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## Massive chop chop crop stopped

British American Tobacco Australia (BATA) today congratulated authorities on seizing 350,000 illegal tobacco plants in Victoria over the weekend.

The seizure is the largest of its kind and highlights the growing illegal tobacco problem Australia is facing due to growing excise levels.

BATA spokesperson Scott McIntyre said last year almost 2.45 million kilograms of illegal tobacco was consumed with this latest significant bust only accounting for 70,000 kilograms of dried leaf.

“In Australia 13.9 per cent of all tobacco consumed is illegal and if the problem was stopped it would mean an extra billion dollars a year in the budget for the government,” Mr McIntyre said.

“This is a huge haul of chop chop but there’s obviously still plenty of illegal tobacco to be found and we believe that greater investment is needed to stamp out the issue and the crime gangs involved.

“It’s ridiculous that some groups still refuse to believe illegal tobacco exists even though the authorities are uncovering 350,000 plants at a time. That many plants equal more than 70 million cigarettes.

“Last year the illegal tobacco rate climbed to record levels and jumped 20 per cent over 12 months following the introduction of plain packaging.

“In 2014 there have been a number of illegal tobacco seizures on top of the huge crop found over the weekend, including another 35,000 chop chop plants in Victoria during March.

“In Sydney a man was also found trying to import 19,000 illegal cigarettes at the airport earlier this month.

“Customs also seized 300,000 cigarettes and 1,866 kilograms of tobacco at the ports in Melbourne in the month of March.

“High excise levels are making it extremely lucrative to smuggle tobacco. The problem is due to get a lot worse with four 12.5 per cent increases over three years on top of twice yearly tax increases linked to the average Australian wage.

“There’s a lot of undetected chop chop and illegal cigarettes still out there and it’s only likely to get worse as high excise drives people to the black market.”

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