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Evidence shows plain packaging has failed

British American Tobacco Australia (BATA) said the plain packaging post-implementation review (PIR) released by the Federal Department of Health (DoH) today did not provide any conclusive evidence it has worked.

As outlined in the PIR, packaging changes made in 2012 were “designed to reduce smoking levels”. Evidence from key stakeholders including the government show that this has not been achieved by plain packaging.

The majority of the report focuses on the tobacco control research that examines sentiment and perception rather than hard data such as sales and incidence. When the PIR does refer to hard data it doesn't delineate between the impact of tobacco excise hikes and plain packaging.

The report even acknowledges this, “These decreases cannot be entirely attributed to plain packaging given the range of tobacco control measures in place in Australia.”

BATA spokesperson Scott McIntyre said The Australian National Drug Strategy Household Survey (ANDSHS)¹ shows that the proportion of daily smokers has been declining steadily over a long time and is almost exactly on trend despite plain packaging.

“The ANDSHS also shows that the percentage of 12-17 year olds who smoked on a daily basis increased from 2.5 per cent to 3.4 per cent between 2010 and 2013 which is the highest rate since 2004. That's a 36 per cent increase in young people smoking during the time plain packaging was introduced,” Mr McIntyre said.

“The same survey shows the percentage of smokers nominating health warnings on tobacco packets as the reason for trying to quit smoking reduced from 15.2 per cent in 2010 to 11.1 per cent in 2013.

“These are government figures from a survey run by the DoH. They are not from the tobacco industry.”

In the same light, the National Tobacco Plain Packaging Tracking Survey (NTPPTS)² was conducted by the Cancer Council Victoria for the DoH to assess the effects of plain packaging.

“There are a number of different measures from the NTPPTS that suggest plain packaging has not been successful in reducing the appeal of tobacco,” Mr McIntyre said.

“The survey shows that the average daily consumption of cigarettes increased after plain packaging from 14.25 per cent to 14.46 per cent. Importantly the average consumption levels increased to 15.6 per cent immediately after plain packaging and only dropped after a series of tobacco excise increases.

“In terms of smokers' intentions to quit, the proportion of smokers with no intention to quit in the following month increased post the introduction of plain packaging from an average of 53 per cent to 56.4 per cent.

“The NTPPTS also showed that the proportion thinking that quitting was of low importance, increased.”

Additional evidence from the industry shows that tobacco sales increased in the first full year following the introduction of plain packaging for the first time in over a decade.

“InfoView³ industry sales data demonstrates that legal volumes of tobacco grew by 59 million cigarettes or 0.3 per cent in the first 12 months following the implementation of plain packaging, Mr McIntyre said.

“Further, the latest illicit tobacco report⁴ shows that illegal tobacco now represents 14.3 per cent of all tobacco consumed in Australia. The black market has grown dramatically since plain packaging was introduced and the three 12.5 per cent excise increases have been implemented.”

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¹ Australian Institute for Health and Welfare. Link: <http://www.aihw.gov.au/alcohol-and-other-drugs/ndshs/2013/tobacco/>

² <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/tobacco-plain-packaging-evaluation>

³ Infoview Technologies Pty Ltd – an independent company that collates industry data on Exchange of Sales shipment volumes

⁴ [http://www.bata.com.au/group/sites/bat_2wey8b.nsf/ivPages/WebLive/000193289/\\$FILE/medM09WSRM8.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.bata.com.au/group/sites/bat_2wey8b.nsf/ivPages/WebLive/000193289/$FILE/medM09WSRM8.pdf?OpenElement)