



19 March 2010

Commission calls for a new category for drug control – ‘category X’

At its meeting yesterday (18 March 2010), the UK Drug Policy Commission considered recent media reports about the new drug mephedrone (‘miaow miaow’). The Commissioners recognised the need to respond quickly to the potential dangers of new drugs but warned against hasty decisions to classify such drugs under the Misuse of Drugs Act.

The Commissioners are aware that there have been calls for an interim drug category which they support, as a signal of their potential danger, and the urgent need for proper assessment of evidence of harm. The Commissioners suggest that the term ‘category X’ might be used for such drugs of concern, to distinguish them clearly from the A,B,C classification of illegal substances.

The Commission proposes to undertake a wider study of the drugs control system, including the mechanisms for implementing such a policy of a new ‘holding’ classification. And to investigate experience of similar schemes, in other countries. It will also be looking at possible rational mechanisms for deciding when to place a drug in category X.

Any decision taken about whether to declare a category X drug controlled, and to classify it as A, B or C should, as required by the Misuse of Drugs Act, go through an expert assessment.

UK Drug Policy Commission, CEO, Roger Howard said: “The unstoppable emergence of synthetic drugs illustrates the need to scope out a new control framework that is better able to ‘assess’ and reduce harm to individuals and society. Until we have a full assessment of the evidence, we are calling for ‘substances of potential danger’ to be placed

in an emergency 'holding' category – category x. This category would be separate from the A,B,C system, and would be used to focus attention on new 'substances of concern', for which decisions about possible classification need to be taken quickly, within a specific time limit, based on a properly analysed evidence base."

The process for banning substances in the UK needs to be changed if the law is not always behind the market. In New Zealand new drugs are put into a special category, where it is not illegal to sell or possess them but their effects are monitored. In Germany emergency regulations can be used to make a new, unregulated drug illegal for the first year, giving toxicologists the chance to investigate and decide whether it is dangerous or not^[1].

The UK Drug Policy Commission is planning to undertake an evaluation of the ways the UK seeks to control drugs by exploring different options and models for the framework of drugs control and hopes to report by early next year.

Ends

Notes to editors

For further information and media interview requests contact the press office on 020 7812 3792 / 07866 757 389 or vsilver@ukdpc.org.uk

About the UK Drug Policy Commission - The Commission (UKDPC) is an independent, registered charity providing objective analysis of UK drug policies. The UKDPC has 12 Commissioners who bring together a broad range of expertise from the fields of drug treatment, medical research, public policy and the media. For more information please visit www.ukdpc.org.uk