reports and papers have analysed NCADA results from a number of perspectives (eg Commonwealth of Australia 1996; Donnelly & Hall 1994; Jones 1993; Makkai 1993; McAllister 1993; McAllister & Makkai 1991; Porritt 1991). The NCADA surveys were designed to provide government and researchers with valid information about the drug use of the Australian population, so my results may be assumed to be reliable within the limits and biases discussed here and elsewhere in the thesis. I decided that it was feasible to substantially replicate the NCADA methodology for a survey of Nimbin because they did not pay participants, and the interviews could be conducted by one unpaid interviewer (me).

I did not test the reliability and validity of my survey method as I was using the NCADA questionnaire and methodology. The reliability and validity of the NCADA questionnaires had been evaluated by pilot testing, comparison with census and other population data, use of a fictitious drug in the questionnaire, and other checks such as who was present during the interview, and interviewer opinion about the veracity of respondents (Commonwealth of Australia 1996; 1993d).

I included a number of the validity measures from the NCADA surveys in my Nimbin survey. They were: the inclusion of a question about a fictitious drug (Quadrinol); information about respondents' age, occupation and education to compare with the most recent ABS census of the village (there was no information about rural demographic profiles); and information was collected about people who were present during the interview (and therefore might influence
Appendix II: Household surveys

I decided that a combination of comparative demographic data, high response and low refusal rates, and inclusion of the fictitious drug would provide the best indications of the validity of the Nimbin household survey results, and I did not include the NCADA strategy of judging whether respondents were truthful or not (which appeared to be an extremely subjective exercise that might produce unpredictable results).

The most important differences between the methods used for the NCADA population survey, and my Nimbin surveys, were that the NCADA surveys canvassed a range of topics, whereas my questionnaires for Nimbin focused on two aspects of drug use: attitudes and personal use, and was much shorter, and the Nimbin drug use section was more transparently anonymous. However, despite my assurances about confidentiality to Nimbin residents, the fact remains that there is greater anonymity for respondents in a national population survey than there is for residents in a small community like Nimbin. This is because data from national surveys are aggregated by state, whereas (as one Nimbin respondent correctly pointed out to me), it was relatively easy to identify a Nimbin village resident with information about their age, sex and occupation, because the population is so small. The ethical issues associated with this kind of research are discussed in Chapter Seven.

A high number of refusals in the first few days of the village survey prompted me to re-evaluate the introduction, which at that point was identical to the NCADA introduction. The NCADA (1993) introduction stated that the interviewer was interested in 'social issues which affect us all'. I changed this to a less ambiguous statement (see Appendix I), and the number of refusals dropped dramatically thereafter. However, the village survey took two months, and as more people participated and talked about it to their friends, I would expect the response rate to improve. The rural survey, one year after the village survey, produced an even better response rate, despite the fact that it was conducted during El Dockin. Final response rates for the Nimbin village and rural surveys are much higher than for the NCADA national surveys, as discussed shortly.

The Nimbin questionnaire usually took 20 - 30 minutes to administer although a small number of interviews took over an hour. It was in two parts with matching codes: 1) an interviewer-administered section which covered demographic data and attitudes to drugs (community and
Appendix II: Household surveys

personal concerns, definitions of the 'drug problem', the effectiveness of government policies, and attitudes towards current law enforcement practices) and 2) a self-completed questionnaire that queried lifetime and recent drug use, the frequency of use of nine drugs, and questions about binge drinking and problematic alcohol and cannabis use. In the interviewer-administered section of my questionnaire the majority of the questions were identical to NCADA 1993 but three were not: the Nimbin questionnaire noted location (village/rural/MO), and asked about length of residence, and 'age today'. In the self-completed drug use section 31 questions were the same as NCADA and 16 questions were new: that is, for each of the nine drugs, the Nimbin questionnaire asked about age of first use (which NCADA also asked in later surveys), and I included extra questions about alcohol and cannabis (about binge drinking, and failing obligations because of their alcohol/cannabis use).

I dropped questions 26 and 27 from the questionnaire during the survey period. The questions were both lengthy, card-prompted questions that queried use of a range of drug services, and drugs which respondents would like more information about, and they followed the self-completed drug use section, when respondents were often tired or restless, and anxious to conclude the interview. The 'rural' questionnaire was administered to rural households and multiple occupancy volunteers. It was identical to the village questionnaire except for four additional questions about police activities against cannabis growers, as the rural survey was conducted towards the end of the 1995 El Dockin operation, which was widely criticised at the time. As well, in the rural questionnaire the single question on hallucinogens in the village survey was split into two questions about organic and synthetic hallucinogens (as did later NCADA surveys). Multiple occupancy volunteers were asked a special set of questions which rural residents were not asked. More details follow next.

Respondents completed the drug use section of the questionnaire unobserved, then folded it and sealed it in an envelope which they put among others in the satchel (I ensured there was always a minimum of 8, but usually 12 to 20 other envelopes). The two sections were later matched for data entry using the matching code typed on the cover of each section. Respondents were assured that their responses were very important, the procedure was explained, the full satchel of completed drug use envelopes was displayed, and I moved several feet away from the table where the respondent sat, to allow them privacy while they
Appendix II: Household surveys

completed that section. If a respondent had a question, I clarified it using a separate copy of the drug use section. On two occasions I was asked to complete the drug use section for elderly respondents with visual impairments and this was noted on the questionnaires.

Village Survey

The Nimbin village household survey was door-to-door for every household. The village boundaries were based on a Lismore City Council map of the village boundaries (Lismore City Council 1994), and also appear to match ABS census boundaries (ABS 1994b); detailed sampling and demographic information for the village sample follow.

Village interviews were obtained from 79 households in the village over 17 days between 2 April and 6 June 1994, with two thirds of interviews (63%) conducted on weekends. The sample represents around 70% of all occupied village households and around 40% of the total village population aged 14 and over (ABS 1994b). Twenty one households refused to participate, and 10 were not available after four visits (where neighbours believed that the dwelling was occupied). Two respondents who didn't understand the questions were excluded: one spoke little English and the other was elderly and a little confused. I made a total of 124 calls for the 79 interviews, and the average number of visits per dwelling was 1.6. I approached every household in the village and invited the first contact aged 14 and over to participate.

I also attempted an over-sample of teenagers, which involved interviewing the first contact in a household and then requesting an interview with an extra person aged between 14 and 19. This was not successful (with only four extra teenagers), and I did not attempt it in the rural survey. The data for those four extra interviews are not included in the results because they would not reflect the actual drug use of Nimbin teenagers, and yet, like multiple occupancy volunteers' drug use, the information was likely to be sensationalised and misinterpreted.

The response rate for the village survey is 71%, which is substantially higher than similar surveys. I calculated the response rate as follows: (number of interviews/ (number of interviews + number refusals + number not available)) x 100, although the response rates for the national surveys were calculated from interviews and refusals only. I have used the more
Appendix II: Household surveys

conservative method of calculating response rate because I believe that the 'not availables' are a part of the research population (and for a number of reasons, I suspect that many may be illicit drug users).

Rural Survey
40 interviews were obtained from 45 households over 16 days between 19 April and 24 June 1995, with 60% of interviews conducted on weekends. I conducted the rural household survey one year after the village survey, around the same time of year. Given the problems with definitions of Nimbin, and therefore any estimate of population numbers, I decided to conduct a rural survey based on a random sample; 50 interviews seemed feasible within time and financial constraints (especially petrol costs). I asked another academic to randomly select five numeric start points by pointing to number sets anywhere in seven pages of random numbers (7 columns and around 20 lines per page), generated by Microsoft Excel version 4.0 on a Macintosh LC III. I defined number sets as the first three digits in the set of 1 to 7 numbers (including zeros), reading left to right. These five 3-digit numbers were matched to individual blocks of land that I had previously numbered on a Lismore City Council map, within the area that I had defined as 'Nimbin' and excluding the village. The matched numbers on the map provided the five start points for the random sample. Beginning at the start point (some of which were fields) and turning left at every gate and intersection, consecutive dwellings would be approached for a batch of 10 interviews per start point.

There were no exclusions or non-contacts in the rural sample. An average of 1.7 calls were made, with a total of 69 visits for the 40 interviews, although this includes five visits for one interview (after my third visit they phoned the university to make an appointment, but were not available when I next called; their enthusiasm ensured an extra visit). The response rate for the rural random sample was 89%. I only used four of the start points because the fifth was remote, I was worried about the safety and drivability of the access road, and there were time and financial constraints against prolonging the rural survey phase. The response rate is particularly good, notwithstanding the absence of the fifth block of interviews and the difficulties in defining the rural population. The excellent response rates for the village and rural household surveys are attributed to the following combination of strategies:
Appendix II: Household surveys

- Repeat visits: A willingness to call back to a dwelling several times, at different times and days (notably early evening and weekends), to speak to an absent householder.
- Survey introduction: Use of a more informative and challenging introduction to recruit participants.
- Confidentiality: Careful attention to, and explanation of, the strategies in place to ensure confidentiality.
- Credibility: A willingness to discuss research aims and issues in detail, and provide information about the research to members of the community, and wider academic and public forums, so that my work became relatively well-known.

Multiple Occupancy Survey
There are a number of multiple occupancies in the area I had defined as Nimbin, with a corresponding concentration of members of the counter-culture. I decided that it was not practical to conduct a door-to-door survey of multiple occupancies (MOs) given the rugged terrain of the region, inaccessible dwellings, and unintentional violation of privacy (I was particularly worried about stumbling on someone's cannabis crop). Therefore I decided to call for MO volunteers to answer the rural household questionnaire. I defined multiple occupancies (MOs) as tracts of land held in common title by a group of unrelated people. If the land had separate title for dwellings, and was part of my household survey route, I treated each house as an individual dwelling on a housing estate. Aside from one large community that was outside my 'Nimbin', the houses on tracts of land with this title arrangement were clearly laid out, with paved streets, and house numbers, as with any other 'estate-style' real estate development.

The multiple occupancy questionnaire is identical to the rural questionnaire, except that the drug use section has a special cover relating to disclosure within the MO and there are six additional questions about life on a multiple occupancy, for example the open-ended: 'Why are you living on a multiple occupancy?' and the closed choice: 'Do you feel that your beliefs or ideals are realised (or met) here?' (refer to Appendix I).
It was negotiated that drug use would not be reported separately for Mos to avoid further adverse publicity and opposition to the communal style of living. Given the different methods for the household and MO surveys, I decided that MO drug use could not be combined with the village and rural results either. The results for MO residents on questions about attitudes towards drug use are presented separately to the village and rural household results. It should be noted that, as in the general community, some members of MOs may be heavy users of illicit drugs while others may be drug-free.

In August 1994, and April to June 1995, I recruited 29 volunteers from multiple occupancies within the Nimbin area. I recruited from both large and small MOs by addressing tribal meetings to explain my research and call for volunteers. Subsequently I used two interview method: either an individual appointment was made for a suitable time and location, or I listed days and times when I would be in attendance on the MO (usually somewhere accessible, with nice views) and invited further contact during those times.

While household interviews took place in the respondents' homes, most of the volunteer MO interviews took place out of doors on the community's land, or at the respondents' place of work. Because of this difference in environment, MO interviews were rarely conducted with other people (including children) present: 3% compared to 24% of (combined) village and rural households had other people present during the interview.

Tables of results follow.
## TABLES OF RESULTS
(raw numbers)

### Table 1:
**Persons & dwellings Nimbin: ABS 1991 Census & Nimbin village survey**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>n aged 14+</th>
<th>including n visitors</th>
<th>total private dwellings</th>
<th>including vans &amp; tents</th>
<th>n unoccupied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABS 1991</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village sample</td>
<td>(all)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
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</table>

### Table 2:
**Sampling information for Nimbin household surveys**
(combined village/rural), (n = 119)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewed</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refused</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at home after 4 visits</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No English/incapable</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL occupied</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unoccupied</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total dwellings</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3:
**Number of visits for household interviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of visits: n</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Total visits</th>
<th>n interviews weekends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4:
**Interviews: others present**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present: n</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Combined</th>
<th>MO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anyone else present</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Including children present</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix II: Household surveys

### Table 5: Dependent children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children: n</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Combined</th>
<th>MO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dependent children fulltime</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent children part time</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 6: Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ethnicity: n</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>MO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia-born non-Aboriginal</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aborigine or Torres Strait Islander</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born overseas</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 7: Gender & age (mean, median, range) by location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture: n</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Combined village &amp; rural</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>18-87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>18-87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>18-81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 8: Village: gender & age (mean, median, range)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender: n</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>18-87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>18-87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>18-80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 9: Rural: gender & age (mean, median, range)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender: n</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>30-81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>30-62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>35-81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 10: MO: gender & age (mean, median, range)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender: n</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Occupancy</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>18-52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>24-52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>18-51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix II: Household surveys

Table 11:
Education: village, rural & MO households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education: n</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Combined village &amp; rural</th>
<th>MO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary school only</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school no HSC</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSC</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade qualification</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE / other diploma</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University years1-2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher degree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12:
Occupation: village, rural & MO households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation: n</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Combined</th>
<th>MO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed full--time</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed part-time</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying (school, tertiary, training )</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping house</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other*</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Includes pensioner, other benefits, travelling, freelance, farmer

Table 13:
Nimbin village: household survey and ABS census

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age: n</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Village %</th>
<th>ABS n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14 -19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 -29</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30- 39</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 -54</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55+</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14:
Drug first mentioned in relation to the drug problem

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug: n</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Combined</th>
<th>MO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heroin</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocaine/crack</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (comb)*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Combines remaining drugs
### Table 15:  
**Important social issues (first mention)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue: n</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Combined village &amp; rural</th>
<th>MO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal/ family issues</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment/unemployment issues</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social/ environment issues</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic/financial issues</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs including alcohol</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal issues</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know/ none</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 16:  
**The drug of most concern to community**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug: n</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Combined</th>
<th>MO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excessive drinking of alcohol</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of heroin</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needle sharing</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco smoking</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of cocaine/crack</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of marijuana/hash</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (combined)*</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Combines remaining drugs

### Table 17:  
**The drug of most concern to self**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug: n</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Combined</th>
<th>MO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of heroin</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excessive drinking of alcohol</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco smoking</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of marijuana/hash</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needle sharing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excessive use of narcotics (morphine, methadone)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (combined)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Combines remaining drugs

### Table 18:  
**Favouring legalisation of cannabis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legalise: n</th>
<th>Combined village rural</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>MO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix II: Household surveys

### Table 19:
Favour legalisation & ever used cannabis, by gender, comb vill/rural

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Female (n=69)</th>
<th>Male (n=50)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Favour legalisation</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever used cannabis</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 20:
Ever used cannabis by gender & location, comb vill/rural

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender:</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Combined village &amp; rural</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 21:
Favour of regular adult use, (n varies, na* bracketed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug:</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Combined village &amp; rural</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>MO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>70 (5)</td>
<td>48 (2)</td>
<td>31 (3)</td>
<td>18 (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis</td>
<td>69 (6)</td>
<td>45 (3)</td>
<td>24 (3)</td>
<td>21 (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analgesics</td>
<td>57 (7)</td>
<td>38 (4)</td>
<td>19 (3)</td>
<td>11 (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco</td>
<td>58 (6)</td>
<td>38 (3)</td>
<td>20 (3)</td>
<td>13 (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tranquillisers</td>
<td>29 (5)</td>
<td>17 (3)</td>
<td>12 (2)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallucinogens</td>
<td>19 (8)</td>
<td>12 (5)</td>
<td>7 (3)</td>
<td>12 (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamines</td>
<td>17 (6)</td>
<td>8 (3)</td>
<td>9 (3)</td>
<td>4 (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecstasy/designer</td>
<td>10 (6)</td>
<td>6 (3)</td>
<td>4 (3)</td>
<td>8 (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroin</td>
<td>9 (6)</td>
<td>4 (3)</td>
<td>5 (3)</td>
<td>4 (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocaine/crack</td>
<td>6 (6)</td>
<td>2 (3)</td>
<td>4 (3)</td>
<td>6 (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*na = no answer

### Table 22:
Government effective: education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government is doing: n</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Combined village &amp; rural</th>
<th>MO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enough</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix II: Household surveys

Table 23:
Government effective: treatment/rehabilitation (na = 5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gvt is doing: n</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Combined village &amp; rural</th>
<th>MO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enough</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 24:
Government effective: drug dealing (unspecified) (na = 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gvt is doing: n</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Combined village &amp; rural</th>
<th>MO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enough</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 25:
Government effective: drug taking (unspecified) (na = 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gvt is doing: n</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Combined village &amp; rural</th>
<th>MO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enough</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 26:
Combined from four previous tables: collapsed categories, village & rural combined

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response to drugs: n</th>
<th>Gvt not doing enough</th>
<th>Gvt doing too much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment/ rehabilitation</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug dealing (unspecified)</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug taking (unspecified)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 27:
**Cannabis contribution to local economy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contributes:</th>
<th>Rural household (n=40)</th>
<th>Multiple occupancy (n=29)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Not asked in village survey

### Table 28:
**Attitudes to police activities**, open-ended

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comments:</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Multiple occupancy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral/ no answer</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Not asked village survey

### Table 29:
**Privacy disturbed, Rural & MO surveys**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disturbed:</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>MO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer / Don't know</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Not asked in village survey

### Table 30
**Personally disturbed, Rural & MO surveys**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disturbed:</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>MO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer / Don't know</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Not asked in village survey
### SPECIAL MULTIPLE OCCUPANCY QUESTIONS

#### Table 31:
Why living on a Multiple Occupancy? open-ended (n = 29)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community/ social support</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic issues</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing resources</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Table 32:
First mentioned benefit Multiple Occupancy, open-ended

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community/ social support</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic issues</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good for children</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Table 33:
Have ideals been met on Multiple Occupancy?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Met</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Table 34:
First mentioned problem, Multiple Occupancy, open-ended

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community decision making</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of facilities</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbours/ privacy</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None/ no answer</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Table 35:
Will you always live here? Multiple Occupancy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Always</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### SELF-COMPLETED DRUG USE SECTION
(village and rural households only)

#### Table 36:
Lifetime drug experience, combined village/rural households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug use:</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol, full glass (na =2)</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco, full cigarette (na = 2)</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallucinogens</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamines</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecstasy/ designer drugs</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroin</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tranquillisers</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever injected any drug</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Table 37:
Cannabis use by gender comb vill/rural

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug use:</th>
<th>Female (n=69)</th>
<th>Male (n=50)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis ever used</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used past 12 months</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less often/ no longer use</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used past week</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used day of interview</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually use daily</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Table 38:
Cannabis use by gender by location comb vill/rural

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use:</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>ALL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vill</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever used</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used past 12m</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less often/ no longer use</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last week</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day of interview</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually use daily</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Appendix II: Household surveys

Table 39:
Ever used drugs in Nimbin by age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>18-34 (n=29)</th>
<th>35-54 (n=63)</th>
<th>55+ (n=27)</th>
<th>Total (119)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol (na = 2)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco (na = 2)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallucinogens</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamines</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tranquillisers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroin</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injected illegally</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 40:
Recent (past 12m) drug use in Nimbin by age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>18-34 (n=29)</th>
<th>35-54 (n=63)</th>
<th>55+ (n=27)</th>
<th>Total (119)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallucinogens</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamines</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tranquillisers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injected illegally</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 41:
Other illicit drug use by gender (comb vill/rural)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Female (n=69)</th>
<th>Male (n=50)</th>
<th>Total (n=119)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hallucinogens ever</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallucinogens past 12m</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamines ever</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamines past 12 m</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroin ever</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroin past12m</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inject ever</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inject past 12m</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tranquillisers ever (illegally)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tranquillisers past 12m</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix II: Household surveys

Table 42:
Drug use and risk behaviours by gender: alcohol (comb vill/rural)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug use</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol ever</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>109</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol p 12m</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>99</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol past week</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol on day of interview</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually drink 7 or more drink</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;5 drinks p fortnight</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fail to do what's expected</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failed with both alcohol &amp; cannabis</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 43:
Drug use and risk behaviours by gender: tobacco (comb vill/rural)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug use</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco ever</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco p 12m</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco p week30</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>59</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco on day of interview</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use less often/ no longer use</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 44:
Drug use and risk behaviours by gender: cannabis(comb vill/rural)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug use</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis ever</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis p 12m</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis past month</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis in past week</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis on day of interview</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use less often/ no longer use</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fail to do what's expected</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used cannabis &amp; tobacco in past month</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 45:
Household sample and long-term users: n, gender & median age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender &amp; age</th>
<th>Total household (n=119)</th>
<th>Total household (n=59)</th>
<th>Long term users</th>
<th>Long term users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>median age</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>median age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total persons</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 46:
Differences between cannabis users and non-users by gender (comb vill/rural)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women User (n = 42)</th>
<th>Women Non-user (n = 27)</th>
<th>Men User (n = 37)</th>
<th>Men Non-user (n = 13)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median age</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Av length residence (yrs)</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>33.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed (FT and PT)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other*</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSC or less education</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade qualifications</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some tertiary education</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol p 12m</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually drink 7 + drinks</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco p 12m</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Other includes student, home duties, pensioner & other

### Table 47:
Long-term users by gender & location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location: n</th>
<th>Total n</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 48:
Long-term users: gender by age group (comb vill/rural)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age: n</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51+</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 49:
Pattern of use if cannabis legal (comb vill/rural)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use: n</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not use</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 50:
Long-term users: gender by education (comb vill/rural)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSC</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE/other diploma</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University 1-2 year</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate degree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 51:
Pattern of use if cannabis legal: comb. vill/rural & long term users, by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use</th>
<th>Total village &amp; rural</th>
<th>Total female</th>
<th>Total male</th>
<th>Long-term sub-sample</th>
<th>Long-term female</th>
<th>Long-term male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use more</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use less</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The same</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not use</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 52:
Cannabis users who are not currently using

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>long-term users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ever used</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>59*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not used in past 12m</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Criteria for long term

### Table 53:
Demographic comparisons, long-term cannabis users
Nimbin households (1994-95) & Didcott et al. (1997)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Didcott et al. lt cannabis users %</th>
<th>Nimbin lt cannabis users %</th>
<th>Nimbin lt cannabis users n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male n</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female n</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-20</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50+</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aus non-indigenous</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATSI</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born overseas</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 54:
**Educational & occupational comparisons, long-term cannabis users**  
Nimbin households (1994-95) & Didcott et al. (1997)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education/Occupation</th>
<th>Didcott et al. %</th>
<th>Nimbin sub-sample %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School only</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic vocational*-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE/ other diplomas</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University 1-2 years</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher degree</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed FT/ pt</td>
<td>57.8</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comb unempl + other</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (include pensioner)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* HSC, probably combined with School only in the Didcock et al study

### Table 55:
**Pattern current cannabis use: long-term cannabis users**  
Nimbin households (1994-95) & Didcott et al. (1997)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current cannabis use: n</th>
<th>Didcott et al. %</th>
<th>Nimbin lt users %</th>
<th>Nimbin lt users n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use daily</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6 times per week</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 times per week</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 56:
**Drug use (ever used):**  
Nimbin comb vill/rural & long term cannabis users (1 na)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug: n</th>
<th>Total Nimbin vill/rural (n=119)</th>
<th>Long term users (n=59)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>58*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>55*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallucinogens</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamines</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecstasy/designer drugs</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroin</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tranquillisers</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injected illegally</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix II: Household surveys

Table 57: Current (past 12m) drug use Nimbin, comb vill/rural & long term users (1 na)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug</th>
<th>Total Nimbin vill/rural (n=119)</th>
<th>Long term users (n=59)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallucinogens</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamines</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tranquillisers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroin</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injected illegally</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 58: Cannabis use among long term users

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cannabis use: n</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Female (n = 29)</th>
<th>Male (n = 30)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Last used past 12months</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last used past month</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last used past week</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last used day of interview</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually use daily</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failed due to cannabis use</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median age first used</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean age first used</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median years using</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean years using</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX IV

TAPED INTERVIEWS
METHOD

Over 1994 and 1995 I conducted a series of taped interviews with members of the counter-culture to investigate key issues for the community, in particular opinions about the village's 'drug problem' and the street scene. The taped interviews included anonymous interviews with people associated with street dealing, and attributed interviews with prominent spokespersons for Nimbin's alternative community. The taped interviews were unstructured, although all participants were asked if they thought that Nimbin had a drug problem. Recruitment was opportunistic although I sought: people who were public figures and community spokespersons (to the media and at rallies); young people; residents of multiple occupancies; health service providers; and people involved in drug marketing. While the process of face-to-face interviews was time-consuming, from recruitment through transcription, editing, and analysis, the results provide a very real sense of Nimbin's alternative community. Representatives of the community are given the opportunity and freedom to speak about their hopes and their history, their problems and their solutions.

Participation was voluntary and fully informed. People were approached sometimes through third parties, and invited to participate. If they were interested, I explained the nature and purpose of the research, and emphasised that they were under no obligation to answer any particular questions and that they could stop the interview at any time; I also explained that they would have control of the tape recorder throughout the interview, to erase or change anything they had said. Some people, because of their occupation or views, were offered anonymity and were guaranteed that the tape would be erased after the interview had been transcribed, to protect their identity. No one who was approached refused outright, but it proved difficult to organise specific interview times with some people, and ultimately they were not interviewed. People involved in the street scene were most difficult to recruit. One interview was conducted in difficult circumstances as the respondent was intoxicated when he arrived, and very little useful information came from that interview.

The taped interviews were transcribed, and wherever possible the transcripts were given to those interviewed. This process ensured the accuracy of attributed text and provided feedback
to participants. Seven interviews identified respondents, and they were all given the opportunity to edit their transcripts. It was also possible to give seven of the nine anonymous respondents the opportunity to edit their interviews; the two who were unavailable were 'Bill' and 'Eagle'. In general there was little editing, but some respondents edited their interviews several times before they were satisfied, and their final transcripts do not match the taped transcripts. However, the quality of the interviews was greatly improved by giving people this opportunity, as errors were corrected, ideas expanded and/or clarified, and readability was improved.

Usually the taped interviews were conducted in a cafe or the home of a mutual friend; private meetings proved difficult to arrange and the majority of interviews were carried out with other people present or near by. To promote a relaxed environment despite the tape recorder and the presence of others, I interacted freely with the respondents and encouraged them to talk about anything they wished. As a result large portions of some interviews are irrelevant to the research area, but on the other hand people appeared to be generally relaxed and spoke freely so freely that on some occasions I had to advise them to erase something they had said.

A student was paid to transcribe the taped interviews. These original transcripts contained a large number of spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors which I corrected before providing respondents with a copy of their interview to edit. My questions and comments were not transcribed because it would have added to transcription time and costs, and I viewed them as merely prompts and encouragement for the interviewees' feelings and opinions. However, my interviewers responses, prompts, and comments doubtless influenced respondents' answers. While it was expensive and labour-intensive, the taped interview is superior to note-taking, which I used for crop grower interviews, because taped interviews capture the persons words rather than the researchers interpretation and judgements. The other major problem with the method is that there is a very real danger of losing the respondents words, ideas, and meanings during the transcription process. These two problems were addressed by providing copies of transcripts to participants wherever possible, to ensure the transcription correctly captured the respondents words and intentions rather than the interviewer's or transcriber's interpretation.
The first protest against Australian involvement in the Vietnam War that I went to, was in 1965 in Sydney, and there were about fifty or sixty people in Martin Place walking around in a circle. It was a very isolated movement at that time. I was interested in how this would become a larger movement, how it would grow, how we could stop this war. That the war was a disaster was obvious to anyone, and I'd done a bit of reading when I was a cadet at the Royal Military College. What I noticed was not working were the teach-ins. In fact they were the first evidence I had that information wasn't enough when creating a popular movement. All they did was preach to the converted and confirmed people in contention. People became argumentative rather than joyous. I noticed what was really changing people's hearts and minds were all those things associated with the counter-culture, that protests were kind of a celebration where people would come out and strut their stuff. The drugs were central to this changing consciousness - cannabis, LSD and when we got to the country, mushrooms. They were the drugs that really shook us up! Back in 1967 when I was president of the University of NSW Student Union Council, as it was called then, I was on my way to the annual formal dinner where the Students' Union sat down with the Vice-Chancellor, the Registrar, and the Bursar, you know, all the senior bureaucrats, and it sort of celebrated student life. It was a tradition we'd borrowed from Cambridge and Oxford. I was dressed up in a dinner suit, and as the President, I was the host.

On the way I stopped at a friend's place, a student house just across the road from the gates of the University. They had gone to India and the East on Aus Travel, and comeback with hashish. They were right into the drug culture, and they got me stoned on the way to this dinner. I remember floating across the gardens of the University. Sir Phillip Baxter, the Vice Chancellor of the University, was also head of the Australian Atomic Energy Commission, working to create a nuclear industry in Australia, and this was his mission in life. Anyway I got up at dinner, and I was saying: friends and Professor Baxter, and went into an attack on him. No more Mr Nice Guy of student politics. We just went for it from that time, speaking the truth fearlessly. I was the president of the Labour Club at university, and Bob Carr formed another club called the UNSW ALP Club, because we were super-radical against the War, and he wanted a much more staid ALP front at the University. A ladder up into the ALP machine. He gets to be Premier and hang out in Macquarie St, conservative as ever. I get to hang out in Nimbin, radical as ever.

In 1971 I began exploring the counter-culture of Sydney in the pages of Tharunka. I was co-editor of Tharunka [the UNSW student newspaper] again, and I'd been reading Theodore Roszak's book The Making of the Counterculture. That year Tharunka featured a series of guest editors with themes from the counterculture: drugs, food, mysticism, ecology, feminism and peace politics. Each edition had a different theme guest editor. I must say that during that year we published the first how to grow, information that ever got distributed freely. It was
one of the most popular editions of *Tharunka* because it was 16 pages on the cultivation of cannabis.

In 1972 I was appointed Director of the 1973 Aquarius Festival, which was a cultural festival which the Australian Union of Students (AUS) put on every second year, under the direction of the Aquarius Foundation, the cultural arm of the AUS. In 1971 the festival had been held at ANU in Canberra, and a lot of activists went there. We had spontaneous protests every day, in the morning deciding to march on the South African Embassy, or the American Embassy that afternoon.

