

Friday, 1 April 2016

Record chop chop crop stopped

British American Tobacco Australia (BATA) today congratulated authorities on seizing more than 60 acres of illegal tobacco plants in regional Victoria last week.

The huge haul had an estimated excise value of up to \$16 million and once manufactured would have made around 30 million cigarettes. The seizure is believed to be the largest on record.

A joint operation at a Dingwall property by the Australian Tax Office, Australian Border Force and Victorian Police uncovered the large chop chop crops which were at various stages of growth.

A large number of items were seized which are used for drying the tobacco prior to its sale including five kiln containers.

BATA spokesperson Scott McIntyre said currently 14.3 per cent of all tobacco consumed in Australia was illegal.

“There have been a growing number of large scale tobacco crops seized locally in recent years particularly in Victoria,” Mr McIntyre said.

“Australia has the most expensive tobacco prices in the world due to a series of large ad hoc excise increases implemented since 2010. This makes selling illegal tobacco extremely lucrative for organised crime syndicates who are now prepared to risk growing illegal tobacco crops locally to supply the black market.

“The illegal tobacco market costs the government and taxpayers \$1.42 billion a year in lost revenue which equates to nearly \$6 billion over a forward estimates budget period.

“We fully support the enforcement authorities and we’re looking forward to seeing many more seizures of illegal tobacco in the future.

“BATA will continue to work with government and enforcement agencies to help where it can as well as ensure its retailers and partners understand that it will not tolerate any illegal tobacco activity.

“We are concerned of the link between illegal tobacco and other organised crime activities but pleased to see that the government is taking action.

“The government could take further steps including opting for a more stable excise system, boosting investment in the Australian Border Force Tobacco Strike Team and changing relevant legislation to make enforcement easier.

“Coupled with increasing relevant penalties there would be a much greater deterrent for organised crime.”

Media contact: Scott McIntyre on 02 9370 1222 or follow on Twitter @ Scott_BATA