few would argue we shouldn’t try to do what’s best for our kids, but just how far have we gone in waving the big stick at mothers?

Not far enough yet it seems, because Australian Hotels Association chief executive Bradley Woods says he will raise at a political level the issue of the legal and moral responsibilities of hospitality staff serving alcohol to pregnant women.

Although the State Government’s new message is that women should abstain completely from alcohol while pregnant, the idea of laws on how women can treat their own bodies is impractical and patronising at best and discriminatory and offensive at worst.

As McCusker Centre for Action on Alcohol and Youth director Mike Daube points out, smoking during pregnancy has caused harm but it is legal for pregnant women to buy cigarettes. It is not illegal to refuse to vaccinate your child, though it is recommended. Advising women that it is not known how much alcohol it takes to do damage is fair enough, but handing bar staff the task of policing whether they take that advice is unacceptable.

Women do not have to reveal if they are pregnant to future or current employers, so why should they have to face the indignity of telling an 18-year-old behind the bar if they are with child? Unless we start demanding women carry proof of pregnancy (or not) cards, there will be some embarrassing scenes, such as women carrying a bit of extra weight being refused a glass of cider.

A third of pregnancies are unplanned, meaning many women could imbibe for weeks before realising they are pregnant and bar staff could be unwittingly serving women in their first trimester, when alcohol arguably does most damage to the foetus.

Pregnant women are also advised to avoid soft cheese, ice-cream, raw and cured meat, pate, chilled seafood and sushi because they can harbour microbes which may damage an unborn child, but it is difficult to imagine a pregnant woman being refused a cheese platter or a cold chicken sandwich in a restaurant.

Women have been giving birth and looking after their own bodies since time immemorial. There will always be those who do not respect the responsibilities that come with pregnancy, but to even consider legislating the choices women can make for themselves and their unborn child is the saddest of knee-jerk reactions.

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