We decided to define the 1973 festival as a lifestyle festival and invite proponents of all sorts of different lifestyles emerging around Australia at that time. We were disillusioned with the greed of the new classic of rock music entrepreneur and we decided not to pay any rock and roll bands. A lot of people make the mistake of thinking of the Aquarius festival as an Australian Woodstock. It wasn't. It was the peak expression of the student counter-culture in Australia at that time. About 5,000 students from around Australia came to the festival and there were about 20,000 day visitors from the Lismore district. The *Northern Star* covered it with fascination. The locals came to stare at the naked bodies. They'd hang around the sauna and toilet areas. No walls, no central division in some of the uni-sex toilets, it was a shock to the local people.

The Festival was a time of dreaming. We were going back to the indigenous culture - the AUS was active in land rights in the sixties, and we had huge aboriginal participation in the Festival. Nimbin is ancient initiation grounds. Understanding Nimbin was understanding the Aboriginal culture which had been there for thousands of years, and regarded it as initiation grounds. And it still is today.

The Aquarius Festival was a temporary community with time and space to share dreams. There was the dream that it was possible to live some better way. There was a desire to continue the thing, and acquire some land. That's what Tuntable came out of. Shares were sold for the Tuntable Falls Co-ordination Co-operative Committee. Nimbin became a focus for a re-settlement, and lots of people bought land. Land was relatively cheap because of the collapse of the dairy industry. When I arrived here to organise the Festival I rented a farm house for $7 a week. The local police officer, Bob Marsh, supported the idea of the festival. He was hounded out of the police force afterwards. Bob took us out to Kirkland Road and we walked into this home with no doors. The backyard was overgrown and there, at the foot of the back steps, was a circle of goldtop mushrooms, and we looked at each other and said, 'I think we're meant to be here'. So we cooked them up and went to a town meeting ripped off our faces. That's how we used to do things in those days.

One of the things that made the Nimbin resettlement different from other areas settled by the counterculture was that the Festival acquired shopfront property in the main street. The old RSL hall had been purchased by the AUS as an office for the festival, it's called the Healing Centre now. It cost $500 including furniture, and we handed it over to the new community at cost. Also the Tomato Sauce building was acquired (it was an old general store) and the Rainbow Cafe. In the Mullumbimby area, the Main Arm valley, you had lots of people seeking alternative lifestyles, many before Aquarius, but they never had a foothold in town.
This was the first time the counter-culture had a foothold in a main street, and this gave the alternative movement the political power of presence.

In 1974 I returned to Nimbin to begin community building. I'd promised the locals that we would recycle the town, bring the young people back. After the Festival all the organising energy had withdrawn and dispersed. Now 18 months later there was this coming back together of people trying to bring the Aquarian dreams into a cultural reality for themselves. People heard about the Nimbin Festival all round the world (in the Himalayas, America, the beaches of Goa). Nimbin's always had that ambivalence between people with great vision, who are doing things, making changes, and this sort of flotsam and jetsam of humanity who wash into town for a place to hang.

And then in 1979 there was Terania Creek. It was the first time we'd come into conflict with the established system. It had been five years. The first two years were spent organising our lives and community, to the point where we were strong enough to take on the NSW Forestry Commission. We challenged their logging policy on a 50 ha patch of rainforest at the end of a hippy valley. The blockade raged for six weeks and became known as the Battle for Terania Creek. When we began we didn't know if the strength was in the community to persevere and win the trees, but the strength certainly proved to be there. Spiking the trees almost broke us, but it was the only thing that could give us back the trees. We put nails in the trees to stop them from taking them out of the forest. It almost broke the action, there was so much division about it. However spiking the trees was the turning point in the action. We spent four weeks in the forest. We won, but people back in the hills, in their illegal dwellings, were scared by the right wing reaction. After the action there were all these red-neck public meetings in the Channon. I forget what the group was called, but anyone with long hair was excluded. When Hurfords timber yard in Lismore burned down, the *Northern Star* printed its front page with a black border, and the protesters were blamed for the fire. It was probably an insurance job, I mean, [deleted] Hurfords would deny this. But non-violence was a big debate going on amongst us, and we were really tight on what was a violent action. Hurfords was never discussed.

People who came to Nimbin, and the NSW north coast generally, were attracted by the dreams of the Aquarius Festival and picked up different aspects of it. Some were interested in vegetarianism, some in the dope, etc. I came back to Nimbin in 1974 with a group called the Reality Construction Company. We were committed to making the alternative resettlement of Nimbin a cultural reality. We used celebration as our community building tool. We had healing festivals, music festivals, birthday parties for the kids, and even a funeral. There were lots of babies. The home birthing movement took off; the home-birthing movement made the women incredibly strong together, and once the women were together, all the community services began to fall into place.

Every time we shared joy together, no matter how big, a children's party, you know, ten adults present or whether it was a festival, it was like we had a gossamer thread connected, a point in individual hearts, which touched and connected with everyone else. And the more we did that, the more it bound people together in a sense of community and mission, that something special was happening. So, that's how it was, so what I've got to say about Nimbin, in trying to get a perspective of what Nimbin is, is that the Festival was a time of dreaming, a dreamtime for us. This was no coincidence, right from the beginning we understood that we
were moving towards indigenous culture, by going to Nimbin we were going back to
indigenous culture.

Nimbin is ancient initiation grounds. When I was doing my community organising in 1975, I
invited Oodjeroo, Cath Walker as she was then called. I met her at a conference, sat down at
her fire on Stradbroke Island, and she'd done some amazing magic that night. It quite
astounded me, because this woman I first took to be a drunk, and she was drunk most of the
time — was also capable of such strong magic. We talked about Nimbin and I told the story
about what had been happening, and I asked her to come and advise me, because my attempts
to make contact with local Aboriginals had not been successful. My inquiries had led me to a
drunken old man, babbling Christian stories at me, just seriously ill and seriously neglected. I
thought, if this is the elder in the community this culture has got a bad problem. So, I went to
Cath Walker and invited her to come over to Nimbin, and she came and stayed at a mutual
friend's place. After being there for two days, I saw her on the third day and I said, 'What do
you know? what do you reckon?' and she said then that this was an initiation ground, it was a
male initiation ground, connected with the Rocks. That it was a place of learning, and the
people should come here for learning, but if they stayed too long and stopped their learning,
they would turn to rocks, they would become petrified. She also said it's not a good place for
women, they would not prosper. There'd been a rumour, at the time of the Festival, that the
valley was cursed. I never could substantiate that rumour, it came from Aboriginal Bunjalung
radicals in Sydney.

The concept of a critical mass in cultural change is important. When sufficient enough people
share a value, vegetarianism, for example, when sufficient people in a particular area share
that value then a transition takes place and the cultural value ceases to become an idea and it
becomes a cultural reality that has a life of its own. It evolves, and grows and changes, it
becomes part of community life. So, for example there was vegetarian restaurants, an
exchange of books about vegetarian cooking, and all this kind of stuff, all the information
resources begin to accumulate. Whereas, if you tried to be a vegetarian living in Casino in
those days, you would have found that you were an outsider, and either you went outside the
community to sustain in your belief, get the information and encouragement and the backing,
or you would have changed your eating habits.

There's a lot of disquiet among the fundamentalist Christians about the alternative culture.
They fear we're devil worshipping. That is, that we're worshipping nature. And we are
creating nature-awareness in the culture. Putting awareness of the natural world at the centre
of culture is important if we are going to have ecological stability. We've got to be made more
aware of growing things and changing seasons. So, why am I making lanterns? I went from
being a political organiser to a festival organiser at Aquarius. In 1978 the Australia Council
funded a residency of John Fox and Sue Gill, from the UK Outdoor Theatre Group, Welfare
State International, in Nimbin. They taught me the art of festival creation, trained me to do
beautiful festivals. We worked on a spectacular celebration of new year's eve at Blue Knob
Hall. This is a tiny hall, and all the people from the counter-culture community would gather
there with their families, put out the blankets, put the kids on pillows, sit around and talk with
friends, dance, listen to music. It was a beautiful vibe.

Fox decided to take it further and build a papier mache giant to represent the old year. It
turned out I can build, I didn't know that I could make things. That year we made an 8 metre
Appendix IV: Taped Interviews

giant, and paraded it through the town with a horse and cart, ringing a bell: Bring out your old dreams, bring out your old tax forms, old letters, put them in the belly of the giant, and were going to burn them at Blue Knob. All ceremony, black costumes, lanterns. It was the old grey giant of the old year, and we were taking it to Blue Knob Hall to burn. Lots of people had made lanterns and these were hung in a big circle.

Behind the hall was a big fire, we had the giant in a big circle of lanterns. We threw the giant, which was stoked up with hydrogen balloons, onto the fire, sang laments. A flaming straw man was floated across a dam. With beauty and astonishing theatre we gonged in the new year together. It was the most amazing spectacle. I'd never seen such beauty in my life before, such amazing community focus.

The second act was a naming ceremony, which they held in a field beside the old Butter Factory. We had invited Aboriginal Elders, priests, a Buddhist monk to be present, and we created a space where people from the community could present their children to the community and name them. In the evening they put on a play at the Bush Theatre that Fox created and scripted, based on things in the community, for example, Terry McGee and I, as community leaders were at loggerheads at the time, and he had us in a boat paddling in different directions. It was graphic and everyone loved it. I was sent to England to study community celebration by the Australia Council, and worked six months with Welfare State International. I'm interested in social change, it's my vocation after all these years, and I use celebration for community building around change.

Nimbin was an initiation ground, and it still is today. People come here for learning and for reasons of crisis in their lives, or because they want to make changes in their lives. A classic model in the 70s was couples selling up everything they owned in Sydney to come to Nimbin, trying to find a better life as a family, and then immediately splitting apart. Also people came who were casualties, broken and falling. In the seventies we had these 16 year old alcoholics. They got nicknamed Droogs, from Clockwork Orange. They weren't violent so much as disgusting. I'd never seen this phenomenon before, they came from the western suburbs of Sydney and they started begging on the streets of Nimbin. Everyone in Nimbin was poor. The great thing about Nimbin was that we were all poor, and having a good time. But these guys were poor and were determined to have a miserable time. We had to deal with it because there were never any gates. There was a big public debate, people were outraged, eventually the droogs were hospitalised, treated, but they were given lots of scope. Nimbin always has been like that. Compassionate. People have to be really outrageous before they get kicked out of Nimbin.

As my friend Paul Recher pointed out, there is a higher concentration of counter-culture owned land around here than anywhere else in the world. Because of the MOs and because of the numbers of people, the counter culture values of the 70s took root here like nowhere else in the world, sustained itself as a culture, and grew.

At long last the NSW Forestry Commission realises that it can't mine forest any more, that they have to plant plantations. That came from the Battle of Terania Creek. We developed the tactics for successful forest defence. Basically it was pioneered here, where we had this evolving culture committed to these values. The community movement to reform the drug laws are also coming from the streets of Nimbin. This is an alive and vibrant community
dealing with social problems in the here-and-now. The spirit of Aquarius: we enjoy ourselves, and speak the truth.

I left Nimbin in 1979, my relationship had broken up, I was separated from my children. People don't like change-makers. A lot of people were turning to stone. They'd just frozen. A lot of the most conservative people on the north coast are not the rednecks, they're the green-necks. Marijuana freezes peoples' minds. They get into raves, speak at you for hours and hours. There's no dialogue, only very loud opinions. Very little action for all the words. Nimbin is a social experiment. Always has been. It's disguised by the fact that we end up with so many social casualties, but underneath that there are people trying new things, acting as if there's going to be a future.

[Q: Does Nimbin have a drug problem?]
There's a drug problem. Two points: one is dealing in the street, we have a drug tourism happening, now people come to Nimbin to buy and sell drugs. This wouldn't be so bad except for the prohibition laws that kept it grotty. We can't regulate it. What you must understand about the heroin scene, the injectable scene, is that it isn't that we have more people injecting drugs in Nimbin, its just that we have more untidy injectors. Junkies coming out from Lismore and shooting up in front of the school kids in their classes, being watched by teachers and kids, I mean, of course there's concern. I had a public meeting to talk about the twentieth anniversary of the Aquarius festival but everyone wanted to talk about the drug problem. There was no space in their minds to talk about Aquarius because of the disgust and concern they felt about the injectable scene. And they blamed me for it, mind you. Our tourist economy has been dominated by drugs. Most people think Nimbin and think drugs. They do not think innovative community. That's why I'm working at present on creating a relationship with Woodstock, which is an arts community, and emphasising the arts side, the social innovation, the music, sculpture, the fashion industry, and all the rest of the things that are happening here which are quite amazing. We need to bring these other things forward, but right now we have this problem of the drug scene dominating our public image.

The second problem I have is the debate about cannabis, because we are forced to defend it as part of the prohibition stuff, and not enough information is getting out about the long term effects of marijuana in the community, of how it generates paranoia, some of it caused by prohibition because it's illegal— rip-offs and surveillance helicopters and this sort of stuff. It creates so much division, people cease to be creative, they seize up, they stop. As I said, the green-necks, marijuana conservatives, are the worst kind. People think because they've raved about something when they were stoned, that its the same as doing it. You go to a public meeting there and you can bet that one third of the audience are stoned, there's incredible madness there, things slop around. On the other side there's incredible revelations, it's often wonderful theatre, things pop to the surface that would never come to the surface at a meeting in Goonellabah where everyone was being earnest and considerate and going by the rules of the meeting, and never saying what's bubbling inside them.

The things that do get organised in Nimbin are amazingly effective. The end prohibition campaign for example, it really does go with creativity, like nowhere else in Australia. So what have I got to say about the cannabis culture? The Aquarius festival wouldn't have happened without marijuana. It was a kind of sacrament. It was used at all our meetings. It
was an inspiration. It changed my life, and a lot of the best ideas we had for the Aquarius Festival came from the marijuana ritual. The sacred herb did liberate the creativity.

So I've got to say that it was a part of the culture, and it's the same in Nimbin today. Drugs are a lifestyle choice and got nothing to do with the law. What I take into my body is my business, what I do with my mind is my business, and if I'm not harming anybody then it's not a police matter. There are up sides and down sides of all drugs. There was a strong Buddhist movement came into Nimbin about 1974, we were told to leave intoxicants behind. Its like the next step for a lot of people, realising that they'd taken them as far as they could. But it was the step that got us out of the city, so it's been part of the community since the beginning.

I spent the most of two days this week on a multiple occupancy, sitting around a table, with men friends getting stoned and talking about how things were going. We had wonderful conversations, lots of laughter and things like this. Stoned again, and it's just like it's always been. But I don't want to do this every day of my life. I live in Lismore in a studio warehouse which is drug free. This way I can do work, concentrate on my life's work and look after my health. One of the big discussions on the weekend was, what's the appropriate age for the boys of this community to be smoking cannabis. There was real concern that one of the older boys had offered a six year old a dragon a joint. I mean, cut it out! That was unreasonable. A ten year old said that wasn't appropriate, and there was this big discussion between the boys and the men about what was appropriate. No resolutions, but an honest discussion. And the boys were coming back and saying, 'Look, when did you smoke marijuana?' and I said I didn't smoke till I was about 25 and I was at University and all that kind of stuff. And he said, 'Well, if you were living in a community where it was smoked every day, maybe you'd have a different attitude, and you would have started younger'. So, what can I say to these boys, they're absolutely right and maybe we'd have different attitudes.

Humans live in a sea of drugs. Forever we have taken things into our bodies, to create changed mind states, and changed body states. And we will do it forever. Drugs are intrinsic to the culture. The divisions about what are illegal drugs and what are medicinal drugs, are artificial. So what this community was saying, OK, let's talk about dysfunctional behaviour on drugs. How will you know when your behaviour is dysfunctional for yourself and this community? So, that was the question that the boys were working on, that they've gotta come up and tell us what's dysfunctional. How will we know? Will it be that they won't chop the wood?, that they don't get their homework done? Just give us some parameters for us to watch you on. We'll see how that goes. Basically what I liked about it, was an open discussion and how the men were engaged with the boys, even though they were rolling all these joints while talking. The boys are just role modelling. They're good boys and they're going to be useful citizens.

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MICHAEL BALDERSTONE,
(self-edited 1996)

Well, the beginning of a major change in me came from getting on the end of a hookah in Kandahar, Afghanistan. We were staying at the caravan park, in an orange grove. An old man, the caretaker, invited me down into his cellar bedroom to join him on his hookah. I thought it was tobacco, it was the best Afghani black hash! This was the first time I'd been stoned. I surfaced hallucinating all over the orange grove, and was in awe of the experience. From then on my curiosity was totally aroused — I went for it. I wanted to understand the experience, and a spiritual path started unfolding for me. I travelled lots over a long period of about ten years. Introspective, just trying to work out who I was and where I fitted in. Unravelling — wandering, poor but free, so I could explore myself, drifting on life. It was lonely at times, and I kept coming back to Oz looking for home, like-minded souls.

Nimbin happened while I was overseas. I kept coming up here, but then I'd go overseas again. I couldn't stand Australia, I couldn't handle my family. I couldn't handle that I didn't fit in anywhere, I couldn't handle the total dominating confusion of not knowing who I was or where I belonged. Everyone else seemed to know who they were, and had something to do. Only I had nowhere to go and nothing to do! I just wanted to think, I think! Contemplate, drift, I was working things out. That was unacceptable in Oz. You had to work!! Get a career. Huge pressure. Especially family pressure. It was like a heavy, wet, grey blanket. Conform. Judgement everywhere. I was into God, in a word, so I'd disappear again, anonymously into the hoards in India or to meditate in Himalayan caves. I was a loner. I wasn't smoking dope or using any drugs in those days. Pure and clean, striving for enlightenment. Hanging out with Sadhus. I'd already blown my mind, but that's another story.

Eventually I came back to Australia. My first child was born in Melbourne, but quickly we wanted to move to the country. I remember getting to Bellingen where I knew people, and then thought No, I want to go to the guts of it. So we came to Nimbin and it all just happened from there. But I'd been to Nimbin quite a few times before, and I'd always been watching it, checking it out, but in those days I couldn't handle Australia I couldn't handle Australia. Well, I started the junk shop that first year we were here. It was very quiet, no-one had a shop here, this [the Museum building] was closed and people were living in the building. There were only half a dozen shops open in town. The Rainbow was open, that was a scene. It grew slowly for a bit. Then they sealed the road from Murwillumbah to Nimbin. It was fifteen kilometres of rough dirt, suddenly a highway, and that changed the whole ball game. The Gold Coast comes here now, and it's become much more accessible. We're getting more visitors every year.

Yes, there's heaps of drugs, and heaps of drug abuse. Heaps of drug use, heaps of misinformation about drugs, and also heaps of knowledge about drugs because there's lots of experience walking the streets of Nimbin these days. These people give the only real advice about how to use drugs. There's no-one else to follow. The whole western hippy movement took off into the dark and a largely uncharted terrain with LSD, pot and other drugs. We really didn't have a clue and had to find our own way. Now at least we can talk to our own children about it. My parents freaked!! Drug use is so widespread now despite all the
propaganda and bullshit to try and stop it, and only because people obviously like it. Humans have always liked altering their mind. Why not? It seems healthy to me. I can't see that there's anything criminal in that, it makes no sense to me that there's laws against plants of nature. That makes no sense. And when you smoke pot, or use other drugs, you know, you know you're not doing anything criminal. That's what's so sickening about the law. Made and upheld by people who don't know, who have no experience. It's a joke.

Society's got itself into a nightmare now and it doesn't know how to get out of it. Too many people are making money out of prohibition and too much superstition has been created by the old propaganda. Without a taste they'll never know! I think that's the essence of the drug problem that we've got. The laws which forbid these plants have created an enormous, secretive, dark, hidden, and mysterious criminal world. That's one of the main reasons why we did it in a big way in the Museum, just to try and get people to talk as we're doing, share experience, come out into the open, no shame. We're not criminals. There's a huge marijuana culture here, which to many is basically a huge criminal world. It's a funny one, us living in this jail without walls, we know we are not criminals, so there's a strong sense of injustice and a lot of anger and mistrust of authorities. I mean, if you really like pot you're a criminal for life. You bring your family up in it. Who wants that? It makes us even more outsiders than we already are. For twenty years hippies have been warning of the consequences of prohibition. Now they are really beginning to show and the debate is livening up, it's easier for us to have a bit of hope. We all know it's just around the corner.

The Royal Commission into police corruption in NSW is a hippy's dream come true, and the walls are crumbling. Even the police are on our side now. Most police I know think the laws need to change. They're frustrated. It's wasting their time and they know it. We've got good cops in this town at the moment. The poor buggers can't even come to a local party. Everyone smokes. It's embarrassing for them. And us. We all hate the laws.

So many people arrested for drugs are good people — not criminals. The only good thing prohibition is doing is creating a revolution. The drug squad is now targeting heroin sellers, and not so much pot, but the whole thing is a sham to anyone with half a brain. The law is killing 500 teenagers a year and breaking up thousands of families. It's tantamount to murder. We'll look back in twenty years in total shame and embarrassment at these laws, wondering how we could be so blind.

Nimbin is like the end of the road. Health workers and police and jail staff send their hopeless cases here. Street kids turn up regularly and won't say a word about their past. Adults too. The town, or the land perhaps, has a huge heart, with huge compassion and tolerance. I only ever found the same in India. It was a religious thing there and its the same in Nimbin. If Nimbin were in India it would be a holy town, and instead of being dreadlocked dole bludging bums, the people would be revered Sadhus, India's renunciate holy men. It's a sacred herb and a lot of people who use it know this.

Nimbin is a really warm, family, tribal, friendly little town. In the street scene, there's a couple of hundred people here every day, shopkeepers, drug dealers, junkies and street kids. The whole array of nutters, weirdos, beggars, the lost and searching, the lost and lost. We all look after each other quite extraordinarily. I've never lived in such a supportive community before. It's taught me to love people no matter what. Well almost! We all mix together, we all know each other, and it's the nicest thing for me about Nimbin. What to do about the street
scene? Let them be, make a bit more space and just let people be, give kids room. I think there should be more trees, and I think Councils working towards that. Make some more tree space, green space, nature space, and take the cars a bit away, if they can do it I think it would help, but I think let people be. I mean bloody hell, let them smoke drugs in cafes and sell a stick of marijuana over the counter for twenty bucks, rather than have rip-offs and dealers hassling.

I mean, a lot of the problems of the street come from dealers. That's what's upsetting everyone really, they're running, they're hassling people, they're insensitive, they're rude. It becomes a cut-throat thing. I don't blame them at all, I think they're mostly heroin addicts and pot smokers who have to deal to get a smoke. No-one can afford pot on the dole! They've got something to do too, the hype, the adrenalin, dodging the cops. It's a job, it's something to do, with risk and reward. Real life. Warrior life at that! They're into it. The laws have created this, it's a world of its own, way out of control. The longer the laws stay the bigger it will get. There's got to be a change of attitude towards people who use medicinal plants, they're not criminals. I would let everyone grow their own herbs, it would sort itself out in a few years. Very simple. The laws were a mistake, so get rid of them, like anything in your life that doesn't work. The changes would naturally sort themselves out. The government could tax it. I can't believe they haven't, in fact. The Yanks must be holding everyone by the balls. Australia is ideally situated to be empirical and show the way in drug law reform. It has to be Federal.

Let's do it across-the-board, regulate it, make sure people aren't ripped off, and there's good quality pot for old people with Parkinsons disease, like an old guy who came here a week or two ago shaking uncontrollably. He had a hundred bucks to spend; he'd been ripped off the week before on the street, by some junkie who charged him a hundred bucks for a few buds on top of a packet of leaf, which wasn't strong enough to take away his shaking. He comes to me, and says 'Help me. Where can I get a real deal on a hundred dollars worth of heads?'

Now in summertime the price of pot went up to $800 an ounce, and it was often unavailable. Powders were always available and cheaper, by miles. To get stoned the old fellow needed good heads, and we marvelled, watching his shaking stop as if by magic when he did.

It's just supply and demand. More and more people want pot, the price goes up, more kids using needles, more kids using powders, more danger and disaster. I absolutely can't stand it sometimes, we've all watched kids becoming junkies. They try and hide it at first, but it's a small community. I've lectured kids when they get 25 bucks together: 'Buy a good stick and have a few joints'. They couldn't even get that some of the time, but you could always get 25 bucks worth of powder, so they start using needles. To them it's: 'Why not, everyone tells you bullshit anyway. I can handle it'. They find out for themselves because their trust in authority is so broken. That's what lies do. Heroin's a really efficient drug, very powerful — it frightened me the first time. Instant pain-free and no worries. Strong medicine. The best pain killer — ask any doctor. Young kids get a taste, they go back to it. This is what the fucking drug laws are doing — it's criminal.

I've talked to heaps of junkies who say the best thing, seriously, the best thing for them to get off their habit, is two ounces of really good heads and they disappear into the bush. If people were allowed to grow their own pot, as much as they wanted, heaps of other drug problems
would disappear I believe. I'd let them grow any plant they wanted. Let the marketplace sort it out. Take the risk, giving humans freedom, you never know, we might find peace. And then heroin would be smoked, no need for needles which are only because it's so expensive. Needles are very efficient! Money! Money is the bottom line.

The police would have nothing to do! Burglaries, violence, prohibitions creating most of it. Did you know in America the jail guards union is the biggest contributor to the Prohibition campaign? With the pharmaceutical companies. Jobs are God! Money really. It's all upside down in this sick society, and unfortunately for them the pot smokers of the world are increasing in numbers daily. Fifty percent of our youth at least can see through the bullshit into another deeper spiritual reality. Even if it's only glimpsed, as I did in the Afghani orange orchard. It's an indelible mark on one's mind, and that remains. The journey to living it is the challenge and we are mostly all a little, or a lot, lost (or you could say found), along the path, at various stages. Nimbin is a major temple in Australia for those on the journey. There's a well-known early hippy saying: We've discovered a plant that can save the world. The only problem is it's illegal. Cannabis was the first paper of the bible! Ironic isn't it, in this supposed Christian culture. Jesus wore it and I'll bet my next joint he smoked it too, hanging out with holy men. They all do in the East.

Until the laws completely change it will get worse and worse and worse and worse.

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BOB HOPKINS
(self-edited 1996)

I've been living here since 1980. I had contact with Nimbin before then, I lived in Lismore in 1973 at the time of the Aquarius festival. I first came to Nimbin in 1972, which was before the festival was even conceived of, so I have had quite a long contact with the area. Why did I come here to live? This was, in part, a conscious decision. I'd been talking politics for a long part of my life, the philosophy of politics, and it all seemed pretty irrelevant unless you actually do something, you know. There I was in the city talking about doing it, and I wanted to actually go to some place where I was doing it. Nimbin seemed as good a place as any. I had kids, I knew there was a community school operating here, communities [multiple occupancies] just my place. We arrived sort of blind up here. We eventually got onto a multiple occupancy.

Positives of a multiple occupancy are a sense of sharing, of guardianship of the land. The thing that I like about the community where I live is that it's really very much a family. You don't even have to like the people in your family, there is some binding there; you don't have a great deal to do with each other that's not intensely communal. A community where everyone gets on with their own particular thing, but there is this quite tangible feeling of family there. Yeah, it seems to me we've all got kids just about, and this is maybe what causes it to have that family sense. You've got a whole range of kids to a greater or lesser degree. There is this sense that those kids can trust you, come to you, that sort of feeling.
We used to get the regular hassles, from the early eighties on. It became noticeable that a section of the local population would get agitated about what they saw on the street that they didn't like. It tended to be after Christmas, it tended to happen about this time of the year, about May. It was the season to sort of work it up. It was also rainy season, but what you've got to remember is we used to think of it as sort of rainy season madness. Where you'd be trapped under the rain, needed someone to blame. People go mad up here in the rain. There's just this constant state of rain, where it just rains all the time, and people are just trapped inside, can't really do a great deal. They like to blame somebody for their problems. Look, the thing about this is that they never, ever, came up with any positive measures. The complaints tended to be more like: You're to blame. It was like hit the junkies across the head, blame everyone, and go home feeling contented. The police would be lurched into action for two weeks, arrest everybody in sight for anything. A lot of innocent people would get busted in those times. After two weeks the cops would disappear back to their normal duties, and the town would go back to normal, it's just a silly situation. Then it might take a year, it might take two years for it to build up again.

Anyway, eventually it was 1988, the 1988 bicentennial drug meeting. A group of people in town had got together and formed this probably well-intentioned group, called the Drug Action Group, and they called this meeting. They had the 7.30 Report with their cameras for this meeting which was down as a public meeting. What happened was that they basically stood up and said this is the situation, and this is what we propose to do, and that's it. End of meeting, no discussion. Ted Pickering was coming in two weeks time to open the new Nimbin Police Station, and they wanted a demonstration to lobby for more police in Nimbin. They basically wanted more police.

Well, there never used to be [property crime]. I'm not quite sure what the current rates are, and if there is a lot of break and enters, but it's certainly not an area where violent crime is common. When we do get violent crime, it's usually associated with the consequences of the laws against drugs. Having people making transactions involving large amounts of pot or money, and one or the other, doesn't fulfil their side of the bargain, and one hits the other across the head, or pulls a gun on them. There again, it's nothing really to do with the drugs directly, its not as a consequence of using them.

Well, what happened was, at this meeting on this night, when they said 'That's it, no more discussion', I just couldn't restrain myself; I stepped out. When I did it, it sort of broke the spell. There was this spell that was around here, it really was based on fear. Everyone was scared. We'd sit there like Jews in a concentration camp and listen to these people say things that were distortions. They weren't true, but you couldn't get up and defend yourself because if you did, you'd stand out as a pot smoker. Even though we were obviously pot smokers, none of us were defending our rights, because we were rural, we stand out. You're more visible on the landscape, even though it looks like there's more room to hide, we all know there's nowhere to hide any more, you can't really get away from it all. So people were really scared. The people who didn't smoke didn't want to speak out because they would be accused of being soft on drugs. If you didn't support the basic policy, you were soft on drugs.

