INTRODUCTION
Drink driving incidents in the Australian community continue to be a major road safety problem resulting in a third of all fatalities. Drink driving prevalence remains high; with the rate of Australians who self report drink driving remaining at 11%-12.1% [1,2]. The focus of research in the area to date has been with recidivist offenders who have a higher probability of reoffending, while there is comparatively limited research regarding first time offenders. An important and understudied area relates to the characteristics of first offenders and predictors of recidivism. This study examined the findings of in-depth focussed interviews with a sample of 20 individual first time drink driving offenders in Queensland recruited at the time of court mention.

METHOD
Participants were recruited at the Brisbane Magistrates Court. Offenders were approached in the foyer of the court and asked if they would like to take part in the study and for those that agreed to take part, a brief interview schedule was administered. Data was recorded on a response sheet for all participants including those who declined taking part in the study. To ensure confidentiality, verbal consent was obtained from all offenders who took part. All interviews were tape recorded and the interviews were subsequently transcribed.

The data was analysed using the computer software program, NVIVO 2.0 [3] for qualitative data analysis. Qualitative analysis was used to explore the relationships between identified themes and involved a process of managing, summarising and finding meaning in the data. As this was an exploratory study, the overall goal of the focused interviews was to gather information about offenders perceptions and attitudes about drink driving, and specifically the drink driving offence that brought them before the court.

To increase the accuracy of the study, the transcription was double checked by two researchers. Checks occurred through the interview process through the interviewer’s use of paraphrasing and summarising and thereby checking the accuracy of participant’s responses. The information gathered from the participants was based partly on the principles of grounded theory that entails categorising participants’ responses into major coded themes. Thematic analysis was used to identify major and minor themes within the notes of the participants’ responses to the questions. Thematic identification began by refining codes to form more well-defined categories or themes. Additional codes were also constructed to represent other relevant information obtained during the interview process. The themes were finally compared within and across interviews in order to increase the reliability of the interpretations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
The total response rate of all offenders approached was 53%. Of the 20 offenders who took part, 40% were female (n=8) and 60% were male (n=12). Of this group, 45% of offenders who took part were alone and 55% were accompanied.

The offenders who took part in this study were aged between 17 and 44 years. The mean age was 25.7 years. Of the study, 90% of offenders had at least completed year 12 education, and all participants identified as being currently in studies or working. Of the offenders who took part in the focused interviews, 75% had an open licence, with 25% being the holder of a current provisional licence. The number of years driving experienced of the offenders taking part in the focused interviews varied greatly, from 1 year to 27 years. There were a number of themes which arose from the focussed interviews, main themes have been noted graphically in the figure below (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Main themes extracted from first time drink driving offender interviews

It was found that the majority of first offenders in the sample did not think they were over the limit at the time of the offence, and a number of participants report being apprehended the morning after a night out. A common theme of was that offenders did not feel that their driving was risky at the time of the offence, however, two participants were involved in a crash at the time. Further, there was confusion amongst offenders about what exactly
constitutes a standard drink according to the alcohol guidelines. Most first offenders agreed that being caught for drink driving was a learning experience not to be repeated.

CONCLUSIONS
This research aimed to contribute to the limited current research regarding first offenders by addressing: the major factors contributing to the index drink driving offence; attitudes towards drink driving and being apprehended; and self-reported drink driving as well as other factors identified by the participants. This research identified themes based on interviews with a sample of first time drink driving offenders in order to inform future research and policy development. This study will form part of a larger research project in which a profiling study for first time drink driving offenders will be completed and an intervention program will be developed.

REFERENCES