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AUSTRALIANS OF THE YEAR CALL FOR ACTION ON TOBACCO

Australia's six medical Australians of the Year have called on all parties to support plain packaging for tobacco products, a measure which is being aggressively opposed by the international tobacco industry.

Professors Peter Doherty (Australian of the Year 1997), Sir Gustav Nossal (Australian of the Year 2000), Fiona Stanley (Australian of the Year 2003), Fiona Wood (Australian of the Year 2005), Ian Frazer (Australian of the Year 2006), and Patrick McGorry (Australian of the Year 2010) have issued a statement which condemns "the tobacco industry's cynical campaign" and calls "on all political parties to commit themselves unequivocally to supporting legislation on plain packaging as part of a comprehensive approach to reducing the devastating toll of death and disease caused by smoking".

The text of the statement, which has been described by one of Australia's public health leaders as "a historic moment" is below:

Call on all political parties to affirm support for plain tobacco packaging

Prescription drugs which save lives and promote health are stored in dispensaries and sold in plain packs with only the drug name and dosage information. Tobacco products, which kill 15,000 Australians each year, are sold in attractive boxes designed to maximise their appeal, particularly to young smokers.

Legislation for plain tobacco packaging removes one of the tobacco industry's last remaining means to promote their products in appealing ways. This measure is recommended by health authorities as a key part of our national tobacco control program to accelerate the decline in smoking and save many lives.

The tobacco industry's current campaign shows how effective they believe plain packaging will be at reducing tobacco consumption. They are also concerned that this ground-breaking political action will lead to similar legislation in other countries which have historically looked to us for leadership in reducing tobacco use. Over time, global plain packaging could save millions of lives.

Smoking has declined from nearly 70% of men and 30% of women in the early 1960s to less than 17% today. Tobacco manufacturers' and retailers' interests in maintaining high smoking levels to maximise sales have thus been very properly subordinated to concerns to promote community health.

We condemn the tobacco industry's cynical campaign and call on all political parties to commit themselves unequivocally to supporting legislation on plain packaging as part of a comprehensive approach to reducing the devastating toll of death and disease caused by smoking.

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Commenting on the statement, Professor Simon Chapman from the University of Sydney who co-authored a major review of the evidence supporting plain tobacco packaging said “I do not recall any health issue where all medical Australians of the Year have come together to urge political action like this. If Australia proceeds with this policy, it will domino around the world in the next few years and completely change the way that cigarettes are sold for ever. This is an historic moment.”

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