Now this night I spoke. I basically challenged the whole scenario, and I remember quite distinctly this feeling that having made that statement, in fact I supported the police that night,
because I remember the police were sitting there, bowed down, with their heads down, while people were blaming them for everything. If we all can see all this dealing on the street, how come you can't see it and stop it?

The heroin scene was here then, but it was very much a small group who looked after itself, made sure no kids got to it. The publicity bought people here, the people who came were travelling with cases full of pharmaceuticals for sale. So the Nimbin drug scene has developed, but it still carries survival services in place: the Rainbow Cafe's really important, the street, the Museum, the Neighbourhood Centre, the Hall, and the country where we've got so much property; places where people can be on the street and be poor. There's nowhere else in Australia where you can do it, other than some city locations and even then you're likely to get hassled and moved on.

So at this meeting I was speaking out, I'd broken cover. There was this real feeling that I'd broken cover, and having broken cover I had two options: one was to turn around and head back for cover again, and just don't say anything more, just pretend. But the other option was, look, if I go back I'm going to lose every bit of ground that I've made in just taking that single step. So, it was just this feeling that OK, I'm going to just keep going with this for a while. I thought look, it's so obvious, if someone really tries, we're going to have a change in three months (this is what I felt). I painted a banner immediately after this meeting, which just said 'Legalise Marijuana', and hung it in the main street, which used to hang banners advertising bands and events and concerts; there was this arrangement with the community.

This one just said 'Legalise Marijuana', it was big and that's what it said, and it sat in the middle of town just after this town meeting and I just left it there, and left it there, and one night it disappeared. I thought: 'OK, someone's souvenired it. That's cool, forget about it'. A week or so later my son was in the school with another kid, who said to him: 'My father stole your father's banner'. So I rang up the house, and the wife answered. I said: 'Look, I have information that your husband took my banner, and I'd just like it back'. She said, 'OK, I'll tell him that'. So, I knew that he had done it, and later I rang him and said, 'Look, I want my banner back. It's OK you know, I'm quite happy to forget it, if you just give me my banner back'. We talked about it, and he said that he didn't like it hanging in front of the youth club. So, what happened was that the banner didn't come back, so I went to the police station and said to the Sergeant, 'I know that this guy has taken my banner'. We talked about it, and I said: 'Look, all I want is my banner back, I'm not really into making trouble, I just want my banner back'. So he said: 'All right, I'll go and talk to him'. So he trotted off to talk to him, and I came back to see him the next day. I said: 'OK, did you get my banner?'. 'No'. 'Why not?'. 'He's burnt it'. 'OK, I want to press charges against this guy for theft and damage to property', and he said: 'No, I'm not prepared to do that'. So I then went to Chief Inspector Charles Jurd. He was the head of the Lismore crew. We'd met, sort of, at these meetings, but I'd been standing up and he knew me. I went to him and said, 'Look I want my banner back. That's all I'm asking'. The Sergeant at Nimbin just won't initiate charges against this guy, and Jurd said: 'Look, stop making trouble. You keep doing this and we're just going to set you up man, we're goanna put you away'.

I put all this stuff into a complaint to the Council for Civil Liberties, He'd said it in such a way that the hair on the back of my neck just crawled, and I was really scared. I didn't quite know what to do because I was still operating by myself, and people were sort of supportive of
me, but no one was prepared to stand out. At some stage, I realised this, because after that meeting I started agitating, talking to the press. I went to Richard Jones and he asked a series of questions in Parliament about this affair, and listed the names of all the police, got it all, I mean it was like writing out insurance for me, which meant that I was saying to them: 'Look I've got connections'. I could see the fight ahead, so I was saying: 'There, I've got connections', even though I didn't have connections really. I ran an alternative meeting in the Hall the following Saturday, which got a small attendance, and people talked about pot. You know 30, 40, 50 people came along and just openly talked about it. It was all pretty basic then the amount of learning that has gone on in the last few years! We didn't really know much.

So, at some stage early in this period, there was a feeling of stepping out, and also there came this feeling like a bright light which just sort of hit me like a spotlight. I can't remember whether they're actual situations or whether they're conscious dream creations, but there was this feeling like, you know, you open the barricades and you're running, come on! and then you look around and there's nobody else there. It was a decision that I had to make. I decided to go on, and it was like this single spotlight ping came out of the sky and I was bathed in it, and I was protected. I had this feeling that I'd been protected — as though some spirit had come there and was speaking through me. I'm a real accidental activist, I didn't intend for any of this to happen. It was no conscious effort, it just happened and continued to grow. It's all changed, and I can't help but have this feeling that the change that has been happening throughout the whole sort-of-war, seems to have been linked to what we've been doing here. In some ways I feel that Nimbin is in part responsible, it played a real active part in changing peoples consciousness.

What really fascinated me in those early days was the incredible depths of the cannabis issue. You start off looking at one aspect, and you spear off in new directions, it's like those walls of mirrors. Everywhere I turn, just the ramifications of its use within society, and the effects of prohibition within society. There was this whole new fucking frontier of issues. OK, if we look at notions of drug use, we're talking about an illegal drug. Here we've got a little village of drug users, and we look at other drug use: alcohol, which is a really dominant part of this town. It's accepted trade, it's legal, but it was part of the drug use that we had to look at in relation to cannabis. You have to get this big overview on where this issue came from, I mean, most of the time we're having to put up with the immediate task at hand if we're going to get through whatever each day presents us with, and you know, if you're on the streets it's going to be a fix for the day. If you're a small struggling family, it's getting the money together and maybe pot's part of that, and so you grow yourself if you don't have money. It seemed to impact on every aspect of life. When I looked at the commercial scene, we talked about employment, income generation for the town. The amount of money involved in the illegal drug scene in the area is amazing.

These days it's sort of changed, I tend to think that most growers around here probably sell out of town. There's a lot of people now who bring their pot to Nimbin to sell in big quantities. There's a whole set of buyers, there's a whole set of people who are prepared to sell your pot for you, an incredible industry, incredible cash turnover. I'm an anarchist, I really used to question all notions of authority and taxation, now I look at the amount of money that goes through this town, and that none goes towards building and maintaining the infrastructure of the town. It's the criminal class that now tax the trade, instead of the government for all the people, or the local council. I'd really like to see the local government control and regulate
the sale of drugs, as they do in the Netherlands. A little cafe like this could apply to the local government authority and say: 'I want to sell pot', and sell it under some sort of regulations. Say you pay a provisional tax on it, and you anticipate what your profits will be over a given time, and pay that as a lump sum tax, and you've got a year's right to trade. It just needs to be worked into the culture in a different way. We need to develop public ways of people enjoying it, sitting down and smoking together, appreciating being together.

At the moment, I sort of feel that it would be a much more pleasurable experience for tourists to come to town here, come into a place where they can look at the range of pot that's available, without having to make sort of dirty deals, you know, they don't know the scene. I feel that tourists should come here, and have a really nice experience of Nimbin and pot. They have a very interesting experience at the moment, but it could be a nicer experience of sitting down, sampling varieties of different sorts of pot. We create a place where we can work out ways to do it, do research. How can we de-stone people before they drive, and just different ways in which we can take responsibility for what goes down here with our community.

The things that really grew to become impressed upon me was the interest that people have in this issue. It fascinates people. For the last seven years I have had so many people come to talk to me about drugs. Sometimes it gets boring when people lay a rave on you that you already know, but you just got to bear with it. It's exhilarating for people to become empowered with knowledge and information, and most of the time it's interesting, the conversations, people's experience, their personal things, a continuing flow of people who are getting busted across all social classes of life, a wide range of ways of getting busted, with different impacts of peoples lives. The times this place starts talking drugs, it becomes like a real open university. It's really something when there's a drug meeting and three and four hundred people turn up. It's something that people are interested in. I was amazed at the fear, people who deal in that illicit trade really have this incredible paranoia. Another aspect of the illicit trade is the split between people who give it away and people who are currently making quite substantial amounts of money by selling pot.

Essentially people cannot deny the rightness of what I've been saying. And it's as though the truth in this whole issue is so apparent, it's such a cut and dried issue that no-one can argue really with it, except if they get into emotional raves or talk about a medical problem. The fear is this sort of huge thing that seemed to overwhelm this whole community. People would be paranoid to have sessions at a time where there was the possibility that undercover cops were in our midst. Everyone was a potential narc. It had very negative effects on the community because this was a community that smoked, that shared, a community of trust, you know: we're all in this together. You're on the bus or you're not on the bus basically. It introduced this really high level of suspicion and fear, I mean it sets people apart.

Greed was another aspect you know. People who previously had been sharing everything, and then one aspect of their life suddenly became worth a lot of money. In a way pot was the mechanism that tended to establish personal empires on some of the communities. Pot has built the communities around here, and made them what they are. Well, there's always been that culture, there still is that culture, but there is also a commercial culture. Well you've suddenly got more money than you know what to do with, you're tempted by the sudden escalation of social class too, you've suddenly got the capability to set yourself up with some legitimate business somewhere. All the infrastructure that you need. I mean, if you've got a
good head these things will run themselves. A lot of people have gone away from here and created some pretty classy enterprises. It's interesting that a lot of that particular group of people never acknowledge where their money came from, and tended to move away from here. Even if they continued to smoke pot, they just sort of moved on. Money is an element in society that produces all sorts of people who smoke pot. We've got this community that is extensively quite poor, and yet there's these huge amounts of money possible — it's lovely, it really is lovely. These guys who work on the street and sell heaps, it's all gold at the end of the bloody rainbow, it's enough to satisfy whatever their needs are.

I ran in the last election, and that was a real experience. A friend of mine died. Actually a series of events led to this, you just had to keep going forward with this issue. If I stopped I'd loose all the ground that I'd made up. I was in this bit of a dilemma, but at the same time I sort of had this feeling, white light guidance, like if I stayed on this straight path, didn't deviate, set my goals, see where I was going and stick to that, there was a chance that I'd get there.

I was picketing the *Northern Star*, because they had printed some really shoddy stuff on drugs in Nimbin. They wouldn't print my responses, so I went down to the stationary shop to picket. It was a day where I was talking to people, getting this idea, you know, hang a banner on the back, banner on the front, and just talk to people as they go by, just annoy the *Star*, have a bell and just yell all day. The *Northern Star* sent along this young reporter called Rory Metcalf to interview me, and I just challenged him and the *Northern Star*, and he said: 'Oh no, that's not true'. I said: 'You really ought to look at this issue', and from that he wrote a series which won him some journalistic award, and it was a perfect topic for somebody to do. No, there wasn't too much of standing up and being counted, there was still this hard-core element. It was still pretty much a one person show plus a few other supporters. I'd started this group called Nearly Normal Nimbin, we'd hold irregular meetings, and there'd be a few real hard-core pot smokers, a few loonies, and there was no real movement, it was just a front. We played politics behind this Nearly Normal Nimbin group. You could issue press releases and it all looked like there was a movement. This guy who did the series of articles, did an article about the group.

A friend of mine who had cancer and was dying, volunteered himself. He came out, he was the first one who sort of came out and said: 'I use pot. I use it because it just makes my dying and my chemotherapy treatment easier'. His story was featured in the front page of the *Northern Star*, and he died shortly after that. I went to his funeral on the day that the election was about to start. I went down to the grave. We'd done this sort of home burial, the equivalent of a home burial, but at the end of the day I went down there to the grave, and it was sort of this feeling that we'd just heard that the election had been called and I felt this dead friend was sort of saying: 'I'm with you, you go do it. I'm with you, just go for it and you'll get through'. He was political. He was one of the few political people around town, but since he got cancer he really degenerated real fast.

Well, I did that first election, I did it as a bare foot politician, I had no money, it was an incredible time. I'd already got the idea that the media was there to be manipulated. I insulted just about every reporter and radio journalist, (probably still continue to do so) and I'd say: 'I have this dream'. I was speaking an unpopular truth, but it was a truth none the less. More than anything else I have a bit of an adversarial approach to things, which isn't really good. I'm about to drop out of this whole movement. I hope a less adversarial approach will come
about. That's needed. In those days it was really just standing up. But I used the press to put me up as a figure that was being a larrikin, you know. It was like a Ned Kelly type challenge to authority, it was what everyone wanted you to do. If you continued to do it to authority, doing it out in the open, you talk and tell your view because you had truth on your side, whatever they do to you, they still can't fucking deny this absolute glowing whole of a truth that's in there. So, they end up with egg on their faces, no matter which way it goes. Yeah I learned to use the media.

The first [Mardi Grass] festival came about because of what happened here. There was some busts on the street one day, a couple of kids got picked up, you know it was just the annual end of season arrests again. It was just before May, it was in April, about this time. They'd sorted their list of people who sold pot to undercover cops, then it was pick this one up, pick this one up. People were just disappearing, you know. The police would come down, they'd point them out, that person might run but they'd still get them, cart them into the van. Now, it so happened that about two o'clock in the afternoon, this one young girl got picked up, and for whatever reason the cops made the mistake of arguing with her on the footpath, and she got loud. If they had just hustled her away, she would have passed unnoticed, but a crowd gathered and then she started to resist arrest, wouldn't go. By this time, a big crowd had gathered, people on the other side of the street, all yelling, and the police car faced this way. In order to get back to the police station it had to go down, turn around, and come back up the street. The crowd was getting ugly, the police quickly got in their car and drove away. The crowd was only ugly insofar as there were a lot of people and they were yelling. There was a real fusing response, I mean people were worked up and the cops had to come back through this to get to the police station. The crowd was there, it was up and running, because it had been there simmering all day. It was the fear, and this breaking of the fear that went down. Anyway, they did come back, the crowds all yelling. I mean, this is probably only a hundred people or so, but in the main street of Nimbin a hundred people looks pretty big. Sure, these were the dealers, but there's still this support for the underdog or something.

This whole bunch of kids marched off, down to the street, down to the police station, but look at it, it was an appropriate response at the time for them. It got bad press, this day at the police station with the kids, so I issued a press release, saying that I was holding this march on May the first, which would be a festive, joyous celebration of the way we felt about the drug laws, rather than this angry negative response. This was 1993, and again this was just something that I put around, sort of promoted the idea, it was really easy to organise. I had managed to make up some good posters, again it was something, you know, there was this group of about ten or twelve people that were committed, but it seemed like a popular issue.

We started off down at the Bush Theatre at one o'clock. I'd designed all this stuff, there was about 50 or 60 people down there, and I thought: 'Oh fuck', because I really wanted a memorable number of people, and there I was down there with 50 people. OK, 50 people is not bad, but it's not a massive indication of opposition to the drug laws. So we set out. We had a few props, we had Jimmy and his horse and cart, and he took off, he was gone down the street. But we had drums and trumpets, and we just went into it. It was sort of like a trance, this walk. We crossed the bridge. I can remember people coming from the sides and there were people along the way as we marched up the hill with the brass and the drums and tubas. And it was just noise, but we were dressed up in costume and people had signs and people had flags. We got up to the park, we weren't allowed to use the park. We got up there and I turned
around and suddenly the crowd had swelled. There would have been at least one thousand people there. It was just this feeling, wow, we were there! For all these people who had never made a declaration of themselves as pot smokers. But that's all we were doing, nothing special, but it became like this incredible initiation ritual, or some sort of rite of passage, the energy that was there! It was an affirmation. For me it wasn't really just for pot, it was for us, as a people, an affirmation of ourselves and for pot, pot too because I owed my dues to this plant!

The thing that was so hard to forget was a big, big counter-culture group marching that day, a collective release of energy. We swirled around, marched down to the police station with a big joint we'd constructed, made a few passing gestures at the police station. The police weren't to be seen the whole day. We'd talked about all this with the police, and they'd very wisely chosen to not confront us. We'd said that this was what we were going to do, and it was such a liberating experience. By 7 o'clock everyone was exhausted. It was not a big event, but it was a great event, it was nice, it was so powerful, such a powerful experience.

And the next year's one was that again, you know, I couldn't believe it. I think this is something about what happened at Aquarius here, you know Graham Dunstan talks about that magic of Aquarius. Now, it's sort of grown, and it's good for this town. The second festival, and every following year, was characterised around here by these monumental advances in consciousness change, in the way that people were relating to pot and to themselves. It's probably the thing that causes pot to be considered a threat and to be made illegal in the first place. It really changes people's attitudes and approaches to things; you know it must make people uppity. The colonial powers created the original bans on drugs, South Africa, Egypt, Turkey were the three main ones.

Well, everyone has stalls and shops going over the last couple of years now, because we really needed to have continuous funding, just to fund the enquires, to fund the expenses involved in keeping an action like this up. So we've come to the next stage. We've now got an office space here at the museum, that's a big step, with our own telephone, our own computer. Most of them come to Nimbin because there is something within themselves that calls them here, it's that universal spirit of searching and inquiring. Drugs are associated with all that, the consciousness-changing substances are associated with all that, it's a part of people. A lot of people come here solely to score pot, quite a huge number of people come here. They're regular people who come here, there's no other town in Australia where you can go and almost be assured that you will make contact with somebody who will try and sell you pot. People are quite happy mostly just to come here and score. They're only here for five minutes in town, ten minutes, they're in their cars and on their way back out again. That contact isn't really exploited. If we were to get them to come into the cafes and you know, sit down and buy food, and look around.

Each year is a bit like a fairground, you know, it's the bright lights, it's where we're trying to create an environment here in the town, which is designed to try to accommodate both the tourists and the locals. We can only really cater well to tourists if we continue to make a beautiful place to live in, if we can make a beautiful place and then add us at the same time. It's not just for them, I mean, we create a beautiful place for ourselves but allow for tourists to come in. Nimbin was based on a vision. The vision of twenty years ago, when the Aquarius vision was put down, so much of that stuff has permeated now into the mainstream,
environmental consciousness, ecological awareness, support of forests, land rights, natural healing, alternative energy... there's just so much! All the organic gardening, organic farming, bio-dynamics, all that was part of the rationale of that period of time.

Nimbin's a state of mind, it's not really all that much to do with the town, it just when we came in 1973 as a culture, you know, I really feel like I'm part of the people. Whatever was happening back in the sixties, there was some universal consciousness at work there, and it was something big, and it was like a seed that took root. This was where a generation made a stand on the streets. Made a stand on the streets of Nimbin of all places, and we didn't let that spirit die. I mean, it's still hard work keeping that fucking spirit alive. It's constantly under attack and the most consistent way that the spirit has been under attack has been via the drug legislation. It is through drugs and the dogma that 'All drugs are evil if they're illegal'. Then if they're evil, they're out to destroy our youth. Anyone at all that dabbles in drugs is immoral, you know, this has been the fundamentalist approach to drug control.

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'DEE'
(self-edited 1996)

[I've lived] Well, not so much in Nimbin itself, but around the place, all up about 10 years.

[Q: who are the 'runners'?] Well, in a lot of ways the people that 'run' for the person that's holding the drug to the person who wants to buy the drug, they are either junkies (people who use smack), or young teenage boys, generally. Most of the people who are dealing, I've found, are family people that need to just look after their children. I find it annoying that runners take the tourists as things that they own, and get very stroppy and angry and sometimes get violent, if someone else cuts in on their tourist. Say if they saw the person first and asked them if they want to buy a drug, or if the person saw them first and asked them if they could get a drug, then somebody else comes along and says: 'Well I can get you one for cheaper', sort of like a market place. Runners have generally different people that they get the pot off, or they might get it off the same people and they sell the same type of drug, but at a different price. As well, a lot of people are really quite angry at how much money runners actually put on a bag, because when they put a hundred, a hundred and fifty on a bag, rather than fifty, twenty, twenty's what one would call reasonable for doing that sort of thing — though maybe fifty if they thought it was a high danger time when there's lots of police in town, 'cause it's your life, you know.

Oh, there's definite seasons, like, there's definite times when there's no pot around, and so certain people bury it or certain other drugs become more available, like speed, like smack, they suddenly become more available, acid suddenly becomes more available, ecstasy occasionally, when pot is running out. Mostly the tourists pay a lot of money or miss out, and generally the dealers get a lot of the money, there's a massive influx of tourists where a lot of
people suddenly come, because it's after Christmas say, and so there's not so many people coming down to the market, a lot of people are getting into their jobs, and are trying to make money. Most runners start getting desperate, and they start getting really angry if you cut their tourists out. Other times there's an influx of drugs, where there's too much drugs and not enough tourists. And then it comes back to the stage where there's so many tourists and not enough drugs, and that's when people start getting greedy, and making heaps of money, and their habits get high. That's all drug users, whether it's marijuana or smack, their drug intake becomes extra high, when there's hardly any around. Most locals are quite angry about the sales to tourists because they miss out, because most of the drugs are for the market. Locals expect to get it at a lot cheaper prices, and they're never happy with the deals; but the tourists are always hungry to get the deals, because there is none where they come from.

[Q: How much money is involved per week?] When it's at the low points I'd say ten to fifteen thousand [dollars], and maybe forty to fifty thousand at a very busy time. And I think a lot of that does go to Nimbin itself, into the shops, into the straight people's shops. They hang out the signs: 'No drug dealers', but a lot of their money is drug money. It comes from the tourists who have been attracted here for the drugs, (and for the scenery as well), not for the shops themselves.

The type of people who do deal drugs, the type of people who are interested in sightseers and tourists, the type of people who make their life out of dealing, it's because they haven't got much else, haven't got any other option than to do that. Well, just say that you're a mother with five children and you break up with the father, and he's been supporting you by doing mechanics, and suddenly he's gone and there you are, you can either be stuck at home with five children, never ever quite getting by in the fortnight, and stressing out and hitting your kids, and hitting your head against the wall, and never getting a new lover, because you've never got any time. Whereas if you grow a bit of pot and you come in and sell it to a runner, who then gives it to another runner who's a smackie, or you take smack and sell that for a person and the runner is taking the risk, and yes it's all on credit, the bag comes straight back if it's not sold. But say that mother does that, well she then has the opportunity to pay somebody to baby sit her kids, she then gets to go out with some money, she then gets to really go to dinner with someone, then, you know, attracting another person in their life, to help her with upbringing the children. I've seen a lot of people on the pension that do that sort of thing.

Well, you get to know the sort of people who do take bits out of the bag, and you do some boycott sort of thing, where nobody gives them a bag, everyone tells all the other dealers: 'That person has been taxing', 'Yeah, they taxed me too', 'All right, well, let's tell everybody else' and generally boycott that person for a fair period of time until maybe the scene changes to where that person's needed.

To put a crop in is quite difficult, to put a crop in and actually get anything off that crop is very difficult. Very few people actually do that, and that's why in the past, say four years ago, the growers suddenly put their prices up. They've suddenly realised there's less and less out there, they've suddenly realised there's more and more people feeding off the street scene there, and they've put their prices up. Before, the grower hardly got anything, and the people on the street got heaps, you know up to nine hundred dollars an ounce, whereas the grower's giving it for two hundred. You know, male growers going out and sweating and carrying water and carrying fertiliser and risking full-on police attention. There's certain times when
you're under heavy surveillance, and there's other times when you're under town surveillance, so there's the people in the shops that are straight and don't take those drugs that are illegal, they take other drugs that are legal. Those sort of people, who condemn this sort of scene because it's against the law, whether or not it's less violent than the drugs they take. They are the sort of people who will see you selling out of a car, and call the police, and you are then at high risk, so you've gotta hide all the time from anyone in the town.

As well as there being certain times of the year when there is hardly any pot around, the police suddenly do a full-on raid, mostly when there's no pot around they do a full-on raid. And that's when it's really risky, because there are a lot of people who want it when there is a little tiny bit of it, and the cops can see the water when the desert is dry, it's like a fresh well, gushing with water in a desert, it's very, very obvious because all these people are running backwards and forth, from one or two people because there's only one or two sources. That's when prices go right up to eight hundred dollars, nine hundred dollars an ounce, and the grower might get five hundred dollars of that nowadays, six hundred sometimes, so we pushed it right up, because we know it goes right up anyway. Police surveillance gets very heavy, because we could go to jail for something which doesn't kill anybody, it hasn't been known to, pot hasn't been known to give cancer in any way, you don't even have to smoke it, you can eat it. It can also be healing the planet, giving the planet more oxygen, it can be also used as fibre for clothing. You can also grow pot without having any THC, which is the thing that gets you stoned in it, and so therefore not growing a drug, just growing something for the planet. It's ridiculous that it is still so illegal.

And so, it's really heavy to think that something so healing for the planet could put you in jail, and friends of mine have been put in jail. It's really sad to know that they've been put in jail for pot, even for any drug that they want to take, and that other people want to take, any drugs that anyone wants to take, it should be their decision. Unless it's something like alcohol, where they start suddenly bashing into each other, or getting into cars and driving, and hitting small children and killing them. Most of the things that are illegal are quite passive, so it's quite scary for most people who have these passive drugs, they're not aggressive, to get these full-on aggressive vibes pointing at them, from the police, from the town. Generally, I think most of the people in the town who own the straight shops do smoke marijuana. I believe that, I believe if they go home and they go to their parties and a joint may be passed around at a party, and they might just go: 'Oh what the heck', and the next day they'll see someone dealing it from a car and get really angry. I think it's ridiculous! Then I've seen lots of raids, where the police come in and they just do what they like. Look they searched my bag once when I was at the toilet. I thought that you were meant to ask, you know: 'Can I search your bag?', and if you say: 'No', then they can take you down to the station [charge you]. But no, I went to the toilet, and they jumped in and searched my bag, you know it had a few nappies in it and ra ra ra, but nothing in it for them. And what if there was something in there, what if there was my nightly nightcap, pot instead of Valium? I mean, you know, a joint, what would they do?, would they bust me?, I mean how would they justify the illegal search?. Illegal searches like that, I don't know how often that happens, mostly they go in and just basically ask you what's in your bag and ask you to take it out, like they've done that to quite a few people.

Generally, they seem to go for the smack addicts more than smokers, but often they'll go for the teenagers that are into pot, into dealing. Yeah, the raids really are quite scary, sometimes they'll go for days. Well helicopters, there's been scenes where helicopters have come down
really close to people's houses and the police are looking at the people in their house through the window. It's just total intrusion of privacy, not looking for a crop, but actually trying to see the people in the houses, endangering anyone who might be outside. The helicopters fly too low generally everywhere, I've heard most complaints are that they have been flying too low for comfort, and scaring people. Intruding on their privacy. They're not, a lot of time, looking for crops, they're just actually trying to intrude upon your privacy and intimidate you, I feel.

Well, there's classic spiels that runners give you, mostly the smackies, things like: Gee, could you drop ten dollars on that bag?. I mean they know you don't want to, they know it's going to sell anyway and that you don't want to drop ten dollars, and that ten dollars is probably your ten dollars profit, and why would you want to give it to them anyway?. But a lot of them will just try it constantly, constantly and constantly, over and over again: You just want to drop ten dollars off that? and you just go, 'No, you know I don't want to'. Yeah, it's always ten, or five, dollars. 'Could you drop five off that?', I mean just these tiny amounts, probably to make up their fifty dollars perfectly or something, you know they're only able to make twenty five or something and they want to make thirty or something. You know, it's like they don't give up! You say, 'No, that's what I need, and if you don't want that, then bring it back'. And they constantly say: 'Hey do you reckon you could drop ten off that?' or 'I didn't quite get a tax from that, um, do you reckon you could give me some of your own tax?'. Well, generally a runner will take one or two buds out of a bag, put them aside, under a brick or something. One or two buds would be a gram, possibly worth twenty dollars to the average tourist. Maybe sometimes they tax more, or tax less if they want to make more money. Yeah, they can take as much as they like, but the person who's giving them the bag will often say: 'I feel you've taken too much, I reckon that's a bit much, don't you reckon you should put that big one back and take this other one?" and he might say: 'No, I'm not making any money on it, so this is what I'm making' or he'll go: 'Don't worry about it' or: 'OK, yeah, sure you're right, here man'. Generally, they run off, sell the bag, come back and pick up the tax, give me the money and ask for a ten dollar discount, or if they haven't bothered to tax a bud out, ask me for a bud, which I always say: 'I'm not here to work for you, I'm working for me, you work for you, and you get your own bloody bud'.

Another down side to doing it is whenever you take something on of someone else's, like that runner when they take that bag on, and they don't bring it back, or if they say they were busted with it, or if they say that they were punched out and ripped off, then they still owe me the money, because I still owe so-and-so the money.

When you take something on, it's your responsibility. Often, the dealer takes a lot more on than the runner, the runner has hardly any responsibility. It's just run, hardly carry anything, and sort of run it back, yeah, they don't have so much responsibility. The dealer generally wears a lot of police busts, also a lot of rip-offs, also people who just suddenly decide that they're going to take your bag right away, sell it and walk off and get a smack deal, you know, and never come back for that day and then turn up a couple of days later, and say: 'Oh sorry man I lost it', or something ridiculous.

I'd say three quarters are smack users, and a quarter are non-smack using people. They want the smack, they want a bit of money. The young guys will be sitting in a pub or playing pool, there will be smoke in, so they run it, and generally those sort of guys don't put much money
on a bag, they just take pot. The smack dealers generally put a lot of money on a bag and
hoard tourists, hide them in little pockets in the town, like say: 'I've got them hidden under this
chair' [joke], you know, hidden away.

Mainly they get a few toys to play with, a guitar, a car, a trampoline for the kids or something
— a few toys to play with. They don't generally get very far, a car would be the biggest thing
most would get, generally the people who grow the crops are the ones who end with a business...
Most of the dealers you wouldn't find very rich at all, unless they're growers who come in
and deal, which is very rare, because most growers don't want to be seen ten thousand miles
away. Well, I've just recently given up because I find it ages me every time I do it. I have a
major stress level, I have to deal with negative people who are grumpy and push their anger at
me if I won't drop five dollars off a bag. I deal with very heavy police seeing me all the time,
I've got to maintain a profile of doing something that I'm not doing. It's a very stressful thing,
I'd rather be at home knitting, sewing, playing with the kids and maybe learning a craft or
learning some sort of other way of working other than doing that. But for me sometimes it's
easy, sometimes it's addictive in a way, it's a high adrenalin thing.

Smack users, they have a certain amount of adrenalin, just running around getting the needle
and getting the smack and not so much of actually dealing the drug itself. The drug itself isn't
really that exciting, most of the excitement is dealing with somebody else, feeling that you're
part of the family, feeling that you've got someone and something and some scene to cling to.
Most smack users are people who are very down on themselves and haven't got a high self
esteem.

