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Kangaroo image on cigarettes “insulting”

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A LEADING public health lobby group has branded a major tobacco company “insulting” and “cynical in the extreme” for using a kangaroo image on cigarette packages overseas.

Media reports have indicated British American Tobacco is using the iconic image and the phrase "An Australian Favourite" on packets of Winfield being sold in France, in a move Attorney-General Nicola Roxon said was "outrageous".

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) joined the condemnation saying it misrepresented Australia’s achievements in cutting smoking rates to among the lowest in the developed world.

“It’s a strong insult to Australia that you would use our symbol of nationhood to lure people into smoking, particularly when we’re one of the least addicted nations in the world,” PHAA CEO Michael Moore told *MO*.

“It exploits Australians and our way of life. Ironically the kangaroo on the sign is seen in wide open spaces where there’s fresh air and they’re [tobacco companies] using it in exactly the opposite way.

“It’s cynical in the extreme,” Mr Moore said

It comes as new laws introduced by Labor will force tobacco companies to sell cigarettes domestically in drab olive-brown packs from December this year.

Major tobacco companies Philip Morris Asia, British American Tobacco and Imperial Tobacco have initiated legal proceedings against the new legislation.

Mr Moore said similar outrage had previously forced tobacco companies to stop using New Zealand imagery for similar purposes. He said he witnessed entire tobacco trucks in Russia [pictured] using the kangaroo image to promote Winfield in 2010.