

Media Release

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Uruguay win against Big Tobacco a victory for public health

VicHealth CEO Jerril Rechter has congratulated Uruguay on its landmark legal win over tobacco giant Phillip Morris.

A ruling by a World Bank arbitration tribunal this week ended a six-year legal battle in which Phillip Morris challenged Uruguay's tough tobacco packaging and labelling measures.

The landmark win means graphic warnings will now cover 80 per cent of cigarette packets in Uruguay and the use of terms such as 'light' and 'mild' and colours to falsely imply that some cigarettes are less harmful will now be put into effect to reduce tobacco consumption.

Ms Rechter said the victory was a reminder that governments should not be intimidated by big tobacco companies when considering measures to reduce harm from smoking.

"This ruling should serve as inspiration to other countries across the world, in particular the Western Pacific region, to consider large or full-size graphic health warnings as well as plain packaging," Ms Rechter said.

"Graphic health warnings were introduced in Australia in 2006 and we know that these warnings have led to a change in attitudes about smoking, an increase in the awareness of the harms of tobacco and increases intention to quit and calls to Quitline.

"Tackling smoking harm isn't the responsibility of just one person, organisation or government- it's everyone's business. We all have a role to play and other countries considering tobacco control measures should be heartened by this historic ruling and should not let a pattern of tobacco industry behaviour get in the way of good public health policy that saves lives."

In Australia cigarette packaging must have a graphic health warning on 90 per cent of the back surface for cigarette packaging and 75 per cent of the front surface of the packet.

In addition to graphic health warnings, the Australian Government also introduced plain packaging in 2012.

For more information on the harms of smoking, or for information on how to quit, visit <http://www.quit.org.au/>

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