It's a adrenalin thing to deal drugs. Sometimes, it's a whole scene and there's friends there that
you enjoy seeing every day and you become part of the family with them. It's a lot to do with
finding your own tribe and it's a lot to do with surviving on the planet without an education.
Say, you didn't have a full family that was mother and father, that was in a nice house in a nice
suburb going to a nice school. So you grew up differently, say your father moved when you
were young, say you moved a lot so you didn't get much schooling, so at school you had
trouble with the teachers. I mean, there wasn't anybody like a tutor to help you get through.

I find most people who are taking drugs are of all sorts. You get all sorts of people buying the
drug, you get old men, you get old ladies, mostly you get young working people, young
straight kids, young people from very straight society. Most young straight society kids
smoke it. There are a lot of other sort of groups, like bikies that come in now and again, and a
few business looking couples and quite a few family people come in to buy it.

Nimbin's definitely a magnetic attraction for drugs and alternative lifestyle, a whole range of
things I believe make it that way. The people that are attracted — the Aquarius festival had
something to do with it, in making it a major place of revolution, definitely people making a
stand in a place, and quite openly smoking it in front of straight people in a social scene. In
the social scene, if you meet the man from the pub or the man from the newsagents or the man
from whatever shop he's going to be a lot more positive towards you in the social scene if
you're passing a joint around then he will be during the day when he's working.

I find that to be attractive to all sorts of people like really straight or alternative, it's when they
are behind the scenes they don't mind being free either. It's to do with, I think, people being
free really. Just people being free to do what they want. Like all over the world there's hardly any places say, like Amsterdam or something, but here it's so openly done. It is done openly so if the cops walked down here five times a day they would bring back people five times a day. They don't walk down there five times a day. They walk down here once every two days. The town cops would get heavily harassed by the people if they constantly walked down town. It would be an intrusion of privacy of the people. Even the straights I believe would get annoyed slightly, if they felt the police were just being a bit too heavy, because it's a town where generally people accept each other, no matter what they're doing. Whether they're playing football, a hippy can accept this footballer and the footballer feels good about it if you accept him, just as the hippy feels good about the footballer accepting him or her. It's a town where no matter what variety of people, what variety of family, what variety of society you've come from everyone accepts it. No matter what variety of people, what sort of family you come from, there's a general acceptance and in a general place for each person, each social group.

[In terms of crime] I think it's generally from break-ins because there are quite a few. Well, that's just it, when these people walk over a smack person, who's on smack lying on the street, they get disgusted, and they may call the police and they make it really heavy for that person, who's just relaxing on that drug. And then that person gets desperate because they've been busted and because they haven't got any money or they lost their deal for the night, and then they do something like break into one of the shops. It did happen for a while, it was mainly the Rainbow, the Museum, the Bakery, places like that, that got broken into sometimes. The community school for sleeping, breaking in for somewhere to sleep.

If there was a place for people to deal marijuana, a place for people to have smack and sit around on their couches and nod off if they wanted to, then no-one would be creating a scene where people needed to employ security guards, because people would have their place and other people wouldn't get annoyed at them using their drug, just like they have a pub. But their pub would be for sitting around, nodding off, instead of yelling angrily at each other and if these other people had a pub like the pub, or like the newsagent selling their cigarettes, where they could pass some of what they grew in their herb garden on to somebody else who wants it, who lives in the city, who isn't so fortunate to have a herb garden but wants to relax at night because they're stressed out from looking at computers and going blind all day.

I think that sort of thing where they've got no place, where everything's fenced off and the pubs fenced off all around the backyard, and the bakery's fenced off, its almost like they're trying to close areas off from people to deal, so as to make it more obvious in the street, yet complain about it being in the street. I think it's a paradox that they do that, that they close off these backyard sections and back alleys that people hide in to do their drug life. They're creating what they don't want, they're creating what they don't want to see. They don't want to see it, but they're stopping people from hiding it.

Being a woman dealing I find it's a lot easier to be ripped off, because men can look after themselves a lot easier. If you're a tough man then you don't get ripped off, ever. If you're a smaller, younger, newer person on the scene, you get ripped off lots. If you're an old person on the scene and female, you wont get ripped off as much, but you've got more chance of someone just refusing to give you the money. There's a lot of jealousy where the motherhood meets the brotherhood sort of scene. When the motherhood has good heads they'll look after
the brotherhood, then the brotherhood likes hanging around the motherhood, and when they have some the brotherhood blows out the motherhood. It's important that they give each other a bong. If you're a woman doing it then you're less likely to be ripped off, less likely to be harassed generally. It means that you've just got these certain friends around that you've made a connection with, but if you don't have that, then you'll get ripped off a lot. Lots of people just don't bother paying you if you're a woman. They'll come back saying some mistake happened, and just never pay you. Whereas they'll go off and deal with somebody else and they'll get paid straight away. I think women doing it are generally less of a rip off, women will with connect each other in all the different scenes. Mostly like, if you're into drinking alcohol, if you're into taking smack, if you're into working in a shop, if you're into taking marijuana, women are the connection, they connect with each other a lot more than men from different scenes will connect with each other. They will accept each other a lot more, they will see the person a lot more, they will see what the person is doing because they have to enjoy being in the pub, in the shop, or being wherever you've been all day.

There are certain rules, like I said before, if you get busted or someone rips you off, you still owe that person. If there's not enough people ripped off, if they have just done it to you, you haven't got any protection around, it's unlikely that someone's going to go up and bash someone to get your money for you. So, if they have done it to you, you'll never ever give them a bag, and one day you're the only person with bags in town and they're fucked. They've stuffed it, they've burnt their own bridge, and also you've been burnt and had to pay for it.

Sometimes its one step forward, two steps back when you're doing it, one minute you've got the smoke, the next minute you're trying to scrape together the money to pay someone because someone messed up with a bag. It's a very up and down business. It happens often, it happens a lot. You either loose something, give something too cheap, a cop will get someone, you smoke too much out of a bag, lots of scenarios you have will put you in debt. Most of the people who go into the drug business end up in debt.

I think that women manage it better than men. I think women in general, dealing with women with credit are a better risk. They're more likely to come back, they're more likely to pay you back, and to keep your connection there, they see it as important. Most men are more likely to shrug it off and say I don't need to get some drugs off them and so I won't bother to pay them any money. When you're talking about smack dealing runners, you've always got couples generally, and if they are not couples, then they will couple up with a male and they will work as a team. So generally, there's a lot of female-male couples so there is a very equal number in runners. In dealers, I'd generally say there's more women maybe dealing than men dealing because women keep it together better. They keep business together more evenly, they'll keep their contacts for a lot longer time because they're constantly paying off debts quickly and efficiently, and therefore maintaining a credit rating. Whereas men will often burn their bridges, women seem to handle the money better, but it's more likely for a women to be harassed and hassled. A man won't push the brotherhood and ask for ten dollars off a bag, but they will ask me because I'm a woman.

There are a few women around, who just deal for locals and they'll grow a small crop, maybe even just one plant sometimes, and they might get eight pound off that one plant. They might be able to supply friends in the dry season, when there's absolutely no mull, with twenty dollar deals, so they can go home and smoke a few heads and there's less risk. It's a lot less risk, they
are never in town, they only see friends. Most people don't do that. I'd say only ten per cent do that. There's those few growers that believe in the old way, the cheap way, that believe in it being a herb for healing people. Local people don't like how much it goes for, they don't like people exploiting tourists, they see that as exploitation. They are generally people who are not in touch with the scene, they're not in touch with the stress of the scene, they're not in touch with what it's like to have to go into town, not able to just go off and sit by a creek and play and laugh with the kids, but actually have to go out to work and have to talk to these really negative people who are hanging out for a hit, who are maybe angry and abrupt and want to abuse you for just being there, because you're there and they haven't had their hit for the day. Somebody else who hasn't had their joint for the day, other people dealing alongside you can be quite aggressive towards you, people that are dealers and run out, and you've still got it and you're expected to time and again come up with the goods, and blow them out and get them high, and they've run out a long time ago, and they're not getting you high any more and they haven't come up with the goods, and they're not doing you a favour. It's wise to pay these people off sometimes, because some of these people are quite big people and quite tough people, and when you need a hand they are there. Yeah, some people have an expectation, because you've been giving them a smoke every day, and suddenly you cut them off because it's costing you out of the bags and you don't want to do it any more with certain people, they get quite upset.

Some people come up and say: 'I've gotta bad toothache, and I just need some heads and my toothache will go away' and they've just seen me sell two bags and they know I've got some and they're a close friend that has stuck up for me, they've given me bags in situations where I've really needed it, what do I do? Sometimes I say no. Maybe I say no because this person is putting out the vibration of: you better fucking do this or I won't be your friend any more and sometimes I will not do it just because of that. Then, the next day I may just say: 'Here you are, I've got this really nice bud for you' and then they might go: 'Wow I didn't expect that, that was really nice'. They haven't taken away the beauty of giving then.

So, you build up certain relations with fellow drug dealers during the flourishing season, when there's a lot of dope around and a lot of touros and there's a lot of sharing, a lot of joints, there's less tobacco in the joints. Then things start getting a little harder, and you have to start cutting off these relationships where you sit down and have a talk and a joint with someone, because you can't always have a talk and a smoke with someone. So, slowly you get less and less people that you have that talk with every day, and people bring out more bongs, and you need to bong more desperately, because you can't afford joints. And it becomes a really heavy vibe-out scene where somebody you know comes along, and you've just mulled up for two people, and they really heavy you for a bong and you can't give them one, but they are your really close friend and they get really upset and I just say: 'Well, it costs money and it costs time' (and it costs blood, sweat and tears, basically).

Tobacco is totally a trend to smoke with dope, hardly anyone smokes only tobacco. Some of the original smokers smoke mull without tobacco, but mostly people smoke with tobacco and can be grumpy until they have their bong because they need their tobacco hit. Some people only smoke tobacco in bongs, and they don't smoke tobacco at all in cigarettes, so they need to find dope so they can have their tobacco hit.
I think dope is a much more powerful barter system than money. Marijuana can buy you things that money can't. Marijuana can be something that money can't buy, and marijuana can get something for a person that money can't. Some people will do anything for a smoke, but do hardly anything for twenty dollars. Therefore there's a lot of power for single mothers struggling on a pension: car repairs, give somebody a bit of mull and your car gets fixed, give somebody a bit of mull and you can get food, or a dress made.

When I was going through a bad time, where there weren't many people in town who were dealing because the busts were on, and one or two people had been dragged away, and there was no dope in town and I had some, it became heavy. I felt like I was surrounded, and I passed some money to a friend, so I had no money on me, I dropped a bag under the table and told another friend to watch it and I walked out. And I said: 'I'm not doing anything, I'm not doing anything' and it gets really heavy when people who are runners don't care, they don't care about being busted. It's mostly smack dealing runners, who are smack addicts, who will just walk up and say: 'I want to sell pot to this copper over here', in front of the undercover cop, and totally identify you. It's just ridiculous that they have no idea of the risk that they are putting on themselves, and the risk that they are putting you in, and you have to say to them: 'Don't talk to me!' and walk away from them. And they get really angry at you, for being so rude and treating them like shit. Then you get around the corner, and you say: 'My god! What are you doing here, if you're just going to say that to me, in front of them? Why don't I just cut you out and go straight to them? Why do I need an interpreter?' You give them the idea of what they're doing there, they get so desperate sometimes, they don't care if they are selling to a cop, they don't care if they are selling at a really hot time. They will still risk it, they don't care if they are selling fifteen little satchels or fifty dollar deals of smack. They'll still run out and try to sell a bag of pot for fifty dollars or get some smoko out of the bag.

I don't really want to be on the streets in broad daylight. I don't see the sense of putting yourself in. Smackies are better off hiding some where with the smack, until they get rid of it all, and then dealing with the pot, cause pot makes you more obvious. The bags are bigger and harder to carry, smack is little and can be hidden under a rock. The smack's for the locals, it's not for the tourists. Hardly any tourists come for smack. Most people that use smack are a local market. There are those people who come in with speed and smack but they're generally a lot messier than the local users, leaving their needles in the grass and the toilets. The locals get very angry about this, because they have children and they don't like their kids bumping into a needle. They know the reality of needles being left in the grass. They don't generally have to see the public; and I find it very hard to believe that some undercover cop would be there trying to score smack, and not look obvious. Like smack people generally have a smack vibe, and cops will find it a lot easier to say: 'Where can I score some marijuana?' and be a straight person buying marijuana, because there are so many straights that use it, than being a full-on straight on the street trying to score some smack, and say the right words and lingo and talk the right way. I know certain people can't smoke from the same bong, because they use smack rather than the ones that don't use smack; but the ones that use smack very rarely are still accepted by the scene.

There are some that don't use smack at all but are friends with all the smack scene. An etiquette of the [street] scene is who you give your bags to. A lot of people want to cut out the smack users. They don't want them having any mull to sell, they are being vindictive, they want to hang smack users, they talk about them like nasty creatures and these are generally
other runners, who run and get the brunt of their violent anger and aggressive desperation to have their tourist.

[Q: why don't they just give them up to get rid of them?]
Nobody gives up anybody. [Respondent was very serious about this point]

I relate to smack users quite well, and some straight people I don't relate to at all, they heavy me to give them bags. They see that as a favour to have that control, to give the bags to whoever you want, sometimes they get vindictive towards you, because of who you are giving your bags to, or not giving your bags to. It is a favour, because it means that they can have a smoke, where they couldn't before. You do that sometimes, you give these certain same people [smack addicts] bags, and you don't tell anyone, and nobody knows, and even if they do you say: 'No, sorry'. Therefore some people make money and others don't, depending on who you deal with and who you don't. It can be quite cut-throat.

I've just given up after twelve, thirteen years of doing it. I've had enough, I haven't been busted, although most of my friends have been busted, or raided in the middle of the night with guns, or pulled into a car and dropped out into the street. Two of my friends have been pulled into a car, and thrown out onto the street just for selling a two hundred dollar bag. One smack dealing girl was asked to go down to the car, because half the money was in the car, and she gets pulled in with the driver waiting.

They drive off, rip her off and drop her out into the street. Another couple were selling about fifteen bags for about a hundred-and-fifty, two hundred dollars each, and one got a broken jaw, thrown out of the car, and their mull was just taken. Yeah rip offs. I'm saying there are a lot of dangers that they face. It's being ripped off by the locals, ripped off by the tourists, busted by the cops, busted in the middle of the night. Like I said, I get very stressed out, and I've given up, I don't do it any more.

* * * * *

'TOM',
(self-edited 1996)

The drug users themselves, injecting drug users? Well I think it depends on what we're talking about. Like, per population, I'm sure there'd be as many injectable drug users up here on the North Coast as there would be in Sydney, really. I think there's probably a pretty big difference between a person that lives in the bush or in the hills around here that uses injectable drugs, as to an injectable drug user from Sydney. I think there is quite a big difference. I mean, I think you'd find that the majority of injectable drug users up here would be a lot more honest people, and they don't have to go to the extent of breaking into houses or stealing.

[Q" Do people support their habits by selling pot?]
Definitely, I believe so, yeah. Definitely, absolutely, yep. The majority of people who do support habits in this town sell marijuana.

I can see where they're coming from, I can understand their point of view in a lot of respects, because it's my town too. I've lived here for a long time and love it, and care about it's future and all that, just as much as them I'm sure. But they've gotta realise that it's probably better that the, well, full-on drug users anyway, are selling pot rather than breaking into their houses. People's attitudes towards drug users are pretty much the same all over, unfortunately.

[Q: Confidentiality is important in Nimbin?]
Yeah definitely. Yes, it would be. I mean I remember when I first started to use it I didn't want people to know. It was very difficult to keep it really quiet, and there's quite a few, as they call it, closet users around the area. People that just, you know, have a taste once in a blue moon, once a month, or once every six months or something. Just recreational users, they're not really running habits or anything like that, they're just using it like any other recreational drug.

[Q: is it an exaggeration, chucking needles around town?]
Yes, it is largely exaggerated I'm sure. I seem to remember an incident that happened, I think it was last year, I think someone ended up actually dumping a heap of fits at a town meeting. Yeah, it is greatly exaggerated. I mean, I see the occasional needle and the paraphernalia or two. There's a lot of paraphernalia to having a taste. You're left with a lot of rubbish, there's a heap of packaging and shit you've got to use for a taste. Yeah, and a lot of them [dumped] are probably clean ones.

[Q: someone told me about needles dumped in a really inaccessible area, on people's property?]
Well that's pretty odd, that's pretty strange. I'd say it was tourists. I mean, the majority of people that do leave fits around are out-of-towners. That's right. I mean, I'd say about 95% of people who use here will dispose of their fits properly. And that would be the other thing, finding them on the side of the road — it would have to be the out-of-towners I'd say.

Right, violence has increased lately, a little bit, basically because of the police. In town the police activity has just been stressing the whole town out. The whole town stresses out, they're biting each others heads off, you know. And the fact that a part of the town scene does rely on mull. Because of all the police activity, the media and stuff, people haven't been coming here to find their mull, because they know that they're going to get pulled up, or searched or busted after they've bought their pot. It's not worth their while coming, and they're not coming, so there's not nearly as much business for those people. And they're not just injectable drug users either -- there's all sorts, there's teenagers, there's mothers that are trying to sell pot as an income supplement, all sorts of people. There's percentages of the people selling pot in town who are injectable drug users, who are going to use the money for their next taste, but, I really find that I don't see it as a crime you know, selling dope to people who want to buy it.

Well, as far as being on the street's concerned, I reckon they've done it to themselves, basically. In the past, as far as dealing smack, or marijuana dealing, they're telling everybody they want it off the street, and they realise it's not going to stop, and they know it's just gonna
keep happening, and they just want it off the street. Well, every spot in town which was a nice quiet spot, where you couldn't been seen from the road or anywhere like that, has either been fenced off or destroyed you know. Because of all the fences and everything, it's brought everyone onto the street, and that's made them have to do their business actually on the footpath, which is exactly what they didn't want, you know, and they've done it to themselves. I mean there's no more drug dealing here than anywhere else, it's just that it's all on one little street.

You know the whole area, I mean really it's pretty small-scale basically. I don't think it's the centre for injecting drug use on the north coast, really, I mean in the Nimbin area anyway. I'm sure there's a few that live here, and have used for a while will keep using for a while too. But its always been a quiet little scene, and there's no reason why it can't be again. I think that the media too, talking about all that and over-exaggerating this bullshit about the heroin scene and stuff in Nimbin, has actually attracted people to come here looking for the heroin, which is not what we want. I don't want our town to be like that.

[Q: The problems would disappear if heroin was available on prescription?] Yeah, definitely, because I really don't think that any more people are going to use indictable drugs whether they're legal or illegal. I think the same people are going to use those drugs anyway. Oh, there's a reasonable amount of counselling and places you can go and detox — the services aren't too bad, it's mostly just people's attitudes. I copped one this morning at a cafe down the road that's only just re-opened. My girlfriend was down there sitting in the toilet and she actually had a bag of mull out, and she was rolling a smoke. And the guy out of the cafe went down there, and I think he knocked and she said: Wait, and he walked on in, opened the door and walked in and started abusing her about taking drugs in his toilet. The thing was, because he knows that we're users, he automatically accused us of using in his toilet, you know, and I went in there, and basically had an argument with him, so that he would just apologise and find out the facts before he starts abusing people for such full-on things. Because I mean it's frustrating enough when you're a known drug user, yeah, you can cop it full-on from all sides. It's all bullshit.

I believe that the Nimbin cops are straight — I don't believe that they'd be on the take. It does baffle me a little bit though, because I'm sure if they really did want to clean up the scene totally, I would have thought that they would have been able to do it really easily really. I think it's just a bit too radical for them to do it [be involved], but it wouldn't surprise me if the ones higher up [were]. Nimbin cops are not too bad actually, they're not too bad for police. I think they're probably pretty straight really.

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Appendix IV: Taped Interviews

'FLAME'
(not edited)

I've lived in the area from the bicentennial year, 1988. I don't think it's got more of a problem than other places I've lived. It's more out in the open. Unfortunately a lot of people need drugs, and it's very, very obvious in Nimbin. People with eight hundred dollar habits have to turn up every single day, and their faces are there every single day.

Yeah, if people come into the village to buy hemp, it's good the service is there for them, yeah, I think it is. Most probably heroin users, I think that their particular drug should also be legalised, or at the very least it should be made available for them through government supply. It's just too cruel, what goes down. I don't like seeing my friends suffer. They're my friends, I don't have a fear of someone who takes a pain killer, I can't organise myself to have a fear about it, it's purely and simply a pain killer, and it means that those people are in pain as far as I'm concerned.

Being a youth at this point in time has to be fraught with problems. I don't think that Nimbin people have more problems, if anything they have less. They live in beautiful surroundings, they eat better food than most people, generally speaking. They have an attitude of freedom that most people in the city, you know, living isolated existences in nuclear families, they don't have this. If they are bored it seems to be part of growing up. They go through this big surge of finding everything new, and then they got through a period where they find everything old, and so they're bored. It needs time, over time they find excitement again. I don't find the drug use in Nimbin problematical. Other than giving them experience in things like growing trees, nurseries, growing food, doing practical things that are going to help them in later life, I can't see that they need very much really. I know a young girl who's doing land improvement. She's doing tree planting, and testing of water for purity, all this kind of thing. She's a teenager, and she likes it, she's totally excited, and she's earning money while she's doing it, so that kind of thing I think should be enhanced and fostered. Certainly the use of marijuana with a bit of education should also be used, not as an everyday thing, but as a special thing. If you could create an attitude towards marijuana, where it gets used rather than misused, it's the same with alcohol, it's only a different drug really. Then the problem side of the drug will disappear.

I came here on holiday and I got arrested fighting for the rainforest in '81 and I fell in love with the place. It kind of called me back and I came here in '88. It has a very special energy. It's got a lot of critters, It's got a lot of live things that have been obliterated from other places on the planet. So you get to see wonderful insects, wonderful plants and animals, and you just learn to appreciate all this. I'm doing a lot more walking. Tuntahle has a lot of twenty year old fruit trees and I'm discovering what fruit gathering is all about, it's just wonderful. By and large Tuntahle is an experiment in permaculture that is working. You can actually go and pick an odd mango and an avocado and a persimmon and a mandarin, and the feeling is that there are actually some trees that anyone can go and pick. That is so beautiful, that is just wonderful. I really don't know. I could choof off to Canberra and follow a political career, but I would prefer to stay here. If I didn't have to choof off to Canberra I would be happy. I could call this my home. I feel strong enough about it to protect it and defend it. It is my home.
Appendix IV: Taped Interviews

I think you're right. Just the fact there's less pollution here. Our levels of health have to be better here than those living in the city. They just have to be better. If you're feeling well in yourself, you start moving towards the more cherished things like freedom. If you're feeling really sick you can't make the jump.

At the moment it's a little bit wet [raining] but I'd have enormous difficulty moving back into a square box because living in a round space with a real close connection to nature is something that makes me so rich that I don't mind being poverty-stricken. And if I were pulled away from nature that would make me poor. It would make me go into lapses and forget who I am. I like finding myself able to do physical things that I have denied myself previously. I'm extending myself and my physical capabilities, and that gives me a lot of pleasure. I'm also visiting a lot more people and giving myself the opportunity to spend time with people and exchange ideas. That gives me a lot of pleasure.

You could still get ripped off here and there, but your own attachment to your things changes here. You begin to keep what's real, and you begin to discard what's not real and so you still have essential tools and nick-knacks and pots and pans, but you seem to be less materialistic. I know I have problems in owning a lot of things. I want to borrow and return, rather than actually own something, because I find that if I own too many things, those things are me. They become problematical so if I have to move I have to cart all these things around with me and I'm going through a reduction process. Keeping things that really work and discarding things that are not up to it any more. I want to experiment with nurturing others and experience being nurtured myself. I think we, as human beings, fail miserably in nurturing one another.

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'EAGLE'
(unavailable)

[ Mt age is between 14 and 19] [I've lived in the area ] close to 20 years.

No [I don't think that Nimbin has a drug problem]

Yes, dickheads [are the problem] Just dickheads here. Most of the people involved in selling drugs on the street are dickheads. I think it sucks. There's nothing wrong with selling, but you just do it to your friends, you don't do it on a commercial scale, like trying to hit up every mother fucker who walks down the street and just doesn't want to know about it.

[Q: Who are the runners?]
[About three quarters of the runners are injecting drug users, and about a quarter are young people who mostly do it for the pot, not the money. It's a big reason.

[Nice country?]
Yes, its a good place to grow up in. No [I don't want to stay here always].

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Appendix IV: Taped Interviews

[Q: Will you come back here?]
Doubt it. I don't know. As long as I've got my wheels, I can go anywhere. [I've been to] America, New Zealand, all over. There's a lot of guitar players every where. It's not something that's to do with the area, it's just the type of people who congregate in certain types of areas, like the ferals, ferals are musical, — going tribal. There's not so many other people, [around here who can play well] there's a few. Well, there's not a lot of places where you can actually play loud music.

[You've smoked for a long time?]
Have in the past, yes. There's just as much emphasis [on drugs, living in an area where there are a lot of drugs as for anyone [living other places]. [I like using] caffeine. No. [I don't drink much alcohol] I just don't. [I use conventional medical services ] Sometimes, but they fuck me up most of the time. Yeah, I've got dreams since I gave up smoking. Dreams, I can dream, something you don't do if you're an addict. Well, you dream, but they're hard to remember.

[Q: What do you want to do in the future]? I want to be a chef. [I've learned cooking] All over the world, from just cooking. [I won't do serious cooking courses ] No, because I think they teach you shit. I'll get that last of all, so I'm a registered chef when I become fifty or something, but before then I'll become famous, not because I'm a chef, but because I'm a damned good cook. [I also like] Baseball. I like it. No [there's no baseball happening around here] [Young people around here] They need open areas, and creativity, where they can go off and learn what they fucking truly desire to learn and not necessarily because of the money that they're going to get in return, or anything, just what they want to do, and what their aspirations may be. If they have any at all. Not someone going: 'Here you can learn this, this, and this'. It's a system where they can get the right people together, and communication systems, maybe through a computer and the Internet, maybe they could get together, get a lot of contacts and be able to do things, as far as connections are concerned, for anybody. The Internet is growing.

You don't need the words of songs, you can play them whatever way you want to. They don't even have to be songs as such, just music, feelings, vibes. One of my favourite songs on the radio, triple J is by Gondwana... corrupt wobble! You probably haven't been listening to JJJ? ... Probably the different announcers. I'm used to it. Yes, pirate radio, they're lacking a pirate radio.. They should have one here, they've got one on the top of the fucking mountain in their own country, and it doesn't come any better than pirate radio. They should be able to put up their own community radio. They can provide any kind of music they want, it doesn't matter as long as people enjoy it. People that want to go in there and put it on, the DJs or whatever can do it. Do it without even making money out of it, so that when they do get a job it's been a lifetime experience for them, not just a three year course in something.

It's a lot more worthwhile then fucking spending your whole life doing one or two things. Do three things, even four or five, it depends on what you want to do. You can just travel around, and you can learn all the languages in the world. You want to travel around, you can learn all the different musics in the world. You can make instruments. If you wanted, you can travel around and learn all different kinds of animations from all over the world, and be an artist in comics, you know. I was listening to JJJ today, and Japan has expensive comics, they're like
the thing, you know, you buy things the size of telephone books and they are comics, that's what they are. They're not necessarily funny, but they're comics, doesn't need to be funny, just anything. Highest technology, right into it! Haven't got any money for anything [like a computer and modem]. I've seen them with pocket sized ones nowadays.

Yeah, Nimbin is a hole. It just is. It's just there's nothing happening here. Nothing happens here, it's a real fucking backwater. Access to technology is an important one, the information super highway. Some people spend their whole life with music. If they want to be a musician, music is just not just fucking 'oh yeah, I can sing a couple of pop songs', 'oh yeah, I can pretend to play this guitar', 'oh yeah, I really like what I'm doing, and I make it sound like there's a whole lot of meaning behind what I'm singing', 'oh yeah, I'll be able to sell fucking thousands of records'.

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DAVID HEILPERN
(self-edited 1996)

I've lived in the area for about eight years. I came to this area because I'd visited here, back in the seventies. I really loved it, I had a share at Tuntary Falls and I really wanted to make this my home, and the place I brought up my children. How long ago did I move here? well Jacob is just about eight, so it was eight and half years ago.

Eighty percent, [of my cases are drug cases] — No, that's changed over time. When I first came here, I had been a tax lawyer and I was employed specifically to do commercial litigation. However, quickly I developed a great thirst for drug cases, and I guess the last four or five years, it's been at that level.

[Q: You've mounted a number of landmark test cases in the courts?]
Sure, yeah. I guess the most satisfying one has been the helicopter raids. We ran a test case based on the legality of helicopter raids without search warrants, and the case was thrown out. As a result of that, the helicopter raids have been much more tentative, many less arrests, admittedly probably more seizures, but certainly less arrests and that's been a pleasure.

We also ran a test case, regarding the weed inspectors, and the right of weed inspectors to enter land, and that was successful too. Although, I know now that the weed inspector is doing what I consider to be breaking the law. And we are running another test case on the 28 of June, which will hopefully ram down his throat the level of his illegality. It's my view that helicopter raids and weed inspectors are two of the main ways people get busted for cannabis cultivation in this area. If we can successfully wipe those two out, then I'll be happy about it.

