



**Friday, 21 March 2014**

## **Local retailer could face \$100,000 in fines over illegal tobacco**

British American Tobacco Australia (BATA) today congratulated the Ararat City Council for prosecuting a tobacco retailer with stocking more than \$10,000 worth of illegal tobacco which could lead to fines of over \$100,000.

BATA spokesperson Vesna Ciric believes local law enforcement is key to deterring retailers from selling illegal tobacco and preventing young people from having access to it.

BATA investigators conduct over a thousand covert purchases of illegal tobacco in Victoria each year and provides information to police and councils for enforcement.

“Enforcing the law and following through with the consequences sends a message to retailers that if you sell illegal tobacco you are breaking the law,” says Ms Ciric.

“Law-abiding retailers think it’s unfair that people can profit so much from selling products that are obviously not legal, and unfortunately these dodgy retailers are unlikely to ask kids for ID.

BATA is encouraging other councils to follow Ararat Council’s tough and determined stance. Ararat Council has shown how local councils can lead the way in stopping organised crime in their local communities.

“This prosecution is a positive step in the right direction for Victorian residents and it’s a great example for other councils signaling the value of enforcement and removing the black market from their communities.

“In Australia, 13.3 per cent of total tobacco consumption is illegal. This is equivalent to \$1 billion in excise that isn’t paid by criminals to the government.

“Joint law enforcement authorities recently uncovered 35,000 tobacco plants being grown illegally in rural Victoria. Organised criminals could have sold that tobacco in Australia without paying tax to make a huge profit from it and unfortunately these people are sometimes linked to some very serious crimes.”

The State Government of Victoria made a promising move earlier this year, announcing a quadrupling of fines for retailers caught selling illegal tobacco, with new penalties expected to be in place later this year.

“Retailers who sell illegal cigarettes undertake criminal activities themselves and they risk huge losses through fines,” says Ms Ciric.

The Ararat tobacco retailer will face court on March 24, 2014.

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