THE SPOKESMAN

SCOTT MCINTYRE

The federal Health Minister, Nicola Roxon, has said plain packaging this week: "The sort of proof that they're looking for doesn't exist when he hasn't been introduced in the first place." The government's reply is that it has no proof of effectiveness. The tobacco industry, however, has been given until September to introduce plain packaging. The World Health Organization has noted that there is no scientific evidence to support the claim that plain packaging will reduce smoking rates. The Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, France and the US Congress have all recently come out in opposition to it. The British Health Minister publicly put plain packaging on the backburner this year due to concerns about its effectiveness. Intellectual property and competition issues are also being considered. Canada and Australia have previously looked at plain packaging and decided against it. The Australian government says its plain packaging plan is a win-win. That's because no other country is prepared to experiment with it. This untended and unprocessed plan for plain packaging could go wrong in a number of ways, essentially, it's an experiment at the expense of taxpayers. One of the worst outcomes from plain packaging is the possibility of illegal tobacco. A report published in March showed illegal tobacco in Australia grew 190 per cent in the last three years, while last year alone taxpayers lost $1 billion in tobacco taxes to organised criminals. The Australian Crime Commission highlighted this in its 2011 report on organised crime's economic network and said that profits from illegal tobacco sales have been linked to the production of counterfeit cigarettes and loose tobacco. The reports also said that the grey market, grey market, grey market revenue is avoided through these activities.

The Illegal tobacco market is equal to about 20 per cent of the legal market in Australia in some European and Asian countries it's two or three times that size. Organised crime will have a blueprint to mass produce illegal cigarettes. The black market will take over. The crimes involved will be easier when all packs look the same. More illegal cigarettes could mean greater accessibility for young people. A lack of price differentiation means that illegal cigarettes, they could lead to a rise in smoking rates. As well as making access to the potential risk of criminalisation and potential fines is likely to end up in court. Documents show that the government's freedom of information request showed the government will spend more than 10 million on legal fees to defend plain packaging. This does not include billions in potential compensation to the tobacco industry. Who would want to see millions of dollars worth of tax dollars wasted on experimental legal fees. Scott McIntyre is the communication manager for British American Tobacco Australia.

The Academic

RENEE BITTOUN

I have been involved in research on smoking and cessation for many decades including how and why smokers are "cured" or triggered to stop smoking, and how they make use of aid for health and social support. There are powerful learned and social influences that are associated with smoking. Smokers get urges to smoke when they are consuming alcohol, or having a coffee, or reading a newspaper or feel otherwise anxious. Nicotine gives them a positive, reinforcing, neurochemical effect. These situations or events become associated with their addiction to nicotine and trigger stronger urges to smoke. This is fairly typical in all drug addictions - they make tight associations. It's not surprising, then, that these associations with the actual mechanism of the drug is there in the brain. That's why I think people stop smoking, and they find it extremely difficult. I see people who stop smoking because of the introduction of plain packaging - we will have to wait and see but the measure is an important step forward.

Associate Professor Renee Bittoun is the head of smoking research at the Brain Mind Research Institute and the South West Sydney Area Health Service.

The Question

Should cigarettes be sold in plain packaging?

With MPs yet to vote on the branding of tobacco, four experts join the debate.

The Campaigner

ANNE JONES

British American Tobacco's chief legal officer Craig Emerson doesn't want his own children to smoke - but what about the 15 000 children who are already weekly smokers whose parents don't want them to smoke. In this industry claims "we don't want child smokers", its marketing thrust pays the under-18s in the front line. Not so long ago, tobacco chiefs, with hands on hearts, swore they had evidence that smoking caused cancer and heart disease. For decades they then used the deceptive descriptors "light" and "low tar" to belie the truth that "light" cigarettes were safer. Now they spend millions and use front groups to spread a new wave of false claims about plain packs: they won't work, there's "no real evidence". What is the truth? Tobacco trade will skyrocket, trade agreements will be violated. Threats to flood the country with cheap cigarettes, to use these measures in compensation in their legal war in victory. The cigarette industry has attached the "new silent salesmen", a powerful, promotional tool used to retain and attract "new smokers" - industry tactics for children. So what is the evidence that plain packs will work? We believe the first country to implement it fully, so of course there is no direct evidence yet, but there are 130 published research studies showing that in the country where people sold plain packs to less than 10 per cent of smokers in their own country, in plain packs to less than 5 per cent, larger health warnings will help reduce the pack appeal and increase the warnings' impact. One of the most important things is that the plain pack will reduce the real risk of smoking. Anne Jones is the chief executive of Action on Smoking and Health.

The Brander

WAYNE BULL

I earn my living by helping companies design and build brands. It all starts with a name that is linked to rich, colourful, images, type and language to create memorable and distinctive identities for companies. It's a bracket that can be very expensive. But not. I am here to help. To support the tobacco industry's right to market their products successfully. It's legal. It's legal to promote tobacco, it's an adage sometimes invoked by marketers to justify working for clients of all moral persuasions. And there are plenty of "high-end" legal products in the tobacco industry that are designed to be engaging and have a lasting impact. Wayne Bull is the planning director of the brand consultancy Principals.

Peek pressure remains a dominant force

Australian governments long ago abandoned the dispassionate "sell to legal" promote principle that it applied to all brands. We're locked in a long and grueling battle with public opinion and the cost is too much to bear. Plain packaging is one of the few measures that have yet to play. It would be pointless to hold back on it now.