

Media release

11 SEPTEMBER, 2010

PLAIN PACKAGING OF CIGARETTES CAMPAIGN SHAME – CALL FOR ACTION

The truth about big tobacco's desperate bid to stop the move to plain packaging for cigarettes was revealed on ABC's Lateline program last night.



Public Health Association
AUSTRALIA

The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) and the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) are today calling on governments to legislate for complete bans on all tobacco industry advertising and force tobacco companies to release full details of lobbying, political donations and marketing plans and budgets.

The call follows last night's ABC's Lateline investigation (<http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/content/2010/s3008987.htm>) that revealed tobacco giant Phillip Morris, working with British American Tobacco and Imperial Tobacco orchestrated a mass media campaign against the Government's plans to introduce plain packaging of cigarettes, under the guise of a retailers' association.

VicHealth chief executive Todd Harper said TV, radio and press ads that ran under the name of the Alliance of Australian Retailers were devised by Phillip Morris staff and executives, according to secret documents shown on the Lateline program.

"When in 2010, the international tobacco conglomerates are prepared to and are allowed to spend this sort of money marketing in such a dishonest way, it's very clear that regulation of this industry has not gone far enough," Mr Harper said.

"It's pretty disturbing to know that in the tightest election campaign since Federation, the biggest spend in paid private advertising was being covertly funded and managed by faceless tobacco executives in New York and London. They have already ploughed in over five million dollars and now we learn there's as much yet to come."

Public Health Association of Australia President Professor Mike Daube said, "These documents show that tobacco companies are every bit as cynical, ruthless and aggressive as we had long suspected. An industry whose products kill one in two of their regular users should not be allowed to promote its interests like this. It is time for a complete ban on all tobacco promotion."

"Governments around Australia thought they had banned tobacco advertising more than twenty years ago. Now, through an artifice, the tobacco companies are able to spend millions of dollars promoting their interests with massive television and press advertising campaigns. That loophole should be closed."

Mr Harper added, "This fraudulent campaign exposes the fears of the tobacco industry. Plain packaging means a loss in sales; why else would the tobacco industry go to such extraordinary lengths to block this measure?"

Leading health groups have been fighting the misleading tobacco industry campaign. On 13 August, VicHealth, the Public Health Association of Australia, Cancer Council Australia, the Heart Foundation, Australian Council on Smoking and Health, and Action on Smoking and Health wrote a joint letter to the Australian Consumer Commission urging the ACCC to act.

The letter requested the ACCC investigate the Alliance of Australian Retailers for intentionally misleading consumers by:

- creating a false impression that a large number of convenience store owners had been motivated to act in defence of their livelihoods
- stating that there were more than 10,000 people in retail who supported the campaign; and
- representing the Alliance of Australian Retailers as a bonafide industry group.

Mr Harper said the ACCC must re-open its investigation as a matter of urgency following the facts presented on Lateline.

"We cannot allow tobacco companies to mislead voters and consumers using this 'wolf in sheep's clothing technique," Mr Harper said.

Leading health groups, including VicHealth have launched their own campaign to expose the tobacco industry's shoddy tactics. <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Resource-Centre/Media-Centre/Media-releases/Current/Smoking-and-tobacco-control/Health-organisations-fight-back-against-anti-plain-packaging-campaign.aspx>

Mr Harper and Professor Daube said health groups would continue their fight against the selfish and misleading tobacco industry campaign to protect Australians from the biggest cause of preventable deaths - smoking.

Media contacts:

Todd Harper, VicHealth CEO on 0417 561 412 / Professor Mike Daube, PHAA on 0409 933 933
