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## **Tougher illegal tobacco laws welcomed**

British American Tobacco Australia (BATA) spokesperson Scott McIntyre today congratulated the Victorian Government on quadrupling fines for retailers caught with illegal tobacco and strongly urged other states to follow their lead.

“We’re hopeful the other states and territories will now take a much tougher stance on illegal cigarettes and chop chop by raising fines as high as Victoria,” Mr McIntyre said.

“The majority of the 25,000 retailers around the country are doing the right thing, but there are many who are breaking the law and every effort needs to be made stop them.

“The illegal tobacco market is currently booming with the rate now at its highest ever point of 13.3 per cent. What’s very worrying is that illegal cigarette use grew 154 per cent last year in Australia.

“The total tax evasion equates to over a billion dollars a year missed by the Federal Government which in turn hurts all taxpayers.

“Worse still the Australian Crime Commission (ACC) says that organised crime groups see tobacco smuggling as a low-risk and highly profitable. They use the proceeds to fund other illegal activities.”

The Trident Taskforce and all of the authorities involved also need to be congratulated for taking illegal tobacco off the streets.

“The crime groups involved are only in it for a quick buck and they’re not the type of people who ask kids for ID,” Mr McIntyre said.

“While it’s great news the Victorian Government and the Trident Taskforce are fighting the problem head on, more needs to be done country wide.

“The Federal Department of Health can also fine retailers for selling non plain packaging compliant tobacco up to \$340,000 per pack. Unfortunately since plain packs were introduced they have not issued one fine.

“Customs are doing a great job as do the other agencies but more money needs to be invested into their operations as the amount of illegal tobacco being stopped at our borders is really only a drop in the ocean compared to the total amount hitting the streets.

“Tougher enforcement is needed at the border and at the retail level to really stamp the problem out.”

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