Certainly, certainly, yeah that's sort of been my experience, and the whole thing about cultivation is, as everyone knows, I mean you've gotta have male plants, a lot of them die, the wallabies eat them, I mean there's a whole lot of disasters. You know, you can throw out a
couple of hundred seedlings, and hope a few are going to grow, and by the time you transplant them, and you have a couple of dry weeks when you're down the coast, you know. And, of course those people are often charged with supply, either deemed supply or actual supply. Also, the definition of supply desperately needs changing. I mean, if we were to sit here and pass a joint between us, that would be supply, mutual supply, you would be passing it to me, and me to you. I'll explain it, it certainly is not ... any supply is supply, it could be a gift, sharing, anything like that, it doesn't have to be for money. The second thing about supply is that if you are in possession of more than three hundred grams, then you are deemed to be a supplier, and you bear the burden of proving that you are not a supplier. And that can be quite difficult, you have to go before a jury, jail is the accepted penalty for supply, full stop. Yes, the word trafficking, yes trafficking is commonwealth, even though the NSW Act is called the Drug Misuse or Trafficking Act. The correct terminology is trafficking under commonwealth law and supply in the state laws. You see, the funny thing about supply is, the only reason there's so many is that you can't grow the stuff. Well, if you can't grow it, then of course you have to supply it to get it, or someone has to supply it to you, to get it. Also, the whole tradition of smoking cannabis, I actually believe that it is much safer to consume cannabis. I'll give you an example of what I mean, I think that the only times that I've had really bad times with cannabis, are times when, for example, I smoked a joint all by myself. The whole thing about passing a joint around, is by the time it gets back around to you, you know how stoned you are, and how strong it is.

So, they're the first two things I'd like to say about the problems with supply. I'd like to see cultivation of personal amounts be lawful, for up to ten plants, that way, there would be very little reason to supply. I would like to see, the only sort of supply that is unlawful, is supply that is for money. Because, I think that, the cash economy taking it out of the whole cannabis thing is pretty good karma and common sense.

[Q; what about green cafes?]
Look, I'd be happy with that too. We've talked about the lawful supply for money, and that's another option and you know, maybe when I retire, I'll start a cafe, and call it Cafe Amsterdam, and do that. But the supply laws at the moment are putting all people who use cannabis in jeopardy of going to jail. Ninety five percent of drug charges are cannabis. Very, very few arrests are heroin in this area, despite the fact that it is the major problem. When I say, the major problem, I'm talking about major health, illegal drug problem, I'm talking about illegal drugs, yeah. I'd like to stress that I'm not really saying, that heroin is the nastiest thing in the world, and, in fact ... in the ACT they're talking about legalising it, but I certainly have noticed that policing heroin requires a lot more police work than policing cannabis, you know anyone can bust anyone for cannabis because everyone uses it (in Nimbin anyway).

[Q: There's a lot of arrests for cannabis use in the region?]
Oh, there certainly is, and the statistics are quite clear, we have the highest rate of drug charging and conviction in the state or of any area. And I haven't compared it nationally, but I'd be prepared to bet my bottom dollar that it is nationally as well. And the reason is policing choice, police choose to police cannabis in this area, as opposed to child sexual assault, armed robbery, etc.
Have I noticed any change? The big change is there is an enormous amount of violence associated with cannabis at present, because of its price. You know, if I wanted to get off my face with a bunch of friends, it would be much cheaper, easier and cleaner for me to go and buy heroin or speed or alcohol, than it would be to buy cannabis. The price is so high, worth more than its weight in gold, so if you needed some money and were desperate for it, it would be pretty easy to go armed rob someone, and people are not reporting it to the police. These figures on home invasions are the tip of the iceberg. I hear personally of at least three, or four times the number that ever get reported, and at some point people are going to die.

I don't think that Nimbin has any more of a drug problem than anywhere else in our society. Nimbin's drug problem is more obvious. You see, people live in Nimbin because they want to live there, not because they want to work there or because they want to die there, but because they want to live there. And living there means being really active and part of the community, so of course there are aspects of that community like, for example, having children. Does Nimbin have a children problem? Well, there's a hell of a lot more children out on the street, and you see them dancing around and whatever, but that doesn't mean that its got more of a problem. It's a more visible aspect of the society, and also there's a concentration in Nimbin of unemployed people. So there's people with more time and perhaps more recreational drug use, but certainly not more of a problem. I would say less of a problem than the [deleted] Club has on a Friday night.

I've been conducting research into sexual assault in prisons, in conjunction with the University of NSW, Southern Cross University and the Corrective Services Department. That research has involved interviewing over three hundred prisoners aged 18-25 within the NSW prison system. My research shows that one in four of the 18-25 year olds have been sexually assaulted while they have been in custody, and just under one in two of them have been assaulted other than sexually. Of course, many of those who have been assaulted sexually were assaulted non-sexually too. The result means this: that if someone goes to jail in NSW aged between 18-25, there's a one in four chance they'll be raped while they are in jail. Oh certainly, yes, [young males] make up a much greater proportion [in jails] than they should if there were an equal representation of age groups. Of course what that means in terms of AIDS who knows? What that means in terms of recidivism is enormous, because you let them out of prison, having been brutalised by the state, and that's effectively what happens. I'm not saying it's the prison officers who are doing it, but what I'm saying is that the state allows this situation by putting young prisoners in with older people.

Then how they come out of prison is as very violent, angry, disturbed young men. That's what we're seeing, we see that at Nimbin, we see that everywhere, they are brutalised men. A lot of my older clients, perhaps you'd call them more professional growers, have been in jail before and are now doing it as a business. They've told me horrendous tales of 30, 40 years ago, about getting raped in prison too, so I don't think there's anything new. But the research has been the first of its kind in Australia, and there's only two other similar studies in the world, and our figures are perhaps a little lower than America and a little higher than England.

[In regard to recriminations] I do think that one of the reasons that I make sure that my cases get publicity is because I think there is some protection in that. Something Chris Murphy told me years ago was that if you are going to be doing this sort of thing, the higher the profile the safer you are. I think there's some truth in that. I think also the respect that I have with most
of the senior police and the magistrates and the judges and my fellow lawyers, men and
women ('fellow' is the wrong word), is such that I feel reasonably safe. But there are police
that are out to get me, they have tried to set me up. One of them recently tried to set me up
with a charge of attempting to pervert the course of justice, and that's what it was, a pure set
up. That does make me reasonably anxious, but I have never been frightened of going to jail
for what I believe in. That's never been a fear for me. I've been standing up at the rallies now
for four years, saying I use cannabis and I'm not a criminal. And I made a conscious decision
to do that because of a visit I made to Europe three and a half years ago. When I went to the
concentration camps I saw the result of what happens if you don't stand up for what you
believe in, and that's what happens. So, I made a conscious decision, and yes, I do worry a bit,
not so much for myself, because what's the worst thing that can happen to me? I've got good
friends in there, I'd be all right.

It is and it isn't. I mean, both my parents are real fighters and have always stood up for what
they believed in. I look at people like Bob Hopkins and Michael Balderstone and Freya,
people like that. They have great courage and guts without the education and resources that I
have. You know, I don't want to have all this sort of like a shadow of hatred, that follows me
around in some police officers, the National Party, and people like that. But it seems to me to
be a pretty small price to pay, in comparison to the price that other people pay for their beliefs.
There are people who spend months in trees, you know, I don't do that. It's just got to change,
it has to change, its not of our own choosing [?] recreational drug use. Actually, one thing that
really pisses me off is when they talk about Nimbin HEMP or my own views as being pro-
marijuana, because I'm not pro-marijuana. I don't think marijuana is the be-all and end-all,
and in fact, you know, I would like everyone using drugs really responsibly, and I don't see
that in Nimbin. I see some people using cannabis irresponsibly, too much of it. I mean, you
know, I know what its like to be stoned every day. For me its not a very good head space to
be in.

But I think that the bottom line is that these laws have to change because what they're doing is
making a police state. You see, when 70 percent of 15 to 17 year olds are using cannabis, and
then (I'm guessing) 80 percent of people in the Nimbin area use cannabis, if it's illegal it
means the police can search anyone, anytime, they can bust anyone, anytime. And who they
do choose to search, what people they do choose to bust, is totally a matter of police discretion
and that really frightens me. The police get away with things in Nimbin that they would
never, ever, get away with anywhere else in Australia, Kings Cross, anywhere. Because it's
isolated, and the people generally are powerless. I just want to say that if the laws change, I
think that the relationship between the community and the police will improve massively.
There's just no trust there. I must say Rosie, the police woman, developed an interesting sort
of modus operandi, which I gather that some of the more genuine police are also doing now
too, which is basically turning a blind eye to anything relating to cannabis. Really, the only
people who are busting for cannabis now are the drug enforcement agency, the drug squad
from Ballina and the helicopters. Apart from that they're leaving it alone, and the local police
know why that is, it's because if they don't leave it alone, they'll be at war.

[Q: what is Operation Jonah?]
It's just outrageous, I mean in the paper the day before yesterday, there was an article saying
131 busts in Nimbin since March the first, for heroin, LSD, amphetamines, acid and cannabis.
The fact is, well over one hundred of those are cannabis busts. They're just hiding behind
those figures to enable them to search whoever they want, whenever they want. It's coming up to Operation Noah time again, which is a really disgusting period of the year. I get calls from people who have been busted because their neighbours have rung and dobbed them in, or their enemy, or their ex-wife or husband or something. I really hate it. So in response to that we have Operation Jonah is an opportunity for people to ring in and say this is what's happened to us with the police. Because, over the years I'd be a rich man if I had a hundred dollars for every client that has said: 'look, I want to plead guilty because I got busted with 150 plants, and I've been charged with 10, and God knows what's happened to the rest, but I'm pleading guilty, and don't do anything else except plead guilty, or I'll break your arms and legs', and I say, 'fine'.

There's massive corruption involved in cannabis plantations. There's massive corruption when you've got anything worth its weight in gold like that. And operation Jonah, is our chance for people to phone in, and call in, because, I've noticed over the years whenever we make complaints to the ombudsman, it's just one complaint here or one complaint there. My plan is to get together a whole pile of them, and send them in, in one big swoop, saying something needs to be done here. I think our press has been fantastic, we have had such good press. You know during the election campaign we got more coverage than any of the other parties, inch space for inch space. I know because one of my students has just done an assignment on the amount of coverage we got. The TV news people have always been very supportive of us; sometimes they put a sensationalist angle on it, but basically we've got the coverage that we want, and that's been fantastic for the cause, yeah. Sixty Minutes, for example, is going to be doing a big number on us Sunday night, and the best thing is that they are the most sensationalist of the lot, and even if it's only half sensationalist we're doing pretty well.

I've had a client for six years now, a lovely person, who has been struggling to get off heroin for a long time. She's the victim of child sexual assault, she's the victim of a series of evictions and things like that, that were traumatic for her; but mostly it's the child sexual assault that she suffers from, I guess. She had been off it for twelve weeks, which is the longest we've ever, (we are a group of people who try and help her) have had her off heroin. And the police picked her up, and internally searched her. The first thing she did when she got out of the police station was go and get a taste. And that to me is the biggest sign of why the drug laws have to change. We cannot allow the police to rape her again, so that she then goes out and seeks escape through the needle. She's back on it, and we'll try again, but, who knows? And if she dies, as far as I'm concerned, the blame lies at the door of the police.

And the second thing is that the only way this person, and most of the heroin users in Nimbin, are able to support their habits, is by selling cannabis. It's a hundred, two hundred, sometimes even three hundred dollars a week, sometimes even two hundred dollars a day habit, that they're using. And I know for a fact that the only way that they can make that sort of money in town is by selling heroin or selling cannabis. And if we can get the cannabis dollar out of that market, the heroin problem will dissolve. Now people say to me: 'oh yeah that's all very well, but then people will go and do break and enters and all that sort of thing. I think that's bullshit. The reason we don't have a high break and enter rate, in country areas of NSW, is because its a small town, people know who's home, and who's not home. It's not like the city, where you never meet your neighbours. Break and enters, you know, it's a hard, risky business, in comparison with selling dope on the streets of Nimbin anyway. So, I'd like to say that if the drug laws change, you know a lot of those people aren't going to move from
Nimbin, they like it, they're not going to move to follow the drugs, they're just going to get off it. And, at the moment the drug laws support an enormous heroin industry. Most of the ganja dollar goes straight up the arms of somebody or other, and into the hands of the heroin dealers. We can only hope that the law changes soon.

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DAVID HELLIWELL  
(self-edited1995)

[I've been a GP in Nimbin for] Thirteen years now. There was a job here. It was the most weird thing. I was looking for a job in the north coast, or the northern NSW area, and I actually got offered a couple of jobs. I got offered a job over at Alstonville, and I got offered a job over at Brunswick Heads. I didn't like either of those two jobs, in terms of the set up I was going to be in, so I knocked them back, not knowing what I was going to do, and then this place come up, so I got the job and here I am.

I think that the things that we're seeing, you know the changes in the last few years, well there's been a huge growth in population, I'm not sure what the current population statistics are, but I would have to estimate that it has risen by threefold in that time. When I first came here thirteen years ago I was in solo practice, now we have four doctors here. So, that gives you an idea of the level of growth just in that time-frame. Well, the areas of health care problems that I see, are often related to unemployment, lack of infrastructure, a lot of people move here and they have no extended family, and they may have no friends in the area. They don't have their normal, old infrastructures that they had in Sydney or Melbourne or wherever they came from. They had family and relations living in the same city, so isolation's certainly a factor here. Substance abuse is always big on the agenda, as far as Nimbin's health problems go. Also there's rural isolation. I'm thinking about people just being able to get to the doctors, or if you just want to go and get an x-ray you have to go to Lismore, or if you want to see a specialist, you have to think about travelling to Lismore. And because such a percentage of patients are on low incomes, they can't afford transport, they're on pensions or other benefits. So that's another factor, rural isolation and access to the services.

Yes, I'd have to say we have problems from drugs. We have an increasing rate of intravenous drug usage, both opiates and amphetamines. We have a situation where we have become a centre for the trade in marijuana, and that, in fact, is how people will fund other drug habits. So we have people coming to sell, and we have people coming to buy, all coming to Nimbin. So we have, I guess, an environment where people work selling drugs, using drugs, and to some extent getting rich as well. You know, to a lot of people, the street is their livelihood, that's what they're doing. The overall feeling at times is one of frustration, in that as a health professional I think that it is one of my roles, duties, whatever you want to call it, to look at not only individual health, but public health. I think as a GP in a small town, I have to look at public health as well as individuals' health. It's one of the attractions that this particular job
Appendix IV: Taped Interviews

has for me. In the end, in Nimbin, the sort of interventions that we are involved with, those of us that work with or for the health department, are client-centred, and public health centred. In other words, they are things like reducing the rate of transmission of HIV, Hep B and Hep C. They’re about reducing the harm of drug use to individuals and their families. At times, I think that people forget that. They have an expectation that we're responsible for what happens with our clients when they're away from seeing us. I would say that that's a really important boundary for any health worker to maintain. That's to say, by working to provide treatment for people, we're here to work on a public health basis. If you've got a problem with Joe Blow, who just heavied you up the town, that's not our issue. That's an issue between you, the community, and the police.

There's this constant frustration around that, and the people can't seem to get their heads around it, because, in the end what I want to do is to get on with achieving my goals and those of the clients. We have individuals who are constantly criticising the service, criticising I think inappropriately, in terms. In other words, people are asking for the removal of the service!

I mean we have had the most wonderful suggestion that people on methadone should have their driving licence taken away. They should be brought out to the clinic once a day, and then bussed home, you know. Where are the chains? And what is frustrating is that I have seen that conflict driven by a number of individuals who have got a large degree of financial investment in the area. I guess that's the thing that really pisses me off, that people like Mal Rothwell and John Hunter, who have been very critical, have got large financial investments in the area. It's not within my brief to look after their financial investments, however much they might want me to do so. So, it's like you have to keep brushing it off, and say: 'uh uh, I'm sorry, I'm not going to buy into that'.

Oh, that's been my perception for the last eight years, that's it exactly. Tourism and cannabis are the two things that really drive it. If you look at what happens, from about November onwards we have a much larger number of tourists coming through the town until Easter. That actual window of about four months is a really busy time for Nimbin. In terms of visitors, and also in terms of a lot of feral folk, because a lot of feral folk are transient, and they literally travel up and down Australia. They may start in the summer in the cities, and then they may finish up in the middle of winter up at Cairns or somewhere like that. And we're part of that network, so we have a lot of folk coming through.

I mean, in the end, you just try getting a parking spot now on the main street, it's impossible. And under those circumstances, what happens then is the town will tend to be busier, the town will tend to be less together, the town will be tend to have more outrageous behaviour on the street between about November and May. What's interesting, is that also coincides with the head season. By November you're getting leaf and tip coming through in people's crops, and by Easter you're getting the heads coming through. And, of course that particular trade, both the tourists coming to buy, and also with the actual cannabis coming on at that time of the year, it puts a lot of money on the street. You put money on the street, you're going to cause more trading on the street, you're going to see more tourists on the street. I mean, the irony of the whole situation is a bit like, well, if you could imagine that there was a big public meeting of the club owners in Kings Cross, saying: 'We really don't want these prostitutes in Kings Cross, they're giving our clubs a bad name, and they're getting in the way of things, and we
don't think it's nice'. And it's that limited approach that people have, in not being able to see the bigger picture, or not wanting to see the bigger picture, and that is frustrating.

As a team we know we have to deal with this every year. Basically we have a GP based drug and alcohol team in Nimbin. I'm the methadone prescriber, and we have a coordinator for the needle exchange, and two visiting drug and alcohol counsellors at the moment. We have the methadone unit nursing staff, and we have a needle exchange program outreach worker. I get to meet with each of those groups of workers on a weekly basis. I spend an hour with the needle exchange program workers, I spend an hour with the drug and alcohol workers, and I spend two hours with the methadone unit, but part of that is administration and organising charts and bottles and things like that. That's half of it, the other half is actually going through clients notes on a weekly basis, talking about their progress, talking about how things are going for them, because we might have concerns. They might have goals that they've stated they want to achieve with treatment, and this is a chance to assess these.

With that team structure I think we have a very good drug and alcohol service in this town. I think we have a very supportive drug and alcohol service. There is no delineation in terms of needle exchange, methadone, counsellors, that you often see in other services where its almost like methadone staff and needle exchange staff see themselves as doing different things. We tend to not to see that, we tend to see ourselves as all working on a continuum, at times at different points within that continuum.

How did I train myself? OK, well, I guess I started training myself by just being here for a while. I think that one of the things that anyone will get when they come and work in Nimbin as a GP is a lot of experience with dealing with people who will want to discuss the pros and cons of any option, who will want to tell you what they would like to do, will want to question what you want to do. So these are all very helpful things in terms of pre-training for drug and alcohol before you even go into it. We work as a training practice here for the family medicine program for the College of General Practitioners. That's one of the things that a lot of the GP trainees who come through say is this: 'It's good experience'.

It was hard when I first come here but you know, someone says: 'Well you can stick your antibiotics up your nose', or something like that. But when I think about it, you know, it's their bodies we're really talking about, so it makes the GP think. It makes us think. I think that's really valuable in dealing with co-dependence issues, where you have to work through, say, this guy might have cellulitis, and we can treat it. He might say: 'Look, I don't want antibiotics, my naturopath tells me they're poison'. Then you can say: 'OK well look, we'll do this for the moment, and if you're not happy with that, we'll try some topical treatment. If it doesn't work, come back and we'll take it from there'. If I behave angrily I am behaving co-dependently. So it sorts you out, where you stop and where a patient stops. And if someone wants to go and get Cellulitis, why am I getting uptight about it? Why am I getting angry about that? And that's good pre-training for drug and alcohol workers. Because I think that one of the most important things when working in the drug and alcohol field is to know where we stop, and where our clients start. I think if we don't get a grip on that, then we're going to get ourselves in difficult situations in the workplace. It's knowing where I stop, and where the client starts, that's the most important thing. In other words, I can empathise with his problem, but if I have an expectation with myself to solve his problem, then I'm going to burn myself out. A lot of the time, it's really looking at what resources that person has, looking at what
they've tried, exploring avenues that they've tried. I had this one guy who was being harassed by a detective from Mullum, he tried talking to the local police and didn't get much help there. Eventually we worked out that if he was going to have to do anything, he had to contact the Ombudsman, that would be his next step. But it was up to him to contact the Ombudsman, I wasn't going to contact the Ombudsman for him, and buy into this particular issue, because you may well find that if you spoke to the police about this detective, there would be issues on his side in this conflict as well. So, it's really a case of, I think, knowing where you stop and where the client starts.

The other training that I had was two weeks in Sydney, when I went on what was called a Rural Doctors Fellowship, where I spent two weeks working at The Northside Clinic, with Dr Lou Goldman, who is the medical director of the drug and alcohol service there.

I also had visits to Alex Wodak's Unit at St Vincents, Bob Baty's Unit at Westmead, and John Saunders Unit at RPA. So I was based somewhere, and was sort of filling in gaps on my skills and talking to experienced drug and alcohol doctors at the same time, also visiting different drug and alcohol units and having a look around. So, I did that, and I did a lot of reading. I was resourced by the manager of drug and alcohol services, David Reilly. And that was quite innovative, in that we actually formed a good working relationship, where I was actually tapping into his previous clinical experience, even though his was as an administrator, and he was able to resource me a lot, with papers and suggested reading, and things like that. What else did I do? I attended conferences, things like the APSAD conferences in Sydney, and the National Methadone conference in Sydney. And I also did the one week drug and alcohol course with the Institute of Psychiatry, Rozelle, where they do a very good one week drug and alcohol course for medical practitioners. That was how I trained myself up. But a lot of the training was based on being in there, and confronting the problems, and working out ways to get around them, and if I couldn't get round them, talking to other people about how we might get around them.

Yes, home detox was really just a matter of pulling out the papers, and looking at what people were doing. The protocols that I set up for home detox, they were all based on Bob Baty's research. So it was really a matter of just digging up the information. It was there, you just had to be willing to dig for it. Or someone like David Riley had to dig for it. So a lot of it was about getting networked. I think its more, particularly that I spend time getting training in the area of counselling, because I saw that as being a need here, and again because of rural isolation. Until recently for instance, if somebody needed to access someone in counselling, it was only available through community health in Nimbin on a Thursday or they had to go into Lismore and access the private system.

And that's another factor too, trust. You have a very alternative society that looks slightly suspiciously at Lismore at the best of times. Again that's part of the challenge of general practice in a small country town. In somewhere like Bourke, it might be getting obstetric and anaesthetic skills, here it might be getting drug and alcohol and counselling skills, in Sydney it might be developing a new thrust in sports medicine or something, if you have a client base that are involved a lot in that area. In other parts of Sydney it might mean getting experience and expertise in HIV medicine. So, you know, to me that's the challenge of general practice, and that's one of the joys of general practice, it's that you are a broad based medical
practitioner, but within that broad base your particular patch, or area, will require you to develop special skills and if you respond to that, it really can be very satisfying.

I think it's getting much better. I mean, one of the things that we now have as GPs is this thing called vocational registration. We're required to achieve certain goals in continuing medical education, on a tri-yearly basis, every three years. You are supported in doing that, in terms of there are a lot more courses now available to achieve those goals. I think in general practice, on the whole, the Royal College of General Practitioners does a very good job in organising courses. We have Brisbane nearby, and theoretically I can go up on a Saturday to a workshop there in the morning, and be back home by mid afternoon. Sometimes you've got to take advantage of what's available, when it's available.

I like [Nimbin's] diversity. I think it's a very vibrant place, it has so many wonderful things to it. And, you know, one of the things that I would say about it is that it's important that we don't get stuck in this linear thinking. If I go down and have a wonderful evening at the Bush Factory, and see a beautiful moon, with a lovely scene for the night's meal by the creek, or something like that, you've got a beautiful, peaceful, friendly setting. And one of the things that we have to learn about Nimbin is, if we have hell, we have heaven as well. We have the peaks and we have the troughs. Now in most places the peaks are less high, the troughs are less low, but here the peaks are very high and the troughs are very low. I think it's all part of the same thing. And that's certainly my philosophy. Behind a lot of what we see around here, in terms of unemployment, homelessness, drugs and things like that, because we have a lot of freedom and because we actually take advantage of that freedom, and enjoy that freedom, we have to accept some consequences that come with that as well.

I think the most frequent cannabis related illness I see is what I call bonger's chest, which is basically acute bronchitis, or asthma/bronchitis, that's induced by heavy smoking and deep inhalation. You look at smoking marijuana, the process is one where people take a large hit and inhale very deeply, far more deeply than you would necessarily do with a cigarette. So I think that's probably the most common thing that I'd see is chest infection and asthma. At times I will see marital discord around it, I mean, as one patient said to me about six months ago, she said: It's no different to the guys all going out and having a beer, and isolating themselves away. The men tend to smoke more dope than the women. And you know at times when people are struggling in difficult circumstances, trying to build a house with a low income, isolated, living in a shed or a tent with kids. The men at times may divert into smoking a lot of dope, and if you've got your partner sitting there stoned all the time, the house isn't even built, you can easily become quite unhappy and dissatisfied with that situation. At times we see (rarely, its not frequent), but we will see cases of cannabis induced psychosis, particularly with people with underlying psychiatric disorders, either manic depressive illnesses or schizophrenia, where heavy marijuana use seems to exacerbate the symptoms.

People will often say: 'Oh!, I smoke dope, because if I don't I get depressed, or I get anxious, I'm an anxious person, or a depressed person, therefore if I smoke dope'. In fact it's really cannabis withdrawal, and you don't tend to see big problems with withdrawal from marijuana. But certainly, as I say, there's often a lack of understanding within this community around the physical dependency aspects of marijuana use. It tends to be chest related problems in the age group we're looking at. I guess we will see the problems with circulation happening later on,
or the incidence of lung cancer happening later on, as people get older. But, mainly as I say, it tends to be related to just respiratory problems, acute chronic bronchitis, and social - interpersonal problems.

One of the more interesting things that I've looked at while I've been here, is what's functional use? Because one of the problems we face in the area of illicit drugs is defining functional use, or finding normal populations. One of the things we were talking about at our last methadone case conference this week, is what do you think defines functional users? What do they do? What structures, what limits, do they place on themselves that allow them to continue to be functional in that area, without ending up needing treatment services and things like that? And it's the same with marijuana use, I mean generally what most people who smoke dope frequently say, on a daily basis, is: 'I only smoke in the evenings'. And that seems to me to be a very, very, important part of defining functional use with marijuana. A lot of people will smoke dope on a daily basis, but during the day they'll stay straight, get busy, do all the things that they have to do, and instead of coming home and having their tinny, they basically come home and have a joint instead. I know a number of people who work hard as carpenters, or teachers, who literally say that 'I come home, I have a joint', instead of the two cans. That generally seems to be one of the important rules that people set themselves, it seems to work for them.

Coming back to the controversy of needle exchange and methadone, I think one of the things that it's really important to look at, is that misconceptions occur because we have different goals. If someone has a goal of clean up the street, that may not necessarily be the same as our goal, which is to reduce the harm related to drugs and HIV transmission. I mean, one of the things that I would be happy to be quoted on is that within the drug and alcohol services we have not tested one user positive for HIV in the whole eight years. In a town like Nimbin, with the number of visitors and the level of I.V. drug use, the rate of Hep B and Hep C, and none tested positively, that's a hell of an achievement.

And that's our goal, and that's the difference. Our goals will be different from say, property developers or shop owners. At times we can delay our goals, but we cannot necessarily take on the same goals as they'll have. Because then we stop achieving our goals. It's like the issue of one-for-one needle exchange. That may achieve one goal, in terms of reducing the amount inappropriately disposed of needles, but it won't necessarily achieve the primary goal of the needle exchange, which is to reduce the rate of the transmission of HIV. Part of our frustration is people not being able to understand that. The reason we're doing it is because we want to reduce the rate of HIV transmission and other drug related harm.

It's like this again and again and again, and all I can do in this area is to sort out where my values are. That's probably the most important thing that I'd say to anyone who works in drug and alcohol, or is involved in the issue of drug and alcohol, is getting a good handle on your values first, before you start talking with other people. Because if you don't do that, you just end up getting confused. At one stage, before we had a needle exchange in Nimbin, we actually had a needle and syringe that were left under the town hall and were shared anonymously. I mean, you know, that's a recipe for disaster, terrifying! We had a situation, in 1987 I think it was, where I did ten notifications of Hep B in one week. I mean that's scary stuff. And it really struck me that it was scarier with HIV.
I'm authorised for up to 50 [methadone] clients [covering an area up to Tweed Heads]. I usually tend to run to somewhere between 25 and 45, so again it depends on what is happening in a lot of areas. It might depend on what is happening with police activity. If there's more police out there, then people will come in to methadone treatment. If someone hasn't managed to detox themselves, they're still running a habit in June, July, it's really hard going, and then they may need methadone treatment at that point in time. We get these seasonal variations. But it varies between 25 and 45 usually, and that includes servicing Murwillumbah and Pottsville and Kingscliff. No, it's not a huge number, and in the end I guess the way I see it is that methadone is a very slow process for a lot of clients. And to me one of the most important things that I have to do, is make treatment personal for my clients, and be responsive to their needs.

And being clear, that's the other thing that I find important, clarity, consistency. If I make rules, I stick to the rules, and I stick to the rules for everyone. I think if you can do that, then you can maintain clients quite voluntarily, it becomes a co-operative venture. And if it becomes a co-operative venture, it works. I've got a client who's been on methadone for the last three years, his wife is also on methadone, and they have three children. What we've been setting up as their goal in treatment more than anything else, is to improve the function of the family. And the family are now working well together, as a happy, functional, intimate family, where they communicate well with each other.

I think what we do is we don't pick up and run with goals that the client is not interested in. For example, with these two clients the chances are that they are always going to battle with it. They'll probably use once a week, once a fortnight. Now, if we focus on using, rather than saying: 'What do you want to do with methadone?' then that's probably going to keep on happening, we'll probably get ourselves into all sorts of hard struggles, we'll probably make treatment uncomfortable for them, they'll be making treating them uncomfortable for us. Rather than that, if we say: 'What do you want to do with your methadone treatment? How do you want to use this time on methadone as effectively as possible for you?' then we can reach the achievable goals that we can work with. To me that's an important part of methadone treatment, to say: 'Well what do you want to achieve with your time on methadone?' and if we ask that question with clients, we often get quite surprising answers, and often answers that we can really work co-operatively with, for them.

