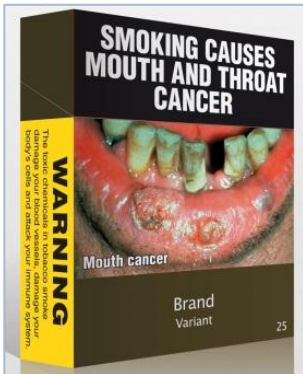


## Why plain packaging for tobacco?

### The Australian Parliament passed legislation on the plain packaging of tobacco products

on 21 November 2011. This world-first law is expected to come into force in December 2012, when cigarettes and other tobacco products will be required to be sold in plain packaging (with no manufacturer branding, colouring, or typography, and of uniform size, shape and method of opening). Within hours of the legislation passing Parliament, Philip Morris, the manufacturers of Marlboro, the world's best-selling brand of cigarettes, launched legal action against the Australian Federal Government. Why is big tobacco so worried?



Example of plain packaging as proposed in Australia

Tobacco manufacturers have long recognised the **power of branding**, particularly important in a product like cigarettes where consumers typically struggle to identify differences between brands in blind tests. As stated by an Imperial Tobacco employee:

*'So the discrimination in product terms, pure blind product terms, without any packaging or name around it is very limited. You can tell if it's very mild or very strong, and you might get some case characteristics that are different. But it's very difficult for people to discriminate, blind tested. Put it in a package and put a name on it, and then it has a lot of product characteristics.'*<sup>1</sup>

Plain packaging **destroys the carefully constructed, but deceptive, brand images of tobacco companies**. Tobacco manufacturers spend a great deal of money, time, and effort in engineering identities for their brands, from the well-known heroic and rugged 'Marlboro man' to more recent slim and elegant packaging designs aimed at women such as Silk Cut 'superslims', right. These brand persona invented by tobacco industry marketing departments are deceptive, attempting to distance consumers from tobacco's genuine character – which, as an addicting killer, is significantly less attractive.



Japan Tobacco International's Silk Cut 'Superslims'

There is a **growing body of published evidence that plain packaging will be effective in reducing smoking** through:

- *reducing misperceptions of differences in health harm between brands:* Tobacco companies are not permitted to use misleading descriptors like 'light', yet research shows smokers still mistakenly associate certain pack designs with decreased risk<sup>2 3</sup>
- *increasing the effectiveness of health warnings:* Graphic health warnings are a direct and arresting means to communicate the adverse outcomes associated with smoking<sup>4</sup>. Greater attention is paid to health warnings on plain packs compared to branded packs<sup>5</sup>, and in countries where graphic warnings are in place, people are more likely to notice warnings, and report that warnings make them think about quitting<sup>6</sup>
- *making tobacco products less appealing:* Plain packaging is perceived less favourably by both adult smokers<sup>7</sup>, and young people<sup>8</sup> - a recent study with young adult smokers in

Glasgow piloting plain packs found their use was associated with increased negative perceptions and feelings about smoking<sup>9</sup>.

The **tobacco industry is aggressively opposing the introduction of plain packaging in Australia**, while at the same



Tobacco industry trade journals demonstrating the importance of packaging,



time claiming it will have no effect on reducing consumption. Commentators in Australia have noted the apparent paradox in tobacco manufacturers opposing so vigorously a measure they believe will have no impact on their sales. In addition to claims that plain packaging is unsupported by any evidence, tobacco manufacturers have deployed a range of other arguments against the measure which have been comprehensively rebutted<sup>10 11</sup>.



The difference branding can make. Image used courtesy of Cancer Council Victoria.

The Westminster Coalition Government will shortly be holding a consultation on plain packaging. Given that this is likely to be taken forward as a public health measure, the Scottish Parliament will have the opportunity to join in to any ensuing legislation through a legislative consent motion.

The degree to which the tobacco industry protests any given regulatory measures is often seen as directly proportional to its effectiveness in reducing tobacco consumption: the industry 'scream test'. As big tobacco is fearful of the measure recently legislated for in Australia spreading to other countries, there can be few measures where the tobacco industry will scream louder than the implementation of plain packaging.

### What action can I take to support plain packs in Scotland?

The Westminster Government has announced it will open a consultation on plain packaging of tobacco products during spring 2012. Although any legislation on plain packaging for tobacco will pass through the Westminster Parliament, the Scottish Parliament will also have to consent for the law to be implemented here.

It's important to show support for the principles behind plain packaging during the consultation stage, and beyond. You can sign up to show your support, send a message to your MP and be kept informed of developments at: <http://www.ashscotland.org.uk/plainpacksprotect>

<sup>1</sup> Brown, D. 1989. Transcript, RJR-Macdonald Inc. V. Canada (Attorney General). 28 Sep, p.661. Cited in: Cunningham R. 1996. Smoke & Mirrors: The Canadian Tobacco War. International Development Research Centre. p.138

<sup>2</sup> Hammond D, Dockrell M, Arnott D, Lee A, McNeill A. Cigarette pack design and perceptions of risk among UK adults and youth. Eur J Public Health. 2009 Dec;19(6):631-7.

<sup>3</sup> Mutti S, Hammond D, Borland R, Cummings MK, O'Connor RJ, Fong GT. Beyond light and mild: cigarette brand descriptors and perceptions of risk in the International Tobacco Control (ITC) Four Country Survey. Addiction. 2011 Jun;106(6):1166-75.

<sup>4</sup> Hammond D. Health warning messages on tobacco products: a review. Tob Control. 2011 Sep;20(5):327-37.

<sup>5</sup> Munafó MR, Roberts N, Bauld L, Leonards U. Plain packaging increases visual attention to health warnings on cigarette packs in non-smokers and weekly smokers but not daily smokers. Addiction. 2011 Aug;106(8):1505-10.

<sup>6</sup> Hammond D, Fong GT, Borland R, Cummings KM, McNeill A, Driezen P. Text and graphic warnings on cigarette packages: findings from the international tobacco control four country study. Am J Prev Med. 2007 Mar;32(3):202-9.

<sup>7</sup> Wakefield MA, Germain D, Durkin SJ. How does increasingly plainer cigarette packaging influence adult smokers' perceptions about brand image? An experimental study. Tob Control. 2008 Dec;17(6):416-21.

<sup>8</sup> Moodie C, Ford A, Mackintosh AM, Hastings G. Young People's Perceptions of Cigarette Packaging and Plain Packaging: An Online Survey. Nicotine Tob Res. 2011 Oct 24.

<sup>9</sup> Moodie C, Mackintosh AM, Hastings G, Ford A. Young adult smokers' perceptions of plain packaging: a pilot naturalistic study. Tob Control. 2011 Sep;20(5):367-73.

<sup>10</sup> Quit Victoria, Cancer Council Victoria. Plain packaging of tobacco products: a review of the evidence. [online]. Cancer Council Victoria. May 2011. Available from: [www.cancer.org.au/File/PolicyPublications/Position\\_statements/TCUCCVBkgndResrchPlainPak190511ReEnd\\_FINAL2.pdf](http://www.cancer.org.au/File/PolicyPublications/Position_statements/TCUCCVBkgndResrchPlainPak190511ReEnd_FINAL2.pdf) [Accessed 1 November 2011]

<sup>11</sup> Freeman B, Chapman S, Rimmer M. The case for the plain packaging of tobacco products. Addiction. 2008 Apr;103(4):580-90.