

April 2014

Standardised packing of tobacco Report of the independent review undertaken by Sir Cyril Chantler

Sir Cyril was commissioned by the Government to give advice on whether or not the introduction of standardised packaging is likely to have an effect on public health, and what any effect might be, particularly in relation to the health of children. Below is an extract from the Summary of Findings

There is very strong evidence that exposure to tobacco advertising and promotion increases the likelihood of children taking up smoking. Branded cigarettes are ‘badge’ products, frequently on display, which therefore act as a “silent salesman.”

It is notable that Japan Tobacco International responded to the decision to introduce tobacco plain packaging in Australia by attempting to sue the Australian Government for taking possession of its mobile “billboard”.

I believe that branded packaging contributes to increased tobacco consumption.

I make it plain at the outset that there are limitations to the evidence currently available as to the likely effect of standardised packaging on tobacco consumption. I do not consider that these limitations prevent me from reaching a view on the issue in respect of which my advice has been sought.

There have been a large number of studies which have tested the possible effect of standardised packaging using mock-ups of standardised packaging to see how smokers and potential smokers react to them. The Department of Health commissioned a systematic review of these studies known as the “Stirling Review” 7 which concluded that:

- Standardised packaging is less appealing than branded packaging;
- Graphic and text health warnings are more credible and memorable on standardised packaging than when juxtaposed with attractive branding;
- Whereas colours and descriptors on branded packaging confuse smokers into falsely perceiving some products as lighter and therefore “healthier”, products in standardised packages are more likely to be perceived as harmful.

The Stirling Review constitutes the most extensive and authoritative piece of work on the issue of standardised packaging yet undertaken.

Tobacco companies have argued that standardised packaging will result in falling prices early evidence from Australia does not show falling prices.

I am not convinced by the tobacco industry’s argument that standardised packaging would increase the illicit market, especially in counterfeit cigarettes. There is no evidence that standardised packaging is easier to counterfeit, and indeed in Australia, hardly any counterfeit standardised packages have been found to date.

Conclusion

Having reviewed the evidence it is in my view highly likely that standardised packaging would serve to reduce the rate of children taking up smoking and implausible that it would increase the consumption of tobacco..... I am satisfied that the body of evidence shows that standardised packaging, in conjunction with the current tobacco control regime, is very likely to lead to a modest but important reduction over time on the uptake and prevalence of smoking and thus have a positive impact on public health.

Sir Cyril Chantler
31 March 2014