You should ask me when is this all going to end?. All the Nimbin street scenes and things like that. I don't know, I think that we're really going to have to endure cyclical patterns of misbehaviour, until we see a change in the drug laws. I think that's a conclusion that I've come to, as I've seen the scene expand, particularly over the last few years. I think we've almost reached a point of no return. But I think it's gone too far now, because there's too much changing, and our community is getting too many tourists coming here now. We have such a reputation throughout the world about cannabis. But in the end I think that were going to have to sit this one out, until some substantial change in the drug laws happens. ... That's right, I think we are a microcosm, where we can see what happens within the macrocosm. I think that's been one of the reasons why its so valuable for you to research here, for the same reason. And as a result, you'll get little old ladies who have never smoked a joint in their life saying look you're going to have to do something about this, because I can see that what's happening is that people are on the streets because of the money. And so it's like when we were talking
about methadone. If people have the chance to see the bigger picture, people will often act more positively and in a more effective way.

[Q: Do you have a lot of overdoses here?]
Well, per capita, one would have to say yes [there are a lot of overdoses in Nimbin]. I think that we seem to have a spate of overdoses, mostly occurring with visitors to the village. Recreational users. I remember one overdose where this guy was from the Coast, he just got out of jail, and he thought: 'I'll come to Nimbin, have a blast', and of course he'd lost his tolerance, poor bugger, so he dropped. What the needle exchange has been working on very hard over the last twelve months has been looking at reducing the harm from overdose in terms of trying to get people to check what they're using beforehand. Strategies like always buying from the same dealer, building up a trust relationship with them, so that you are getting accurate information, rather than little information. If you stay with the same dealer, after a while you'll tend to get information. Like people say: 'Oh, it's not as good as last week, but it's pretty good'. Things like not using alone, things like if you're unsure of the quality of the heroin, test it first, and then use. Those types of things, like about abusing alcohol the night before, that alcohol affects us the next day. Karen has done a very good job of that, and I think our overdose rate has actually fallen quite dramatically.

The best quote I can give you is the one that happened last year. But the other one I can give you, which is the one I gave to Robin Osborne from the Lismore Echo after the public meeting about needle exchange and methadone services. Afterwards we actually ended up with a motion for looking at urgent change of the drug laws, that's what came out of that meeting. But in the end, after that, I said: 'You know we're going to have to live with the fact that tourism, development, and drugs are not going to go away quickly in Nimbin, and we're going to have to accept that. In the end, it's saying that just as people who are involved in tourism or development have to accept that drug use is here to stay in Nimbin, so people involved with drug use have to accept that tourism and development are here to stay. It needs that tolerance and it needs that acceptance, that everyone's involved here, and it's not going to go away. Just as drugs wont go away, I don't think tourism's going to go away, and I don't think development's going to go away. That's what we need to understand, and if we could understand that, then maybe we could work a bit more co-operatively.

I'm happy at general practice here, it's hard work and stressful at times, but it's a real existence, and my wife and kids really love living here. I've never been, very career orientated. I suppose I can see myself working in Lismore, when the kids are older, or something like that, but probably not much further away than that. I was offered a job about three years ago, the chance to be the Medical Director of the central coast Drug and Alcohol Service at Gosford, and I thought about that for about two minutes and turned it down. It's a lifestyle. You look at why people go into farming. People don't go into farming for the money, they go into it for the lifestyle. And I think that in general practice, if you can go into general practice for the lifestyle you can get a good financial reward. For me, that's the only way I can find general practice satisfying is to look at it as a lifestyle. Because if I looked at it as just a job, I don't think I would enjoy it. So that's why it's important for me to be involved in that public health side of things, as well as individual patient care. Because that's part of the lifestyle, that's part of being a GP in a small country town.

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When I lived in Sydney I decided that I'd like to learn more about my body. I was doing yoga in fact, and I realised how little I knew about my body and how it functioned. I started to do a naturopathy course to do the anatomy and physiology really, it was a herbalist course, and I ended up doing the whole three year course. I'd been practicing in Sydney, and then when I came up here it was the obvious thing to practice here in Nimbin.

I've lived in the Nimbin area for almost ten years. Why did I come up here? Well, it's not related to being a naturopath, it was just a really handy skill to bring up here. The main reason that I came up here was because I was in a relationship with someone, who had been brought up in the country, in the bush, and I'd lived in England in the country for most of my young life. And he really wanted to move back to the bush, and I was quite happy to do that. I decided that I didn't want to live on a piece of land on my own, in isolation, in the country, so we got a group of people together, and we started looking for land. We wanted to live on the coast, and we found this piece of land up here near Nimbin. In those days when we bought this piece of land I'd never even heard of multiple occupancy, or the idea of group landownership. It evolved from there. We found the land, we formed a multiple occupancy because it was the only way in which we could own land together without subdividing it. And I've been on that piece of land pretty much ever since (that was actually thirteen years ago, but I've lived there for nearly ten).

I think [I become a Lismore city councillor] because I became involved in community politics, and particularly the politics surrounding multiple occupancy development; and I think if enough people say you should run for council you start to think, well, maybe I should run for council. Because multiple occupancy brings people into conflict and discussion with councils, I'd done a fair amount of negotiating and discussion with councils and gone to council meetings. I'd also got involved in a few other issues, particularly sewerage and recycling in Nimbin, and they are directly related to council. So, I'd started to sort of think about it, and I made a decision that I would do it. I got elected, and three years later I'm still hanging in there.

It's not easy, it's very challenging, it's very confronting. It's been good for my own personal growth. It was a very, very steep learning curve in the beginning. You know, I had a fair involvement in a number of issues, but there are a lot of local government issues that I'd really never had anything to do with before. So there was a lot of learning for me, which was great. It was really good for my own intellectual stimulation and personal growth. I wouldn't say it's difficult, it's just very challenging, it's very frustrating, it's exhausting, it's enjoyable, it's a whole range of different things. It takes an enormous amount of my time. I could do it seven days a week, twenty four hours a day. So somewhere along the line I had to decide that these were the things I really want to be involved in, and these were the things that I just haven't got the time for, that I'm just going to have to leave for the time being. And that's hard sometimes, because you know that there are things that are important, but you just can't give the time to them that they need. I think I focus on issues that relate to Nimbin, that's where most of my
time goes. Because I work on the street [Diana's naturopathic business in on the main street],
you know, I have a business and I'm involved in a lot of community groups, people have that
direct link with me, they can come up to me pretty much anytime of the day or ring me at
home. So in Nimbin I'm very public property, whereas in Lismore I have a lot more
anonymity. In Lismore people are usually apologetic when they ring you up, and they're sorry
to disturb you, whereas in Nimbin people see me as a friend and it's OK to ring me constantly,
and I don't mind, I don't mind at all, but it's often a very demanding sort of role that I find
myself in.

[Q: Does Nimbin have a drug problem?
That's not an easy question. If I were to answer it from my own personal perspective, I would
say that a drug problem exists when a person doesn't have control over their drug of choice. In
other words, where their drug is controlling their life. I don't think that's a common
community perception, but maybe it is. On the basis of this I'd say some people have a drug
problem. To say Nimbin has a drug problem implies Nimbin has more of a drug problem than
anywhere else. Nimbin has a media image problem in relation to drugs and drug dealing, and
using on the main street is a problem to the community of Nimbin.

There's been a range of responses. My first direct involvement in any of them was the public
meeting that was called in Nimbin, I think that would have been in 1989. There was a sort of
a community forum that I thought was managed appallingly, where all these people who set
themselves up as some sort of consultative committee or group on the drug thing called a
public meeting. They called everyone into the hall, sat up the front and gave their own
perspectives, none of which I could really relate to, and then stopped any debate from the
floor. What we saw after that was an increased police presence in town for a few weeks, and
nothing changed. So that was my first introduction to how the community deals with the drug
problem. I know that there's a long history before that, but that was my first encounter.

When I was elected to council it was at the same time as a group formed, called the Nimbin
Ratepayers and Progress Association. Now primarily they had formed to respond to Nimbin's
sewage problem, which put me at complete odds with them, in terms of what they perceived as
being the solution. But they ultimately also became involved in the drug problem, and their
way of dealing with it I found to be incredibly antagonistic, not at all compassionate, not
empathetic, confrontational and really angry. To me it seemed like they were bringing up a lot
of fear, and a lot of that fear, I believe, must be within themselves as people, if that's the way
they were trying to solve problems. Because it didn't seem to me that stuff like demanding an
increased police presence, and demanding the closure of the needle exchange program, and
demanding the closure of the methadone program, and other harm reduction programs,
wanting to drive people off the streets, and clean up the streets and make Nimbin look nice
and clean. To me they didn't seem to be creative solutions at all. I believe that there are
people within that organisation who are genuinely concerned and compassionate people, but
the stance that they took as an organisation, I felt was quite inappropriate.

At some stage, when I'd been on council perhaps three months, or a year and three months, I
don't actually remember, there was a group formed, called the Nimbin Think Tank. Graham
Dunstan, when he entered back into Nimbin town politics, went to the Mayor and said that he
thought that the Mayor should set up a think tank to look at Nimbin's drug problems. This was
after Nimbin had just received a whole bout of publicity about the drug situation, in part
because of publicity that the Ratepayers Association was putting out. John Crowther, the Mayor then, approached me and said that he wanted to form this group called the Nimbin Think Tank, and that he would like me to suggest people who it would be appropriate to be on that group.

This wasn't really an easy task, I mean I tried to get together a group I felt represented all the different sectors of the Nimbin community, and considering it's a very diverse community, that's not easy, and of course there were people who were excluded. I think, we had a group of perhaps eighteen people in the beginning, and I think it really was a very cross-representational group. It was a really interesting group of people to have in one room at the same time, talking about probably one of the most difficult issues in our communities. The mandate of the Think Tank wasn't just to look at the drug issue, it was actually to look at the whole street scene. Because you can't look at the drug issue in isolation, you've got to look at a whole lot of issues, like unemployment, poverty, homelessness, broken families, sexual assault. I'm not saying we looked at all of those issues in any great detail, but it was acknowledged right at the beginning that you couldn't isolate the drug problem.

So when I say it was a representative group, it was really a group that was trying to be representative in terms of attitudes and backgrounds, female and male, although not necessarily in terms of age. That group met regularly for probably close to a year. We conducted a survey on what people perceived as being the problems of the main street, and it was pretty clear at that stage, and I think probably because of the context within which we were doing the survey, that the results related to what was happening in the media. Drugs were by far the biggest concern. However, of almost equal importance were things like traffic concerns and parking, and just general main street things (we were looking only at the main street). I think we put out some information, and even had a public meeting at some stage, but anyway ultimately what happened was the obvious thing, which I think most people in Nimbin would acknowledge, was that we had to look at the issue of drug laws and the appropriateness of the drug laws, as a Think Tank. We had always worked from a position of compromise and consensus, of getting around to a point that everybody felt comfortable with, and we couldn't agree on this issue.

The Mayor flatly refused to discuss or even entertain the idea of legalisation or decriminalisation, and that basically was the end of the group, because you had a convener of a group who wasn't prepared to discuss it. It wasn't that it was the solution, it was just that you couldn't really look at the cause of people's problems while you had drug laws that were making people criminals, and were forcing the police to address a situation in a really unwinnable way. So I guess the Mayor pulled the plug on it. That was it, end of discussion. This was after a year, and I think it was a very interesting exercise. It was certainly educational for a lot of people, including myself. In many ways, I was relieved when it finished, because drugs has never really been my issue, it's not really a local government issue.

It's an incredibly controversial issue in town. It was an issue effecting my other work, in that I was sort of being pulled into the whole drug debate and also trying to work on a whole lot of other community issues. So I felt some degree of relief when it ended, but I think it was just a very interesting exercise, with a very interesting but disappointing outcome. I think John Crowther has found it fairly difficult to enter into Nimbin politics since then, he showed his colours in a sense. I know he cares about Nimbin, I think he finds Nimbin fascinating, but it
brought up a whole lot of stuff for him, [deleted], and he was unable to deal with it. I'd say that there were other people in the group who would feel the same as myself about his role in Think Tank. So the group wasn't really motivated without him, and it wasn't really appropriate to keep meeting because it was a group that he had convened. It had very selected membership, which meant it had to exclude people who felt excluded. It ran its course, it was useful, it had some good outcomes, brought together a really interesting group of people, but did really nothing for the community.

I would hope that Nimbin can improve without having its integrity changed, and the things that people value changed. I think Nimbin's suffered from the lack of money spent on it for a long, long time, its really over many, many years, probably since we lost the Terania Shire, maybe even before that. My feeling is that money is coming to Nimbin now because the town has a strong advocate on council, myself, who has the respect of councillors and the support of the community. I think that's the reality, and I've worked really hard to get things happening here. It hasn't been that hard, because Nimbin has been neglected for such a long time. There's a lot of things in the pipeline too that haven't happened yet, but they will happen over the next three, four, five years. I'd like to be there to see that they do happen.

I'd like to run for another four years, and that will be it, I mean eight years in council will be quite enough. Then I can get on with the rest of my life after that. Also there's been some really good active positive groups in the community that have done a lot too, like the Hall Committee has been one of our most dynamic committees for quite a while. They've really put in a huge amount of work to get the hall looking like it is now, and that makes a huge difference to the street, and the appearance of the street. I think it also motivates business owners and shops to actually spruce up their place and paint it. Really, that's all that's changed on the main street, I mean the park's been reshaped, the road's been resurfaced, but not that much has changed. It's the hall that's made a really big impact, plus the new shops next to the hall. That was a really big vacant block there for a long, long time. So that changes the streetscape.

I also think that Nimbin has a bigger population (and it's growing all the time), and it also has a much bigger tourist trade than its ever had before. It's a challenge for the community to be able to balance that, so that our lifestyles aren't compromised. It's also an opportunity for us to show people how we live, and the things that are important to us in our lives. And maybe, they can learn from that experience, I would hope so. I think it's also important just to reflect on some of the attitudes of councillors to Nimbin. There's still a lot of prejudice towards Nimbin, there are a lot of derogatory comments made about Nimbin. There's a great deal of disharmony amongst councillors because they feel Lismore is an unknown quantity out in the big, wide world, and yet if you mention Nimbin everyone knows where Nimbin is.

So if you want to identify where Lismore is, you say near Nimbin. That Nimbin should be seen to be representative of Lismore Council area creates a fair degree of disquiet. But you know, there's no doubt in my mind that Nimbin is what brings people to this area a lot of the time. Apart from the fact that Nimbin's beautiful, and people know that, I think the tourism group in Lismore have really recognised it, and every time they promote Lismore they use the name Nimbin. Now it's 'the Lismore-Nimbin' region. I want to reflect on a comment that was made in council a while ago. Whilst there are councillors that recognise that Nimbin is an incredibly valuable asset that we have to promote, I remember we were talking about Japanese
tourists coming to Lismore, and I said: 'Well, you know Nimbin gets Japanese tourists, and
we've never put out any sort of promotional tourist-attracting publicity', [and one councillor]
said: 'They must have lost their way'. They just don't want to recognise that Nimbin is a very
valuable place, and it could be used for the benefit of everybody in a way that doesn't have to
compromise the lifestyle and integrity of the place for the people who live here.

So it's just interesting; I still have to battle a lot of that antagonism. Council workers who
won't come out here on their own, unless they've got someone else with them, because they
think they are going to be abused. Whereas I would see it as that you get challenged and
confronted when you come to Nimbin. You know: 'Why are you here? what are you doing?'.
It makes you think about what you're doing. And I've found that on a personal level it's been a
great place for my own growth, because you're challenged by a whole lot of things that you
can't turn a blind eye to because you're in a small place. If you find yourself reacting in a
fearful, or angry, or resentful way, it's because of something inside yourself, it's not what's
happening outside of you usually. I think that Nimbin's ability to challenge is a good thing, it's
one of Nimbin's strengths.

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KATIE LOVE
(self-edited 1996)

[I've lived in the area] Must be getting on eighteen years, something like that.

[Q: 'Who are the young people who hang around town?]
Some of them are our kids. When I say our kids, I mean the hippies that came up here and
settled, a lot of their kids aren't staying at home. Sometimes they have a younger family, or a
marriage break up, and the young people just get out, rather than hang about. A lot of them
come from other places, they're drawn here either by the media, or just the feeling that there's
something more here than they're experiencing. And I even find quite often that the people
who have lived here have gone away. Their young people, their kids often come back.
They're not always homeless for long, but they are drawn back here, even though their parents
have gone away. I haven't got all the answers, but the young people here seem to care for each
other a lot. They're full-on teenagers, reacting against the adults, and yet we seem to have
developed a fairly tribal group of young people who look out for each other. They don't
always have a lot of sympathy if someone's on smack or something like that, they just seem to
kind of leave them alone. I'm not saying that they can't cope with anything, they are very
caring young people.

It's interesting, I started helping with the kids in I think it was 1976, but they weren't youth,
they were kids, little kids. Because there were a lot of children on our community, the Co-op,
[Tuntable Falls Co-operative] I started a play group, and then we got a Preschool [on the
community, where Katie was the first teacher]. I knew nothing about kids till I had one of my
Appendix IV: Taped Interviews

own. When I come up here I had only one child, and the reason for a lot of my initial involvement was to get playmates for her.

Then I started to see that even the two and three year-olds were, in a way, homeless kids, a lot of them. And they were running around without a lot of attention, and that's why I started the playgroup, and that turned into a preschool, because I thought they needed it. I thought the parents needed childcare, and they did! A lot of the teenagers that I deal with now, we have a little eye-to-eye contact, and yeah, they know that I knew them when they were three.

Well, this is my idea of Nimbin: to me the Nimbin I relate to is the hippy scene, not the Nimbin that was here originally, when it was probably just the town. It's something that we actually created, out of the Aquarius dreams. And to me it's a place, it's a home, well it's a feeling of home, that's what I'm trying to say. I don't feel that anyone here is really homeless. Well, that's the way I used to feel. It's a little bit harder now, with all the smack scene and the alienation, but I'm talking a few years ago.

What's changed? It's that, well actually for a long time, we've attracted too many needy people, and so we get a lot of people we can't cope with at all. We're expected to give too much love, and we don't always get love in return, so for a lot of people we feel cut off, mainly from the town itself. Well, we might be involved, as always. Because with everything I've done with youth, I've grown too, along with my child.

Now, my daughter doesn't live here any more, she's twenty one, she's at Uni in Sydney. And I just do my best, with what I think they need. I'd like them to have life skills, it doesn't have to be a certificate even, it's just abilities, like the feeling of accomplishment, being able to sew, make some nice clothes, or build something, play games even, you know whatever. Just for the feeling that they can do things. I've worked in housing youth for years. I've been on housing committees because there's a need for housing, but at times its exhausting trying to just get the government to create some housing. I really think that the more houses we build, the more people we attract.

That's why our projects for youth have been geared at the young people that we really want to encourage. The house we've got is a student house, the co-op we are trying to create is for young parents who have already got their babies, and maybe are having another one. Some of them are alone, and some of them are young couples, and they are getting priced out here. We actually have created something which is for the public, its actually a beautiful thing. You can see that it's needed because of the price of land, and in the process we've priced our own children out. And that's partly why I've tried to compensate for that, by creating at least some housing, places they can move in and out of. The multiple occupancies are still filling up. There's people who have got their share, and they're still saving up to build a house. There's still plenty of room, but there's more and more people attracted to this dream of ours. In a way, we've left our own kids out a little bit, so I just want to balance that out.

We have what they call a 'client group'. That's because it's taken so long to get this project that most of them have managed to fit in somewhere. Some of them have fitted in at Tuntable, some of them have gone away to Queensland. The actual target group isn't necessarily the one
we started out with. But we've kept on with it, because there is still that need, and more and more of our own children will be having babies soon. So I think: 'We'll plug on with it'.

Tuntable is now closed to the extent that they're only giving shares to their own children, and Tuntable has always accommodated heaps of people. It's not always ownerships, sometimes it's a rental, but it has helped the problem a lot. And so have a lot of the MOs, and a lot of the children have got the space, or they have inherited it. But there's more and more people arriving.

To me, the sort of tourists that I want to attract here are almost pilgrims, coming to learn. This has always been a learning place I believe, and my experience of it is, well, if you stay here long enough, you become a teacher. People come here to find something a bit different, and they take a little bit of Nimbin away. Nimbin's not always happening, but what we've spread all over the country, through people visiting here, we don't even know. But you read Grass Roots and things like that, and I'd see names and places and faces in that, and it just makes me realise that they didn't stay here necessarily, but they took a little bit away, and we have spread it. But Nimbin's sometimes been a little bit depleted by people not being able to get it together here. For instance, it's a fairly rugged place, climate wise.

No way has been adequate! We've tried to get educational programs and it's taken years. Now we get a few things trickling through, Skillshare and the like. By the time we get it there isn't the same youth that we had years ago. Things are necessary right now, if they're to be helped. But it's just a funny climate at the moment. The young people don't have a lot to be here for, at the moment. I feel the government has taken too long to acknowledge that we can do something with some of their money, and that we do make the best of it. Often, the money that they give us is only given with their stipulations, their standards, not ours. If they'd given us all the money that they now say we received, that the [youth housing] co-op is going to cost, we could probably house every youth for the next five years, but they won't let us do it that way. A lot of it's voluntary. Well often I am doing things that I don't necessarily want to do, and I didn't really offer to do. Too much is expected of key people, but a lot of that is our own problem, we have to learn to say no. That's a skill I'm only just learning, my body is teaching me by packing it in on me regularly. I've just been to the chiropractor, I go every fortnight at the moment, I have to listen to my body and say: 'No, don't do it all'. I don't always want to do these long hours.

[The drug scene] is pretty bad. In just the one main street, Nimbin has seen a lot in the last few years, things that we'd rather not have seen. A lot of the hippies are just cutting off and getting out of it in their little bit of heaven; doing their own thing, and trying to just herd their little family around and keep them out of it.

But, what happens, of course, is that the teenagers of twelve or thirteen come into town anyway, and that's what makes me sad, that they don't help us to make it a nice scene for them. Teenagers always want to come to where the action is, and the action has not been all that crash-hot in the last few years on the streets of Nimbin. Really, I think if we just keep trying and not get disillusioned, the scene we dreamed of will prevail. We on the Aquarius Foundation have got a dream of having another celebration: in 1998 it will be twenty five years since the Woodstock-Nimbin connection, and we've got a sister village happening with Woodstock. And by then we hope that if we keep going, and keep trying to get Nimbin
positive, if we just keep believing, and keep trying, then we'll have something to show for all our work.

Well, a way back I went through a stage of being almost cynical, not quite, but it was the people I was working with. Then I dropped out of working and went to Khatmandu, and somehow absorbed all the beautiful culture there, and I came back a hippy. And I just saw beautiful people, poor but happy, and that was my dream. I didn't need a job, particularly as a career, or money, I wanted happiness. And that's what I'd like: a happy, creative, joyful scene here, with love and affection for young people, and respect between the generations.

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'BILL'
(unavailable)

Well, I think a lot of us have that sort of late sixties or early seventies dream of going back to the country. Being self sufficient, self supporting, not even living on the dole, as best we could trying to just keep away from everything, dropping out. I think a lot of us try to have dream of dropping out and being in the country and doing just what we had to. There's nothing keeping the sixties, seventies dream and I think a lot of them in this area are the young people who have really, really and truly got it together. We've built our own homes and probably ten, fifteen, twenty years down the track, we've got our own homes, I've got myself to where I work a few days a week. I spend as much time as I can with my family, I try and be as little dependant on the system as I can. I live a very free and very comfortable life. We're not in a rat race, and to me Nimbin, well I don't care about the bloody tourists, I didn't come here to be a freak show, I didn't come here to be a sideshow. I don't care about Sixty Minutes, or any of that. This is my home, and this is what's been provoking the whole issue. I came here because a) the climate was good, b) they were life-loving people.

The people in town are nothing like the hills people. The people in town do nothing, they sit around all day long deal, get out of it, and do nothing, absolutely nothing. They bore me to tears, they bore the hills people to tears. We're out there doing stuff, and they are doing nothing, there is a strong division there. I mean, I also think we get on with the older types, you know the National Party, straights, rednecks, whatever you want to call them. We're starting to get a lot more opportunity there, they're quite happy, a lot of them don't care what we're doing. They see what we've done on next to nothing. They've come to accept us, they don't like the town either, and we don't want to have anything to do with the town crowd.

What do I see wrong with it? It's catering too much to media sensation, it's catering too much to the tourists. The hard drug problem? the dealing is the problem. Most of the old hippies, if they were going to smoke dope, would give it away, and share it, it was a social thing. It was the integral part of our life, it still is. You know like, you drink a glass of red wine, it's a social thing, if you haven't got some I'll give you some. But there's sleazebag, wheeling and
dealing, smackhead types, selling to tourists for copious amounts of money, driving hoon cars, forget it! Now, most hills people are more interested in riding horses, than they would, you know, drive cars.

And I find that nauseating, I really do, I don't like it, and I'd like to see the town rid of those people, they're not alternates, they're just, you know, the flotsam and jetsam from the city. They were used to hanging around the streets in the cities, and now they're hanging around the streets of our little town. They've wrecked the town, they've ruined it, its gone. It's not going to fall to pieces, it's fallen to pieces, it's finished, it's finito. You know, I can't walk barefoot in my town any more. My kids can't sit on the pavement any more. You've got dealers with their dogs, who wants it? I don't need it! I live a long way out of town, I live down an impossible dirt track. I find them [needles] all over the road, I find them in my child's bus stop, I find them in the woodshed. There is no way that those needles can get there from the needle exchange. We are very secluded, we are very private. It took us years to get the power up there, and yet I've got needles there. You know, I can't get stuff delivered from town because they say our track's impossible, and I've got bloody needles up there. And I'm not talking one or two, I'm talking twenty-five this year, at least twenty-five this year. Why put them where my child gets the bus? My child walks to the bus stop, and we can't walk barefoot through our bush any more.

My daughter has what she calls her fairy cubby house, and it was in a beautiful bit of rainforest, and OK, I guess it's a bit cosmic, but we really like it and we planted the orchids. And we'd go there on a hot day, it's ours, we paid for it, but the junkies dump needles in there. I don't like having to do things that I don't want to do, like shut the gates, write signs saying 'piss off', you know, 'trespassers will be prosecuted'. I don't like people on my land now, but before I used to; a few years ago if someone wanted to come and live there I'd say, go for it. I'd let people in there for months; we can't have that any more because of the bloody needles, and it's only junkies that do that, the last two years, two to three years.

Well, I always liked that tradition, you know, my house has never been robbed. I've always felt that if someone stole, then they would be needing it more than me, and I've never been ripped off. I don't believe in it, and it just goes against my whole philosophy, to have a house with locks on it. And I like the idea if you came to my house and we were out, the stove is always on, there's a pot on the stove with hot water, get yourself a cup of tea, do what you need and go. I like that idea, that if you want to go and pick some fruit that's fine, that doesn't worry me. Now I'm worried. You know now, we're having to deal with, you know now we are talking about things like maybe a few dogs around the place. I mean, one of the things that upset us is even just living here, and they'll probably end up causing us to move. We've created what's taken us years and years and we've had no help from family or friends, we've done it all ourselves. Oh friends have helped us build, but we have no money and we've built ourselves a home. I've got a beautiful place there, everything's just perfect, I have a good network of people, but I now having to shut my gate when we go out. We're now talking about putting locks on the house, and now lots of hills people are talking about getting Alsatians, Dobermans. People up here talk about putting axes under their beds, buying guns, and what's it for?

It's not for dope growers, it's the junkies. The junkies come, and rip off people's crops. If they're not ripping off crops they're ripping off your TV, they're chasing your video, if it's not
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your video, their ransacking your house. They're totally immoral people. It comes down to always being frightened, because of the junkies. There's too many, there's far too many. You go into town at times, and there's forty or fifty of them, hanging around the street like packs of bloody dogs. No one needs that, no one needs it. They're coming here because, they wreck the town, they've taken over. No one's looking at a solution, a lot of it's our own fault, we're far too tolerant. We've got to get a distinction between drugs, you know if you've got someone who's stoned, they're not going to upset anyone, let's face it, if he smokes too much pot, he's going to fall over in the gutter and smile, and he's not going to be a worry. Junkies have got expensive habits, junkies are immoral. I know, I've got a brother who's one. He's a rip off merchant, and all his junkie friends are. They'd steal from their children, you know, I've got no time for them. And until such time as they make a distinction between the drugs, we're in trouble.

The pot heads, leave them alone and crack down like crazy on the smack dealers. The other thing that I think is happening is they should really start examining their little crutch, about selling dope. I think it should never be sold, I think if you're going to grow, give it away. It was never intended to be a commercial crop, it was part of a dream, you know, it was part of why we were all here, it was something that was used, it was part of our whole social cultural thing, it was never meant to pay for the rego.

I came here, to find life-minded people. I'd lived in other parts of Australia, and I've lived right across the world, and I've lived in some very, very, violent societies, well I won't mention any, but I've lived in some very violent places. I came here, because when I came to this country, there was a lot of life-minded people, and I think it's very tragic that now were starting to lose them, they're starting to go. A lot of them are moving to Victoria, places like Castlemaine. The craft people are moving down there, a lot of people are moving up to Queensland. A lot of the alternates, and what I would call real alternates, the creative people, have had enough, they've just had enough.

I think by making the circus, this media circus, by bringing the tourists and feeding off it, these people aren't making crafts or anything, but they'll do anything for these tourists, I think it's awful. I would be happier if they were giving them the dope and saying come and have a look at this chair that I made, or something like that. Give up this sleazy, hell of a town.

I personally think it's a real problem, I don't think that it should ever be sold, that's just my own cosmic sort of old hippy hangover, or whatever you want to call it. I've never bought dope in my life and I've never sold it, and I never would. I think it makes for bad karma, really, extremely bad karma, to make money out of the stuff. I just think it's wrong, to me it just feels nauseatingly wrong. And the reason that most of the people are selling in town is because it's full of smack addicts. And going back, I mean the counter-culture, you know, twenty odd years, and smackies have always been horrible, they've always been ghastly. Many a time, I mean, you have too many cookies at a party, and people get over the top, and there's a camaraderie amongst pot heads, there's a friendship, there's a sort of even sharing, there's a pleasantness about it. Piss heads don't have a nice attitude to each other, if they're not getting it, they will be all over each other. I find that junkies are dogs, you know they'll watch someone in town use smack or cocaine in town, they'll watch someone O.D., he'd crawl out and nearly die, but they won't help him. I find that nauseating about junkies, junkies are not a
community, they're just a bunch of animals that just abuse the rules, you know. Keep them away from us! Make the needle exchange a needle exchange. Make it something that's done properly.

You know, I'm not anti-drugs, don't get me wrong, but they've got to be used. And I don't want to see anyone capitalise on the tourism in Nimbin. Nimbin doesn't want to capitalise on the drug trade. I think it's awful. We stand for a lot, lot more than a handful of bloody dealers, it's just not on. For the old hippies we stand for absolutely careful use of resources. Never have more than you need, never have more than a thousand dollars in the bank. If you've got more money than that, give it to someone else. I really believe that, really strongly. If you help people, don't say well I give two thirds and you give two thirds. It will come back. That's what I like about living in the hills. I like to give without it coming back. You know this money stuff is wrong, it's really wrong.

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'FIONA'
(not edited)

[I've been working with injecting drug users] For two years.

Yeah, I think probably there is a few in Nimbin that don't mind it being known, and that's probably pretty unusual in Lismore. In terms of drugs? Yes, there's probably a lot less injecting drug use in Nimbin, although there is some still, but I'd say that there's far more in Lismore. And certainly I've seen some more chronic injecting drug users who live in Lismore, as opposed to that level of injecting drug use in Nimbin. There probably is more growing and use of marijuana, that's just a feeling in Nimbin, but I don't know.

Well quite a lot of injecting drug users use cannabis to get off heroin. Which I think is quite useful, and you use cannabis on top of methadone to get the same sort of effect, which is quite useful too, probably other people will tell you that as well. I think it is quite useful in that sense, that people who need to calm themselves down, slow down, things like that, can use cannabis quite effectively.

For a start I just think it's seen as such an eager group. I just think a lot of the blame stuff is totally out of whack with anything that really happens. Like, an instance with the community hall committee, who have blamed a huge amount of damage, thousands of dollars worth of damage, they've blamed it on intravenous drug users.

Now most of our clients out there have their own place to stay, or stay with friends. There's not a lot in town of an afternoon, evening or night, they tend to be around more in the mornings, it just doesn't fit. I think it was actually whole tins of paint and building materials being wrecked, and it just reeks of adolescent stuff. Apart from anything else, there is a lot of
young adolescents that are hanging around town, who do not have places to stay. I don't want to immediately blame another group, but it's an example, yeah. Whereas, the blame is being put on the intravenous drug users, and often it's not rational, anyway that's how I feel.

Well, better accommodation for some people, a lot more support in the form of groups, a lot more support around their own sort of self support, in the use of methadone, or having a methadone lifestyle. They probably do that a bit, but probably less though than in some other areas where people would have to keep it more secret than what they do out there, but they definitely do. And there's definitely a big element out there of your run-of-the-mill people, who do not have enough understanding of what it's all about and are very, very critical of intravenous drug users, and programs, and people on methadone. I think its an across the board thing throughout Australia, but unfortunately I've come up against a sort of a harder element out there, because it's not hidden out there, it's not hidden like in Canberra, for example. And because people have to face it everyday, they've either gone one way or the other, and a lot of people have become very anti- without any information, or with very little information.

People still see needle exchange all the time as encouraging drug use and they don't seem to be able to understand the sort of concepts that the health department is into, like that we're here to minimise harm. And the biggest possible harm from drug use in the long term is HIV, to the whole community.

Instead of being able to see that we've done incredibly well in that area, compared to America and a lot of other countries, that basically they just have to stop saying this is encouraging the drug use. They just cant see that this is a reality, that people are there because the drug is there, and people are there because they want the drug. Until you look at those issues, and why people are wanting drugs, and not to be sort of totally connected to our work-ethic type of society all the time. You know why they want to getaway from that a bit. It's easier, not really looking at the real issues around all that stuff. But a lot of people are very threatened by the fact that people want to get away from that, from our type of society, and get out of it. But you know, the majority of those people also are not coping with our sort of society. Because they don't have proper incomes, they don't have access to work, or anything useful to do in their lives that they feel OK about, and a lot of them, because of their backgrounds, because there's a lot around incest, child abuse, and an enormous amount around lots of grief issues, that people have not come to terms with. I mean, this is not all users, but it's probably a majority.

People see the presented behaviour of drug users and they see a few people that stand out in our society because they're not coping. They don't see the huge numbers that are actually coping even though they use drugs, which a lot of our society does anyway. They don't see the underlying stuff of why those people might be doing this, all they see is presented behaviour.

A lot of people live in very sub-standard accommodation, where they've got to collect water, where they've got no proper heating. Even though it's probably a moderate climate, there is still a few months of winter, where having not proper doors on a house or things like that, or mud floors, or whatever. Sometimes the accommodation is inadequate, and it can be quite inadequate with young children, safety wise.
Yes, unfortunately there are a few people that are slack [about discarded needles]. Part of the culture around using is to piss off authority. I think there is a combination of things going on here. That is, there's people that come in to the community to use and don't give a stuff. I have witnessed that myself, where I've given out a needle, and I'll go into the men's toilets five minutes later, and there'll be the same packet on the ground, and I've given it to someone I've never seen before. I've talked to them about how to dispose of it, there's a bin right there for them to dispose it in and they haven't. So I have witnessed that one and I also know that there are places where they are being left. It is sometimes only accessed by locals; there's a minority of people who for different reasons, paranoia and police would be a big part of those reasons, also, an attitude to authority would be a small element as well sometimes. We're often talking about a few [needles] a day, I would guess a few a day. Often we give out packets of ten, one's been used out of it, and one might be disposed of OK, and the others that aren't actually used have been thrown somewhere. So, there's a combination of things going on there: there's people that are paranoid. It's not as bad as what people make out. Often the places that people do dispose of them unsafely are places that most people wouldn't access, so, they are places that people go to use because there's no safe house, which is a huge issue. I'd really like to see a safe house happening, and a lot of people, have suggested it in the community, even people that are quite biased against using. You just give it out, collect it all, it all happens there, and it could be really good to have that facility. But the Health Departments not exactly OK about it, and I know that within the Health Department there would be a lot of resistance to doing it.

I don't think cannabis, because of the cost of cannabis, and things like that, that people are using other drugs. I think people generally are using other drugs if they're interested and want to experiment. Well, a lot of people do make that comparison, like rural areas where its easier to sell cannabis, and grow cannabis. There is a less client related, and I'd certainly say for my clients, that I know of very little client stuff, involved in being able to score heroin. If you take out the drug element, and that's selling cannabis, or selling a few other deals to be able to get your own score, or connecting people. I know of very little criminal activity, like break and enters. But a lot of people associate it with intravenous drug using in the city, where it is probably much harder to grow cannabis, or to support it in any other way.

Well, I don't know what would happen there. I mean, what I find really interesting, is the people that are using those methods to support their own addictions still really want cannabis decriminalised. They do not want to be exposed to the dangers of supporting their addiction. A lot of people who are making money out of it still want it decriminalised. And to my way of thinking, you know, there will still be a market there if it is decriminalised. The costs won't be the same, and maybe there can be a controlled market, which some of those people can still make money out of, I don't know.

Well, I think they are fairly different. I think in a rural setting you are much more able to get some of your clients help. I think my big thing would be that there needs to be a lot more community development work done by people who have knowledge in drug and alcohol stuff, and in intravenous drug using stuff. For these people to be getting services and for things to change. So by community development I mean like setting up courses, setting up support systems for these people, setting up housing, setting up help, all that sort of thing. What the problem at the moment is that you've got to do service delivery, client work, and help work
and you just can't cover it all. You know, over the couple of years that I've been around it, the minimum amount of community development stuff, I don't think there is a whole lot, that you can do because you just can't keep pushing at it, and doing everything else as well.

Yeah definitely, and I've helped some incredibly needy people not always, but I'd say, like I was saying before that's only a small amount of the people that you see present. There's a lot of people out there that are quite functioning, and managing in their own homes, and with their children and everything else. It's a drug of choice, and they manage to keep it in control, and then it's not controlling them.

[Q: Do injectors suffer from discrimination?]
I think it's a very big problem. I think that generally these people are very under-confident, very lacking in most standard stuff, it's very hard for them especially to go to a system which oppresses them. Because they are intravenous drug users that this is a bad thing for them, and for their children, but they can't use the police, like in domestic violence situations, in other violent situations, that may involve the drug, they cannot use the police.

Because, the police would focus on that, rather than what they are being asked to look at, and a lot of people won't bring the police in, in that situation. We had a sort of informal ballot last week, and that's one of the big issues that came up, was that people cannot use the police in drug violent situations, because of the likelihood of people being charged with, you know, drug stuff. I'd really actually like to see it negotiated, that police go into those situations and not look at the drug side at all, just look at the domestic violence, sexual assault etc.

[Q: It's like the discrimination against gays?]
Yeah, exactly, it is and you know, before it was because gay people were just going to be victimised by police as well, and now that's not OK for that to happen. Now, it's still in [...] of these people will be victimised by the police as well, because they are in a victim position in our society, and until that changes I don't know if we are going to get very far with that one. Yeah, very concerned, and also very concerned that the system is looking at 'user pays', which, when you look at it in a realistic prospective, people have been looking at America, and its HIV rights for many years. In comparison to Australia, who introduced needle exchange very early on, and has stopped us from having that second wave and third wave in Australia, and reduced the likely numbers by thousands and thousands. The reality is that America has corner stores where you can buy needles. The reality also is that people in this category will not buy needles, and that's what has happened in the States, because the programs are not there, and because the needles have not been provided free to an impoverished class of people. Then it has not worked, the information is not there also. But I just don't believe that if we have a user pays situation, that it's going to work.

It is, except for the fit pack scheme, in the chemists is if you return a pack, it's actually free. So, if they change it to everything having to be payed for, I have great concerns that needles will be shared again. It's one thing to be able to get, in a negative sense, it's one thing to be able to get the money together for the drug, but to be able to get it together for the equipment and everything else as well, I mean, there's a lot of functional people out there that can, but there's also quite a few people that won't.
Yeah, well there's definitely a [...?] within the group, that it's not a reality for them. They need to be properly educating people within the community, who have those sort of community development positions, to take into account drug and alcohol needs, to take into account needle exchange stuff. They also need to be just getting more to the general public, and other community organisations about what its all about, about drug and alcohol awareness. Young people are crying out for more information about drugs and alcohol in this country. Every classroom you go into, grade 9, 10, 11 and 12, if you do anything around health, then they will want to know about drugs and alcohol. At the moment it's just not being addressed, it's not being covered. We're available to do it but it's only just starting to happen, and some schools cover it and some schools don't. So, it's very minimal at the moment from what I understand. I actually haven't done anything with this service, but I know other people have.

Well, I haven't worked around injecting drug users for a long time. I don't think I've got the background to know that; I've worked mainly in refuges, youth refuges. I would say that in all youth refuges that I have worked in, that misses in a lot of rural areas of NSW. That young people have had access to the injecting drug community because they have been on and off the street. So, I would say I just think its more open here, I think that it exists everywhere. Certainly, talking to other needle exchange workers, who work in places like Broken Hill, and out west and stuff, it exists everywhere. Maybe it's a bit different in some places, I don't think so, I think there's similar problems. I suppose the big thing for me over the last couple of years, working around this area and getting to know a bit more, is how incredibly discriminated against these people are, and how disempowered they are. Because they don't know anything else, they do take on a victim role, and it's very hard for people to break out of that, to get on with their lives, even though quite a lot of them are doing it. It's very hard for them to continually try and access services and things, when a lot of people in those services don't have a good enough understanding of what this whole area is all about, how to encourage people to get out. What people are up against is that even within the Health Department, within services, people have got a limited understanding. But also probably much more so within the wider community, with real estate agents, with our housing services, with a lot of the things like that.

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'PETER'
(self-edited 1996)

[I've lived in the area] On and off, for about eight years, but I've lived here full time for the past eighteen months. I'm 25 -30. The scene in Sydney, well it tends to be more reliant on the sex scene, the dealers make their money through prostitution. Not directly themselves, not as pimps, but as suppliers of drugs to the workers. No, I'm talking about the injecting drug scene right-across-the-board. I started using in the gay scene, but I witnessed the IV [intravenous] drug scene across-the-board, twenty-four hours a day. I lived and worked amongst it. They tended to work themselves to supply the excess cash — they usually had horrible habits, that's why they worked, or their partners worked. They were on heroin,
cocaine, yeah coke freaks selling smack, so that they don't use their profits, or coke users selling heroin, heroin users selling coke.

[they sell different drugs from what they use?]
Yes, guarding against using it all. It's funny, my experience was that we worked to buy the drug, and we used the drug to forget about working. Yeah we needed it, so we had to go out and work, and so we'd do our jobs, and then we'd go out and get blind. Vicious little circle: you eat, sleep, work and use, not necessarily in that order, but somewhere amongst it all, you sleep. And you're buying from people you know — everyone knows everyone. I mean, the cops know everyone!

Yes, it's damned easy [to score what you want], everyone knows everyone. [On the north coast] For good quality gear, you have to know somebody within the scene. It's almost impossible [in Nimbin] to buy good shit, you don't know what you're buying. Every time I have bought here, even with connections around here, I have scored shit. Lismore's almost impossible, but [if you do score] the quality is better. I'm talking from my own personal experience. No, no, [it is easier to score] in the cities, not just in Sydney. If you've got the cash, you can get anything you like. Around here, I can't picture any local kid, young person, you know, even if they have gone away and got a habit, coming back and finding it easy to score, because of the family atmosphere of this place. Yeah, everyone knows each other's business, I mean just around Nimbin, yeah.

Lismore's a complete rip off, I mean if you get on at all, most people I know get ripped off, they just get ripped off, if it ever turns up. The gear never turns up. And every time they give their money to people they walk, you know, come back a week or two later, cop a beating, and it's all sort of forgotten about. They've either tried to deal and lost out badly, or their habit has just got too high, their tolerance has got too high. They not only cut into the profit, they cut into the stuff that they're supposed to sell, so to break even they go on scamming on ways to cut the gear down until there's almost nothing. [The drug might be cut with] A variety of things, the friendly cut is glucose, and that's nice to the system, you know the body doesn't mind that, but I've heard of psych drugs,..... Largactil, one of those, Artane, Artane being cut with some gear a year or so ago. It was sending its victims around the twist. I think it killed one person out here [Nimbin]. I don't know [if there's been a lot of overdoses in Nimbin].

The services in Sydney were designed as user-friendly as possible. The APC [Australian Prostitutes Collective] in the late eighties, Kirkton Road clinic, Albion Street Clinic, NSW Users and AIDS Association [NUUA]. They were all designed, they were all funded specifically, for the people that they cater for: IV users, HIV clients, prostitutes, yeah street kids, parlour workers, street workers, anyone, anyone off the street. Completely across-the-board, the groups that the other services just can't cater for, they can't cater for it, they can't handle it. A lot of the health workers within the system, you know, just have the wrong idea. Well, often their attitudes. Health workers attitudes towards IV users for instance, is the same as the straight community's, attitudes towards gays and gay ideas: as being scum. You know, even trying to pick up needles on occasions, from one particular service in Lismore, was really hard. Not only did we have to pay for it, but the attitude of the little queen behind the desk just sucked.
You know, she treated us like shit, and my gay friends basically refused to use that service after that, and went to another service that was a little more friendly. Yeah, they seem to have to do these courses, to sort of bring them up to date on the needs of IV drug-using and HIV positive people, and people with HEP. They don't seem to work on their attitudes at all. You know, they come into the service with the knowledge, but are really down on people when they are supposed to be supportive. They need to be supportive. The last thing a person needs to find out, you know, after they receive the bad news, is you know, these down people, these people treating them like shit.

IV users, gays, the services we've got are fine. The other groups I'm thinking of just need more in-depth training, looking at the individual worker and seeing what they have to offer, and you know, just drawing that to the surface. Also finding out, maybe hitting them with trick questions to find out what their attitudes towards different groups of people are, and maybe removing them from that area, get them working in another area. You know, these services provide plenty of services, but you have to draw the right people in for the right job, and move the other people on, otherwise you're going to fail. There's nothing worse than having a lot of sick people around, who are sick because they're too nervous about utilising the services that are available. It's sad.

No, Nimbin has no more of a drug problem than any other place in Australia. It's just that Nimbin gets more media attention than any other country town. In fact, fifteen years ago, it was Mullumbimby. I mean Christ, no! No.

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'I WILL'
(not edited)

I've lived in the general area for 25 years. A sister of my lover at the time was living up here, and she was sending back letters saying how wonderful the place was, and so we came up and fell in love with the place, and really considered it sort of home territory ever since. [Nimbin was] Much more innocent, people weren't on the dole. There wasn't any great wealth around, and people had to depend on each other for survival, and fun, and amusement, and romance, and food, accommodation, clothes.

Well, because land was so cheap in those days, people bought up and all of a sudden as the energy attracted more and more people to the area, the real estate prices started accelerating in an upward direction. And so, people that got in cheap had all of a sudden become filthy rich land owners, and land barons that were selling off a portion of their 400 acres or something, with a hefty sort of kick along the road, sort of onward and upward. So people became less concerned for each others welfare and mutual friendships.

[Nimbin's drug problem?] I think in most people's minds, it was the wrong sort of drugs. Certain drugs are easy to take, and I think its a central problem in Nimbin. There is a criminal
Appendix IV: Taped Interviews

There's myriad things, there's the property developers right? I generally feel better about it then I did a little while ago. The healing techniques I recently became really aware of, have convinced me that if the amount of energy that was put into incarcerating people, and putting them through the legal process of humiliation, and sort of degradation, if that same energy could be put into allowing people to confront their own lives, and feel their own fears, and live through their own pains. The core of all these so called bad people are like good people, and so, when I see a drug problem, it's more of a perception problem. I don't know exactly what to do about it, other then to just gain more understanding and respect for it, and sometimes help possibly in turning the tide from fear to love. Because I think that unless we lean that lesson, we haven't got too much time left on this planet.

All those things, people did a whole lot of things, you know, there were moves in various semi-professional directions, people started setting up businesses, doing herb farms, you know, running restaurants, fishing, buying boats. Other people lived very simply, quietly building their house, some people are taking ten to fifteen years to build a two room hut, fastidiously crafting each little bit.

Well you know, a lot of people have gone a bit crazy, yes it's true, it's been a stress on the people, especially when kids are crying, and everything's mouldy, and the creeks are up, and you're out of tobacco. I actually only had good-time memories of those situations, up here. Getting through the storm waters and the rising river, you know it's all very adventurous, and life threatening, and adrenalin's rushing. So, I've only got fond memories of all that stuff. But I never really got into building a house, I'm only just doing that now, I'm looking at the most easiest way to create a base. Yes, I can imagine it being quite a stress on you, wanting to do a whole lot of things. Yes, a lot of stress, being a young man wanting to do a whole lot of other things, you know, in his imagination as well, possibly. Yeah, but like I said before, my association with Nimbin only touched that beginning, I was more in contact with the Mullumbimby area for years, possibly until the early eighties. The coast has become more cosmopolitan, and professional, and sun-tanned and efficient, yeah, and smiling. Nimbin still has this Aquarian middle-aged sort of smoke haze about it, but you know that's nice too, it's sort of somehow closer to nature, or an expression of being a bit more rooted in the earth, and less rooted in the twentieth century mind-games of planet earth.

I think it's fairly concentrated [artists and musicians], you know, relatively to other places around the joint. I can't be certain of that, I've heard comments from other people to that effect. I'm really not too sure. Most of the places I choose to land do have that element in them, so I don't know whether that exists everywhere, or whether it just exists in the places that I get attracted to.

Oh, I couldn't say that [I'll stay here for ever]. No. I did a couple of years jail, and I realised that a lot of moving was unnecessary, and it might be interesting to sit still and see what
Appendix IV: Taped Interviews

happens. But I've got dreams that could take me away from this place quite quickly, in body not particularly in spirit. At the same time, I've been sort of away from the heart of Nimbin, living in Lismore for the last few months or more, but at the same time sharing the purchase of land in the Nimbin region. Well, it was just because housing sort of popped up rather effortlessly, and I'm into effortlessness, if I can help it. I had my offspring with me, so it was appropriate to have a comfortable house.

And now that's no longer the case, so I'm preparing to build a house, or a boat, something simple that doesn't cost too much. I'd given more room for my children to be themselves. I had a fairly strict upbringing I'd say, yeah. Well I'd read the Primal Scream, and it did make a lot of sense, so I tried not to inflict the sins of my father. Well, I became aware of the tendencies that move through your body, like a replay of a record, that's how I do it. I still enjoy being a parent, yeah it goes on forever, it's just that you're not always actively interfacing. As they grow older they have less need for your guidance, they just sort of orbit in every so often, you know.

[I could live in] Either of those [around Australia or the world[]]. I'm pretty open to whatever in the creation of certain reality. The creation of bubbles of abundant living, live for yourself, enjoying and self wealth-generating, and that everyone involved becomes a winner, becomes more educated, knowing, understanding, compassionate, sort of participate in the emerging dance. That's a poetic way of describing what I'd like to see happen. Sort of like a soft revolution by agreement, within the confines in which people can objectively check out the results that go well; it works or it doesn't work, what aspects won't work for us, and they're free to create their own corporate realities.

I've never been to Greenwich Village, but I can sort of imagine what he means, because there's all sorts of mad (presumably mad) people, or a little bit eccentric, a little bit off-the-norm sort of people, expressing various viewpoints and acting out various characters and relationships with each other. You can say they are similar, but they are all different. There's a good heart here in Nimbin I think, underlying all the bullshit or superficial sort of wobbles that may go on in the field.

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'ROD'
(not edited)

I'm 20 [years old]. I have been living in Nimbin and around it, for the last two years. I like the open-mindedness of everyone around here, even though it stuffs a lot of people around as well, but as long as I don't get stuffed around its all right.

[Q: Do you think that Nimbin has a drug problem?]
Yeah, I do. Heroin and alcohol would be the problems. Well heroin, people running in the cafes and on the street, disturbing everyone, watching people, and not only people running, but
people dying in the toilets and that kind of thing. Getting carted up the street on a stretcher whenever they drop. Yeah, and alcohol I guess is a bit of a problem too, but on a different extreme, the violence, people going off at each other, alcoholics going off at junkies running.

Buy the pub, and maybe turn it into a ganja palace, something like that. Oh, keep the pool tables, and with maybe facilities for rehabilitation, or something like that, or with at least information about it. Yeah, just a place to go to smoke, play pool and eat and drink. With the heroin it seems to be fairly young people, because they don't last that long after they get into it, although there's a few old ones, but they seem to be [...] mind to it, they're the ones that totally burn out.

[I use] Marijuana sometimes, not tobacco. Acid sometimes. Both my parents were fairly free about explaining drugs, and their effects. Yeah, they're not trying to instil any fear in me, although I guess my mum had a bit of a fear of heroin, because my dad was a heroin addict. No, I knew what was going on, but like I've only recently become fully aware of the implications of that. When I was younger I knew, like I saw him a few times after not seeing him for ages, and he was pretty ill, I could tell that he wasn't healthy. I knew it was because of heroin, but I still wasn't really aware of what it is to be addicted to something. Now, I am more aware because I see it all the time. I think it's a behavioural pattern that is hard to get out of for a lot of people, more than an actual chemical thing, although it does seem to be a chemical thing as well.

I'd like to live in the bush, around here somewhere, and build free energy machines, and fly around in space ships.

Well, going to the extremes of freedom without looking at it sensibly. Yeah, not looking after themselves, a lot of people just don't look after themselves, because they are too interested in their senses. What I mean is, getting off too much on a lot of drugs, not that it's a bad thing to enjoy drugs, but when its a day-to-day thing. When you don't get other things done, like food, or looking after your children. I see heaps of people in town not really looking after their children very well because they're more preoccupied with what they have to do, because they have to, I guess. Yeah, I'd agree with that. Yeah, everyone seems to watch out for the kids in Nimbin. They've usually got somewhere to play, but they just don't seem to be getting any attention from their parents, yeah screaming a lot, because they're not getting any attention, from the people they want it from, rather than just anyone around.

Yeah, [I had] heaps of cousins mainly younger cousins. But I was just around them a lot, I hadn't done any nappy changing until the last couple of years, but I've just been around kids heaps. I wasn't actually in the city, I was out in the bush, on the outskirts of Melbourne. But I came up here because I wanted to see my father. Well, I saw it through my mums eye, in 1973. Yeah, I was in her womb at the first Nimbin festival. I haven't really talked to her much about the first one, I think what I can remember her saying is talking about building grass huts, or something. Sort of on an ego basis I guess, because of the hype of the place. Well when I came up, I lived through primary school over in, just near Mullumbimby. So I have always been around this area, or I was when I was younger anyway. Then down to Victoria, and then back up. I came to Nimbin, I had been here a couple of times, I came to the second Aquarius Festival when I was ten. It was great, heaps of kids just running around, plenty of things to do. Like I remember, this tent set up for all the kids who were building
stilts that you could actually make and use, and making hang gliders out of cardboard, things like that. Plus, it was just a massive festival for someone that small.

I guess there was heaps of people, but it wasn't like masses of people, it was pretty spread out, yeah, heaps of room to adventure around. Like, things to play on, kids circuses. Yeah, it did feel like [coming home] a little bit, I guess. Because I'd only been to the second festival, and a couple of other times I'd been, all I remember is just walking into the Rainbow when I was younger, it was a lot different then. Oh, it just seemed a lot wider, different tables and stuff, different set-up. Even then I haven't got very clear memories of that. I didn't really have a very clear picture in my head of Nimbin at all, other than that. Until I came up about three years ago, I just came up for a holiday, and stayed for a week or two. And then about a year after that I came up again and I decided to live here. Well, me and a friend, we hitched up from Melbourne. We wanted to find some work somewhere, that was just two years ago, I was 18. Because we were getting a bit bored with the area we were in, I guess. We stayed just out of town, not too far out of town. It seems to be getting a bit more full-on these days because, I mean, there's lots of people coming in from the cities, and not everyone wants to put up with anyone they don't know from the city because, oh I don't know, thieving and whatever, you know. A lot of the people up in the hills just aren't interested. A lot of the people up in the hills just stay in the hills, and hardly come into town at all, they try to avoid the place because of what they see as a drug problem with the heroin. No one seems to focus much on the alcohol. Well, I think that is just as much of a problem, only its more common, its all over the planet pretty much.

No, I don't mind going into town, I spend heaps of my time there, especially lately I haven't had a place to live. I've just got a place now. I've got a fair few friends around the place, where I can stay. It's sort of one-night jobs everywhere, either that, or in my car. It started to piss me off a bit.

Yeah, there's a lot of pretty full-on police activity happening. Yeah, the undercovers have got a six week program on at the moment, over Christmas. I think the focus has been on the smack dealing, yeah I've talked to them once, oh I didn't really talk to them, but I was at a table where they were talking to other people at the table. And they were giving us the rave, that they weren't really after the dope dealers (who I was sitting with).

They didn't say that specifically, but that's sort of what they were getting at, they were more after the smack. Well, it doesn't seem like that, this time, although they usually do go into a bit of that, just busting the dope dealers. At the moment it seems that they are actually focusing on the smack. And there's been a few searches of the smack dealers, and people known in the smack scene in Nimbin. No, not really [leaving the pot dealers alone], because they do end up searching dope dealers in the process, which is ridiculous, I think it should be decriminalised. Yeah well, there's heaps of smokers, and if they've got a little bit on them, and they just happen to talk to some junkie, or something, you know, next thing Ds are coming out and searching and whatever. That would be the fear of a lot of people, and then you know they're busted with a joint, and taken up the station.

Yeah, it happens at Christmas. I'm pretty sure it happened last Christmas. When the head season comes along they usually do helicopter raids around the hills, trying to find crops and stuff. But this year I think they came up for only two days. I don't think there's been enough
funding, or they're spending it more on the heroin or something. I think there is a changing consciousness all over the place, especially around here, and they are getting to realise that marijuana actually isn't the problem drug. Probably the next generation's coming up, and they're still into marijuana. A lot of judges, and people in high places, are actually for decriminalisation, because they see the ridiculousness of it. Because I mean, I don't see many people that are stoned bashing people up or being aggressive really at all. And as far as driving goes, all it really does is make you drive slower, and more carefully, and if I don't wanna move, I'll wait till later.

A lot of them [school friends smoke cannabis], most of them, yeah, it depends who was running it really. Possibly no,[I wouldn't have admitted to using pot if I was asked in a survey at school ] if I thought that the information would get known by the teachers. Because I remember the teachers searching the kids at school, and the high school, and busting them. Oh, it was an outer suburb that the high school was at. I remember I got asked to go to the office one day, there was some list of all the people suspected of smoking in the school grounds, and they meant pot, yeah, and dealing as well. And so, these kids were getting searched, taken to the office and getting searched sort of thing. There were rumours that would go around during the day, because as soon the first one happened, sort of thing, the information got out. I got searched and all they found was a packet of Tallyhos with half the top ripped off. I started smoking in year 9, I started smoking when I was about 15 or something.

[The drugs I used before pot] Alcohol, that was about it, apart from tobacco. No, oh I remember one day me and some kids in primary school got a whole packet, or two packets or something, and just sort of chain smoked them all, but that was about the extent of it I think. Yes,[pot] was pretty expensive, because like in Victoria it was about 20-25 dollars a gram was about standard, and that usually wasn't a gram anyway. As we got older we had a bit more money, and could buy quarters at a time, but to begin with it was sort of like, grow your own. I didn't have enough money to buy grams, so I used to grow my own.

[Q: What did your mother think?]

Oh, she was a bit worried, she gave me some worries about getting put in youth homes or something, which I thought was a bit ridiculous. I didn't really believe it, seeing as I only had one or two plants. Yeah, she smoked pot. No I never nicked pot from her, she maybe did from me, maybe not nicked, but sort of hassled me out for some. She used to tax a little bit off my plant, but other than that, she used to buy some off me occasionally, I was sort of buying quarters, and just smoking the excess, and selling grams to get the money back. And my schizophrenic uncle used to buy a bit off me. I did think about it a bit, but I didn't really get worried, because I didn't feel any signs of madness coming on. I think in my early years in high school I would have been a bit spun-out if I would have known that it could be hereditary. But I don't think I found that out until I was 15 or16, and then I didn't really feel worried about it. Well, I think I used to pretend that I was a bit worried about it. [He was] Pretty young, I think hes about25 now or something, so hes still pretty young. Yeah, he used to start talking about the devil. He spun me out a bit more later on. To begin with, I thought it was funny.
[I'm interested in things like perpetual motion] Well, I've got a lot of friends with a lot of good information about perpetual motion machines, water powered cars, all sorts of things to help the planet along. Stop the fossil fuels creating the effect that they're creating with the ozone layer, fuck-ups you might say.

Yeah, that does bother me, because if something doesn't get turned backwards soon I don't think that the planet will disappear, but I think humans will wipe themselves out pretty soon, if there's not a bit of reverse action happening. Not to mention probably the vast majority of all the other animals and plant life. Until the planet goes through another ice age, and renews itself again. So I think especially with transport we've got to get a lot smarter. There's heaps of people around for years working on free energy ideas and its sort of squashed. Peoples ideas have been put under the military use only, patent laws or whatever, which are international. They get threatened, the oil companies for instance would certainly want to stop anyone from giving information about free energy machines because it totally wipes out their source of income.

There's a dude, John Searl I think, he had a dream when he was younger about a free energy device. Then he worked in a bearing factory I think, and then he worked with the British Electricity Council or whatever, running all their electricity, you know. While he was there he built the free energy generator, which is the device he saw in his dream. I'm pretty sure it was the outcome of what he saw, anyway, it's a device that is a series of magnets, full of magnetic plates and bearings running around each other. When you set it in motion it gets faster and faster, unless you're slowing it down. If you've got coils around the outside, you can collect electric current off it, or you can collect straight from it by mechanical means. And so you can have your own 240 volt system in your house, just running off one of these or you can have it running your vehicle. It's also an anti gravity machine. Once it hits a certain peak, it becomes a super conductor, it gets colder and colder the faster it gets. Which is different to most generators; most generators, the faster they go, the more load they've got, they get hotter because of friction, different types of friction, mechanical and electro magnetic. This one, and also the atom-free generator, are perpetual motion machines. [these things] Pretty much [go forever]. It would run down eventually, I guess.

You know, after a few thousand years or something. Yeah, there's things that seem to create more energy than you're putting into them, they all seem to have the effect of getting colder the faster they go and getting to a point, where they actually lift off. So, if we get one of them built, we can fly around in the air.

I'd have one connected to cars, so we can just drive them around and it will look unsuspicious, and then if there's any evil forces after us we can just take off. Oil companies and police, if you wanted to run marijuana from a crop to somewhere, or from somewhere so somebody could sell it (I'm trying not to mention anything here). Yeah, you could sort of zoom along in your car, and pass by the cops. Then, when they start to chase you, just take off into the air. That would spin out a few police around the area, I think.

Yeah, I play the guitar. I want to learn as many instruments as I can, because I'm interested in music, not just one particular instrument. I think it's that the sounds resonate and create certain emotions and stuff, but I'm more interested in just the immediate pleasure of a song. I
haven't really written any songs, like I just sort of muck around, and experiment with different combinations of sounds and stuff.

And drawing, yeah, I usually use fine liners or something like that, and just the black breaking fine liners. I'm getting into colour a bit lately, pencils, whatever, anything really. I've tried painting, but I haven't really got into that, it's just drawing, yeah, but I don't think any of it is a direct result of coming to Nimbin. But it is a good place, like you can just sit around in town and draw, play guitar or whatever, just like if you're at home, with a bit of extra people around. I wouldn't feel comfortable doing that in any of the local towns around Victoria, where I was living, except maybe at a local market there, which was sort of a lot of hippies and stuff, a similar environment to Nimbin anyway, because of the people. That was in my area, but Nimbin's about the only place I would sort of feel comfortable playing the guitar. Drawing, I don't mind doing anywhere, really.

[Q: Why would you want to live on an MO?]
Because when you're living communally you get a lot of input from all different people. When you're just living in a space with one or two people, you seem to focus on, or I seem to find that, when people get to know each other, it's easier to spin-out at each other, because you see a lot of the stuff that you don't like in the other people coming up over and over again. Whereas, if I'm in a communal situation, I'm getting a lot of input from all different people. Well no, not straight away, anyway. I've noticed a lot of communes around the area, the people in them are constantly arguing. Because people are venting all their aggression onto each other, which they've built up, because they haven't sorted minor things out. Like, minor things become a lot more major, and they have to freak out at someone and go off on a big rave, a spin-out trip.

Hopefully, that's just an aspect of the last generation, and they'll get over it, and we can learn from it. Focusing on conflict resolution, something that I read recently, it sounded good. Instead of our main focus is usually on what the problem is, instead of how to compromise and sort it out. There's a lot of people not sorting out little things and working it out. Acceptance of each other, as well as trying to help people get through their bullshit, in as positive a way as possible, instead of looking at the negative aspects of yourself, in other people. That's about all I can think of, I haven't really lived communally. I lived in one communal situation, which wasn't any problem for me. I saw a few power games going on and stuff, but I didn't get very involved in them, and I was never the centre of any arguments or anything myself. So, I didn't get that close to the action or anything. I haven't experienced that yet.

Live communally with my own space, if I had the situation where I could go off to my own space, and not have my space invaded when I wanted to be away from people, but that's pretty hard in a communal situation, I guess. I should probably get over that idea of wanting to hide from things that are bothering me, because that is probably where half the problems I have come up against have arisen from anyway. People spinning out, and not really looking at why they're spinning out, and not looking at what's causing the situation you're in.
APPENDIX V

CROP GROWERS' SURVEY
METHOD

I decided to interview cannabis crop growers for information about the green economy. Investigation into cultivation of illicit crops was a difficult task, and my aim was to survey a small number of growers (12 - 16) using a design which paralleled the 1993 injectors' anonymous mailed back survey (de Launey 1993). In mid 1995 I conducted eight semi-structured interviews with cannabis crop growers, to query risks, profits, average weight and value of a plant, and other information about cannabis cultivation for the market. Initially I asked three key people in the community to distribute a total of sixteen questionnaires with stamped return envelopes. Only two of the sixteen questionnaires were returned to me by mail (the research was conducted at the same time as a large scale and particularly punitive police operation in Nimbin).

Given the poor response to the mailed survey (at that point only one had been returned by mail), I recruited growers through trusted third parties for face-to-face interviews. As a result I conducted six face-to-face interviews in mid 1995, based very loosely on the mailed-back questionnaire, I took notes on answers and comments in abbreviated form. Participation was voluntary, informed and anonymous and interview times ranged from five minutes to over one hour. Both the mailed responses were larger scale growers, and the responses in these two surveys do not resemble answers for any of the face-to-face interviews. A copy of the mailed questionnaire is provided in appendix I.

Occasional and small scale growing was extremely wide-spread and any small sample was unlikely to capture the astounding variety of growers. While I spoke informally with many people who grew small crops I took no notes, and I only briefly consider information that is derived from these informal conversations in my dissertation.

An obvious problem with investigating crop growers is that there is little information available to compare results with, and there is no way to ascertain the veracity of the information. This problem is endemic to research into illegal or otherwise proscribed activities.
The sample cannot be taken as representative of large scale growers in the region (about whom one can only speculate). I checked my results with a number of contacts in the Nimbin community (including cross-checks by some of the interviewed growers), and there was agreement among those who were consulted that the main details — weights, price ranges, problems, and so forth — were accurate. Despite every attempt to validate the results, the problem of validity remains. Because larger scale cultivation is both dangerous and secretive, it is extremely difficult to gain information from a group which faces prison, heavy fines, and confiscation of homes, vehicles, and other assets if arrested. Given the paucity of information about crop growers, the current research provides useful information in a difficult and little-researched area.

Tables of results follow.
TABLES OF RESULTS
(raw numbers)

Table 1: Profile of crop growers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grower</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Interview type</th>
<th>Av. number plants (recent crops)</th>
<th>Years growing crops</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Mailed</td>
<td>100-200</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Mailed</td>
<td>20* (x2 pa)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>20 -500</td>
<td>15-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>100 (x2 pa)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>1-16</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>10-40</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14-19</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>10-20</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(average of 20 female plants per 100 mixed sex, twice pa).

Table 2: Estimated value of cannabis leaf/ male plant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grower</th>
<th>$ value per plant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>nil (remove)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>200*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>20-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>30-50 (but pull it out)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>50 -100 (but eat it)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>nit (rip it out)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>nil (remove it)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 'Most growers throw the leaf away, not worth touching it'.

Table 3: Estimated value of cannabis leaf and tips (middle grade)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grower</th>
<th>$ value per plant</th>
<th>$ value per oz</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>not asked/na</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>400*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>20 -50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>not asked/na</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>100-500*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>nil*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>nil (give it away)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* leave it in ground to mature into heads
### Table 4:
**Average weight & weight range for one plant**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grower</th>
<th>average weight</th>
<th>weight range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 oz</td>
<td>1 - 3 oz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>na</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 lb*</td>
<td>1 - 4 lb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3 oz</td>
<td>1 oz - 10 lb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>about 8 oz*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5 oz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>4 oz</td>
<td>2 oz - 1 lb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>4-5 oz leaf, 2 oz heads</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* (if the grower is experienced

### Table 5:
**Estimated value seedy heads**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grower</th>
<th>$ value per plant</th>
<th>$ value per oz</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>average 500**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>150 - 200</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0 (people want no seed)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>depends*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>400</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Early: $350-450, middle: $300, late $150-200, but if dry up to $500 per ounce.
** As for next table: Very early or very late: $150-200, middle: $350-450, late $500 per ounce.

### Table 6:
**Estimated value Sinse/ unseeded heads**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grower</th>
<th>$ value per plant</th>
<th>$ value per oz</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>500*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>300-400</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1,000 - 2,000</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>300**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1,000 - 5,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1,000 (if 4 oz)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>300</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Harvest is March to June: $200-300, July-Feb: up to $500-600 per ounce.
** Very early or very late: $150-200, middle: $350-450, late $500 per ounce.

Transcripts of results follow.
Appendix V: Crop Growers' Interviews

TRANSCRIPTS
(as transcribed in note format)

Grower #1 (Mailed back)


Motivation to grow? Finance: it's the only way someone like me (ie unemployment benefits for 20 yrs) (unemployable) can make money & also my ideals motivate me. Every one should get high at least once.

Dangers/risk? Gun toting ripoffs including police. Helicopters

Rip offs? Every sort of ripoff indirectly. Directly only patch thieves and stash thieves and unpaid credit, I gave a pound to some friends to sell and they got held up by a shotgun.

Steps to minimise risks? It goes with the territory. Just got to keep quiet and keep your head down.

Adequate knowledge of drug laws? Yes.

Criteria? For growing a commercial amount its something ridiculous like 10 plants, Trafficking is 250 grams.

How sell? Sell it mainly to one person, Small amounts to general public in Nimbin.

Method changed over time? No.

Prefer sell to males females? No difference.


Profit? $50,000

How long ago? Last 12 months

Profit over last 2 years? $70,000

Weight range single plant? 1 oz - 3 oz

Average weight? 2 oz
Appendix V: Crop Growers’ Interviews

Av value of single plant? $500
Profit changed? Yes, Inflation: used to be $300 lb, now is $4000 lb
Spend profits on? Heroin, cars, boats, motor bikes, travel cocaine, ecstasy, children.
Market fluctuates? Seasonal: March to June is harvest season, $200 -300 oz, July to Feb out of season, prices up to $500-600 oz.
Doing in 1 year? Pulling off a good one. Five years? Same.
Why grow? To live.

* * *

Grower # 2  (Mailed back)

size crops range n? 1-100 (including M & F) Av size crop? 20 Fem. n crops pa? 2
Motive to grow? A pot smoker tired of paying money for an easily grown innocuous plant. The monetary gain in my case is not substantial, the money does come in handy,
Risks/ dangers? If caught and depending on quality/value (determined by police @ $2000 per plant regardless of size or sex) loss of liberty, alienation from neighbours/community, financial ruin, confiscation of assets.
Ripoffs? Personally none although one may be ripped off (ie they take the pot no cash reimbursement). Credit not repaid, standover tactics (eg persons unknown), pillage, ransack, physical attack, steal money & pot.
Steps to minimise risks? I tell no one that I am growing, have grown, or intend to grow. When harvested pot is moved surreptitiously and sold to a close friend. [They] then move the pot retail. Golden Rule NEVER SELL TO ANY PERSON YOU DON'T KNOW. EVEN IF THEY MAY BE A FRIEND OF A FRIEND. Loose lips sink ships!
Adequate knowledge penalties? No.
How sell crops? My pot is wholesaled to a known and trusted friend.
Method changed over time? Not really.
How change?  We have had to become even less visible ie working late at night or moving goods at peak traffic (vehicular) periods.

Prefer deal males/females?  For some reason it tends to be mostly males. Although I don't differentiate between male and female {dealers}, 95% of my customers are male.

Police ops changed business?  Yes, due to the choppers I space each plant about 50 ft from each other. I sow late (less time in ground, results in a smaller plant) Because of the secretive manner in which I dispose of goods my client base remains small but I am well acquainted with client.

Style planting changed?  Yes, dramatically. eg poor position more sites for same quantity. was, for example site 1: 20 plants [diagram circle with close spots]  Now it is: example site 1: 2 plants, 200 metres  site 2: 2 plants, etc [respondent drawn diagram shows small circles]

Value male leaf plant?  Very low THC content. No value. Poor smoking. To ensure pollination of female plants is negligible male plants are removed as soon as identified.

Value plant leaf & tip? $25 per ounce

Value seeded heads?  $150 to 250 per ounce depending on quality

Value sins?  $300 to 400 per ounce. Between $3,000 - $5,000 a lb

Comments:  Regardless of seed content, quality of pot whether sold by the pound or ounce, leaf is relatively worthless unless the availability of quality pot is unavailable. Then and only then is leaf & tip valuable.

* * *

Grower #3:  (Interviewer administered)


[I grow]  20 - 500 plants, no fixed pattern, depends on year and what you're talking about (notes:  Half crop male, 10% hermaphrodite, throw away half, if seed rest useless, gets ripped off).

Motivation?  I had a handful of seeds;  I don't think, I feel, I act.

Risks?  Police. Jail (that's number one), guys with hoods and shotguns, they're the physical dangers... the worst, and then there's the pocket [financial] dangers, like your rippers (they go out in range rovers, with kids on trail bikes who fan out, they take maps and work an area in grids).  Most of your thieves are your friends. Rip offs unpaid credit mainly;  crop rip-offs, mull rip-offs.

To minimise risks?  Aware of strangers, aware of cops, I've got a nose for it, I can smell it.
Appendix V: Crop Growers' Interviews

Adequate Knowledge of drug laws? Yes. Law can be inconsistent, depends on the magistrate, commercial quantity over 20 kg, but it depends on circumstances. The biggest problem with the laws at the moment are the inconsistencies. Some with identical charges will get off lightly, others harshly.

How sell? You gotta use your nose: each situation is different. Nothing is predictable.

Method of disposal changed? Yes.

Why? Police: helicopters, more sophisticated policing, more people growing, people growing smaller patches, and more smokers so more demand for what there is, and the cost of living is higher so people are trying to subsidise their wages, or dole. 10 to 20 plants makes 10 to 15 thousand dollars to subsidise your wages.

Prefer to sell to males or females? No difference. In some situations they may not get hassled, most cops are male; but evil doesn't discriminate on gender.

Have regular police operations changed way you do business? You gotta be a fox, you have to evolve, every day of your life you have to change. There's less and less forest, the environment around you becomes more and more crowded, less and less space for anonymity. That means more people watching you.

Has style of planting changed? Yes. Less ganja, less quantity, more quality. More return for high quality heads. [Explained: grow for females, unfertilised virgin is sinsemilla, high return and less risk because you have small amounts].

Comment: I'd love to have the opportunity to grow a plant outside my door. Legalise it.

Estimate of profit?: $ 30-40,000 (last crop ripped off, that was it's worth).

How long ago? 3-5 years.

Weight range of single plant? Average useless grower: 4 oz, a ‘reasonable’ grower 8 oz, experienced grower 1 to 4 lb.

Av weight of a plant?: There's problems with simple answer: Police may weigh plants wet, they lose 25 - 75% of weight drying. Growers don't sell trunk and roots, which police may weigh.

You have seed, but about 50% will be male, you throw it away, too bulky to sell; about 10% will be hermaphrodites, but you keep them in case they head, so about 40% are female. The weight of the plants depends on the soil, season, weather, el nino and so on, there's so many factors involved, and they'll change sex easily. Some dickhead up the road their pollen screws up your female plants. So half, or less of the crop is female. Sinsemilla (female, seedless heads) say $250 an oz, and you get anything from 4 to 8 oz, so $1,000 to $2,000. But it depends on the time and the demand.
What about a female that has seeded? If its seeded it's the same as a male, all people want is to smoke sins, no stalk, no seeds.

How about leaf? Leaf, $200 for the whole plant, if you can sell it. Most growers throw the leaf away, not worth touching it. Leaf and tips,$400 a plant, but again, most growers wouldn't touch it because you leave it to head. Most growers get 4 to 5 oz (incompetent), It's a skill to pull out 10-20 lb from a crop.

Profit changed over time? Yes.

Why? Has the price of petrol and toilet paper gone up?

Spend profit on? Women. I've got a gold credit card at the local brothel.

How does market fluctuate? [declined to answer]

What expect to be doing in one year? Travel: the foot of Mt Everest, the base camp, Nepal, Tibet.
What expect to be doing in five years? I don't know, in five years there'll be less forest.

Why grow? It drew me to the forest, put me in touch with the real world. To get medicine to the masses (instead of alcohol and cigarettes, you get a hit of ganja out to the masses). But the connectedness with nature, Gunja has taught me so much about being in touch with the forest.

Comments:
I remember a time they found a patch, some dickhead had put a patch beside mine, and Forestry (State) bulldozed the whole mountain side. I've seen them clear-fell virgin forest on slopes.. turn it to bare dirt, and then planted a pine tree forest. State Forestry, so many illegal practices, some of the executives work for Boral, those forestry guys should be investigated because of conflict of interest, and the management practices of forestry commission needs honesty. Old growth forest is being knocked down. Put plantation timber into fucked up areas like Gundagai. I've noticed over time I've been going out there, the deceit of the forestry commission. Forestry guys put in patches, and walk through looking for crops and ripping them off. My major complaint is Forestry Dept and heavy connection with Boral, who deliberately create conflict between foresters and loggers and greenies. They want a monopoly, cant lose, create conflicts, it closes down the small sawmills, so they have a monopoly. They buy out timber rights from the Forestry Commission for next to nothing. There should be an open and public inquiry.

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Grower #4 (Interviewer administered)

Male. Age group 20-29 Time growing crops?: 4 yrs.

Last crop? This yr n plants? Approx 100 n crops pa 2
Appendix V: Crop Growers' Interviews

Diff between patch & crop? patches 10-15 plants, crop 100s.

Prices:
- leaf: $20-50
- leaf & tip: $20-50 per oz
- female seeded: $100 per oz
- sins: $3,000 per plant

Av weight: av 3 oz per plant, range 1 oz to 10 lb (confirmed this).

Profit last crop? $300.

Why grow? I like the mull. I think its good to grow mull. I like doing it.

Risks/dangers? My concerns are that one plant is for the cops, 1 for the rip offs, 1 plant is going to be male, 1 plant goes to pests (termites, dry.. no water, etc), and the fifth plant is for you.

What do you do about rip offs (to avoid)? Don't try and do anything big time, just a few seeds straight in the ground, check after a month and pull out the males, don't visit too often, leave it to mother nature.

Sorts of rip offs? This most recent year I got ripped off.

How? Don't know, don't care: motorbike riders, mates, could be anyone. all I found was a blue shoelace.

How market? Give it to somebody you can trust, who's going to collect the money for you.

Know penalties for growing? Not particularly.

Prefer do business males or females (more reliable, less possibility of ripoffs, etc)? No.

Has style of planting changed over time (smaller plots)? No.

What expect to be doing in one year? Probably growing more good gunja, even if its only to give it away.

Anything else you want to say? Legalise it. Standardise all drugs. Licensing system for people who produce opiates, LSD, all pure grades (no shit in there), cocaine, hashish, and I reckon they should make Nimbin a national experiment.

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Appendix V: Crop Growers' Interviews

Grower # 5 (Interviewer - administered)

Female. Age 30-40 Time growing crops? 18 yrs (16 yrs every crop ripped off, all or half).

Value male or leaf? $30 - 50 oz (pull males out before females show sex).
Seeded heads and sinsemilla? Very early (or very late) in season $150 - 200 oz  
Middle of season $350 - 450 / 500 oz Late in season/dry $500 But it depends on quality as well as season. Prices can also fluctuate from one week to the next.

Weight range single plant? No two plants are the same, impossible to judge how much (weight) unless I can look at it. Ratio weight wet to dry plant 3:1. Never get 20 lb from one plant. Record is about 8 lb, that only happens once in a blue moon.

Size crops: Range? Lost most, last 2 yrs smaller n (4 or 5), got a pound each time (mostly for me). You can loose 70% of a crop to thieves, rot, wallabies, moths.

Risks/ dangers? Rip offs, 99% lost this way.

Fears: Going to turn male or hermaphrodites; one year every plant turned hermaphrodite.

Ripoffs? Never had a heavy rip off.

Prefer deal males/females? Sex doesn't worry me.

Style planting changed? (smaller plantings to avoid ripoffs).

Estimate profits last crop? None.

How long ago? This year.

Profits over p 2 yrs? Not much.

What spend profits on? To pay bills, mostly grow for personal use.

Comments:
Females different attitude to growing: women approach differently, more respect and reverence for the plant, not dollar signs in our eyes. I don't think about how much money I'll make, my big worry is: is it going to be a girl? I think of it as my own supply, and if there's anything over, I might sell it to pay the bills or whatever.

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Appendix V: Crop Growers' Interviews

Grower # 6 (Interviewer-administered)


Crop range? 10-40 Av size? 5 oz from a plant.

Motive to grow? Inability to get a smoke and for friends who can't do it, and to get a bit of cash. I'd much rather the laws were changed so that we could just give it away or share it. It is a sacred plant to me, and I don't like having money involved in it.

Risks/ dangers? Violent rip offs, home invasions are the biggest fear.

Does that happen often? Yes, but its rarely reported.

Ripoffs? Last year virtually the entire crop was taken.

By whom? By someone we knew who'd gone back to his heroin habit.

How often have you been ripped off? Regularly. Young kids and outsiders who come to the area specially for the purpose.

How do they know? Where do they get information about where to look? Just get dropped off and roam through the hills... on hippie communities... talk to people. I was told of this just this morning: a gun was putting their mouth by people who were so out of it they were really dangerous. There was even a concern that it might have been the police or tied in with police. The first thing they said when they came in was Do the police know about this? [Q what did he mean?] That he was growing cannabis. The present police actions are unquestionably accelerating the violence. Too many people want drugs and don't have the money for it.

Steps to minimise risks? Neighbours and friends try and help each other, but nowadays mistrust is so widespread, its coming between once friendly neighbours.

Because of rip offs? Yeah, you don't know who to believe. This was the second rip off in the last two or three years.

Has there been an increase in crop rip offs? Increased! More people want pot, many more! There's been a big increase.

How sell crops? [Declined to answer]

Method changed over time? Yes.

How? Smaller, more hidden, harder to hide, harder to keep hidden, harder to access... all that.

Estimate profits last crop? [Virtually all ripped off see earlier]

Estimate av value single plant? Male / leaf? As a seedling nothing, as a big plant, not worth money, I'd probably just eat it. Technically speaking about $50 - $100 a plant.
Leaf & tip?  Few hundred.. $100- $500, but Id rather they became heads.
Seeded heads? OK to smoke, not so popular on the street, say $500 a plant.
Sinsemilla?  This is what we're after: $1,000 to $5,000 a plant.

Comments:
It takes a lot of plants or a lot of practice to get to just sinsemilla. Police judging values (money) on the number of seedlings for example, is totally unfair, and ignorant. 20 to25% are sins from seeds, say 20%.

I would love to be able to do this in my front garden, next to my house. If the laws don't change, there is a real worry now about increased violence and ripoffs, which have escalated really quickly in the last few years. Even the long term growers who may have once liked to keep the laws, didn't mind illegality, now saying enough is enough, lets get some regulation in the market place. Something like Amsterdam, [illegible] because the price of pot in Aus so high: The street value on the north coast is $400 to $1000 an oz depending on the time of year, and this summer there will be a serious shortage of pot, increased demand, other more dangerous drugs will be used instead. The price is so high compared to Europe or America, almost twice as much! In the US it's $250 - $400 an oz sins, you can buy heads all year round in America, all year round for $250 an oz and the same in England I'm told.

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Grower # 7  (Interviewer-administered)

Male.  Age 14 -19 Time growing crops?  5 yrs.

Range?10 -20  Av size plant: about 5 foot.

Motive to grow?  To supply my habit without paying money, and getting involved in dangerous illegal activities.. less likely for me to get busted than selling pot on the streets of Nimbin.

What do you mean by less dangerous, what danger? Personal danger, like getting locked up
Other risks/ dangers?  You face getting ripped off, that's probably the biggest one.

Who by?  Other smokers, in part because of the laws, and possible harassment from other people who think you shouldn't be doing it at that age.

What do you mean about age?  They think, believe first of all that young people shouldn't be smoking pot, and they get really pissed off when they find out I'm growing it, but after I talk to them they realise it's better I grow it than getting involved with the street scene to supply my marijuana use.  I use very little alcohol so I might have a beer (one beer) every month or so.

Ripoffs?  Unpaid credit from friends, just neighbours ripping off, that's about it.  No really heavy dealings.
Do you fear heavy stuff? Yes, but I also avoid involving myself and getting a reputation among people who would cause that sort of thing.

What about crop rip offs? Crop ripoffs.. it's rare for me, but for a lot of the growers it is a major problem, you're more likely to get ripped off then busted by the police.

Weight range single plant? 2 oz - 16 oz, average 4 oz, (16 oz on a really good one, every couple of years).

Estimate av value single plant:
Male/ leaf? I usually just pull it all together, males I just rip them out, probably worth less than $50 per plant, but I pull them out when they're really small so that they don't even grow big.
Leaf & tip? I'd leave in the ground so it's no value really.
Seeded heads: Probably under $400 per plant.
Sins? Probably about a thousand, (if it's an average of 4 oz), if it was a bigger plant it would be worth more, and that's like, after all the leaf and stem are removed.

Why remove leaf and stem? It's easier to sell, takes up less space, smells better, just more, better grade of smoke, better quality.

Comments:
I'd like to be able to grow 5 plants in my garden without having to worry about people ripping me off, or worry about the police, or worry about anything, being able to tend them every day without hassles.

I only grow in single plants, I don't go for patches because I think its more sound, harder for ripoffs to find, harder for police to spot. I like to sell for low prices because I believe people shouldn't have to pay hideous amounts of money to smoke a herb, when they could grow their own if they had a good location to do it in. They shouldn't have to pay lots. I only sell pot when its necessary to buy something important for my lifestyle. I try not to make my standard of living higher. I buy shoes, get the car registered, things like that. I try not to abuse the profits and take it for granted.

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Grower # 8 (Interviewer-administered)

Female. Age 40-49 Time growing crops? 5 yrs.

Size crops av size crop? 12.

Motive to grow? Partner [first] suggested it. I was terrified, thought I'd end up in jail [first crop dumped down septic because frightened]
Risks/ dangers? So far the big problem is crops and partners. Partners are your worst enemies [partner = business partner] I was ripped off by a partner one year and then he came back & ripped off the next crop. [You need the] males for heavy digging, but they have dollar signs in their eyes. I know a husband who is selling her half of the crop at half price. Any woman who grows with a man has had it ripped of or he got less [than expected] for it. Some how you're entitled to less when push comes to shove, and they see the heads sitting there.

Ripoffs? Only from partners, and unpaid credit (small amounts ... you know they won't pay so you keep it small).

Steps to minimise risks? I worry about getting caught, I get stoned for the courage to sell, come into town, and my morals get to me and I start to give it away, other sellers offer me money to leave because I was ruining their business. [Joke]

Prefer deal males/females? Yes. Definitely [females]. Males, I think: what can you do about it, cant go to the cops, its violence against women, I tried to raise money this year for medical treatment, but cops got that lot. But usually the ripoffs are: one for the cops and three for the rip offs.

Style planting changed? It's ridiculous, I should be able to have a couple in my garden! [no answer].

Estimate profits last crop? $500.

How long ago? Last 12 m.

Profits over p 2 yrs? $500


Value plant leaf & tip? Nothing, I give it away.

Value seeded heads? About $100 p oz.

Value sins? About $300 p oz.

Weight range single plant? 4 or 5 oz leaf, couple oz heads.

Plants can't be valued at price per ounce, some plants only give you one head, it true, you can't estimate, I've never got more than 2 oz from a plant, because I can't care for them .. distance.

Amount of profit crops changed over time? Yes. People are making more. 20 yrs ago I thought I would grow some but threw it down toilet, I was too scared even to keep it.

What spend profits on? Essentials, shoes, clothes, blankets, never even make enough to own or register a car.

Comments (from throughout):
There's going to be trouble one day in this town and I'll hold the police and the system directly responsible, because you can only put people under so much pressure and then they crack. [refers to police operation *El Dockin*]

Prices should be down where people can actually afford it, $200 worth, $300 worth, that's a phenomenal amount, if we could sell for about $20 oz that would be good. The whole dealing scene takes the attention off the real social issues, (no one sees past the streets), constantly known paedophiles in this town, no backup or help. Transport: women stuck up in the hills, what if they're sick? Some of the money they're putting into *El Doc* should be given instead to the Neighbourhood Centre. There's no money for support, but plenty of money for police to do wheelies on motorbikes and take helicopter joy rides over communities. Some of the youth come from the city as street kids, we get the ones who've been horribly abused. No room here for anything but police charging dealers. No help for the junkies, they can't trust anyone.

Most women don't grow big crops, it requires physical strength and male partners rip you off. Some women have partnerships with their children, who are honourable [don't rip you off].