

Plain Packaging on Tobacco Backfires Within First Year in the UK

After Government U-Turned on its Commitment to Wait for Evidence from Australia, New Research Shows UK Public Consider Plain Packaging Ineffective and a Poor Use of Resources – Concerns it will Lead to an Increase in Illegal Cigarettes

Geneva, May 17, 2018 – One year on from the controversial introduction of plain packaging for tobacco in the UK, new research commissioned by JTI and conducted by independent polling company Kantar TNS, reveals that the majority of the UK public are not supportive of the policy.

In the largest public opinion poll of its kind since plain packaging was introduced, research found that UK citizens are concerned their government has imported a failed policy from Australia¹ without fully evaluating the potential negative consequences²:

- Almost two-thirds of the UK population believe that plain packaging will not achieve its primary objective of reducing smoking rates (65%) and is a poor use of government resources (65%).
- Three out of every five UK adults (58%) believe plain packaging will lead to an increase in the number of illegal cigarettes sold in the UK.
- If the UK Government had yet to decide on plain packaging and was considering whether to introduce it today, 69% of UK adults believe they should either reject the policy (35%) or wait for more evidence of its effectiveness from Australia (34%).
- 72% of respondents believe the government would either a) fix a policy review / ignore evidence that went against a preferred policy (29%), or b) be reluctant to change their preferred policy if the evidence was weighted against it (43%).

¹ In Australia, which pioneered plain packaging in December 2012, latest Government data shows that the long-term decline in smoking rates has now stalled: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/illicit-use-of-drugs/ndshs-2016-key-findings/contents/highlights-from-the-2016-survey>

² After Australia implemented plain packaging, illegal tobacco sales went up by 30%. The overall illegal market is now at 15% – the country's highest level on record: See "Illicit Tobacco in Australia: 2017 Full Year Report", KPMG, April 2018: https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/uk/pdf/2018/05/australia_illicit_tobacco_report_2017.pdf.

The scale of illegal tobacco in Australia – and related criminal activity – has forced the government to set up a multi-agency 'Tobacco TaskForce': <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/government-butt-squad-to-chase-billions-in-criminal-tobacco-fraud-20180505-p4zdiv.html>

Respondents are also critical of how the Bill became law:

- 68% think the Government changed the decision-making requirements it had previously set out in order to push it through.
- 72% think it was important for the government to research the links between illegal tobacco and terrorist organizations.

One year in, the latest data shows no impact on tobacco sales or smoking rates in the UK³ and counterfeit plain packs were discovered on the high street as early as one month after the implementation of plain packaging.⁴ An analysis conducted by JTI on UK counterfeit samples shows that tar, nicotine and carbon monoxide levels far exceed those allowed in the country. But this is only the tip of the iceberg: in some cases, counterfeits have been found to contain heavy metals such as arsenic, cadmium and lead⁵, along with other toxic contaminants: asbestos, mold, dust, dead flies, rat droppings – and even human excrement⁶.

“Plain packaging is failing in the UK, as it has in Australia and France⁷, and as we always warned that it would,” states Jonathan Duce, Head of External Communications at JTI’s global headquarters in Geneva. “Rather than wait for results to emerge from Australia – as originally committed to by Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt – the government pushed through a policy without waiting for hard evidence or research into the consequences. Plain packaging should never have been introduced in the UK, and other governments considering the measure should think twice before importing this failed experiment.”

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³ “TPD2 and standardized tobacco packaging – What impacts have they had so far?”, Europe Economics, May 2018: <http://www.europe-economics.com/publications/15/publications.htm> – Data on smoking rates for England, considered as representative for the UK.

⁴ “EXCLUSIVE: First Fake Plain Packs Discovered, Rogue Retailers Making ‘Small Fortune’”, BetterRetailing.com, November 10, 2017: <https://www.betterretailing.com/first-fake-plain-packs-discovered>.

⁵ <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/sniffer-dogs-with-gopro-bodycams-help-find-30000-fake-cigarettes-in-soho-a3547241.html>

⁶ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/illegal-tobacco-tainted-by-asbestos-and-rats-s2fpnsx26>

⁷ In France, the second country to implement plain packaging four months before the UK, Minister of Health Agnès Buzyn admitted that plain packaging doesn't stop people from smoking and that she was against it from the outset: <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/15/cr/2017-2018/20180075.asp#P1117763>

Data published by the French Observatory for Drugs and Addiction shows that one full year after the implementation of the policy, tobacco products shipped to retailers (cigarettes and RYO/MYO) were broadly stable in France, with only a slight evolution of -0.7% in volume, following a 1.3% increase in sales during the first half of the year: <https://www.ofdt.fr/ofdt/fr/tt171225.pdf>

Note to editors

Methodology:

2,464 interviews were conducted online among adults living in Great Britain between 12th to 19th April 2018. Interviews were conducted using the Kantar TNS Research Express, which uses the Lightspeed access panel as its sample source.

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**For questions regarding methodology, please contact Emma Dolby, Associate Director:
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About JTI

JTI is a leading international tobacco company with operations in more than 130 countries. It is the global owner of both Winston, the number two cigarette brand in the world, and Camel outside the USA and has the largest share in sales for both brands. Other global brands include Mevius and LD. With its internationally recognized brand Logic, JTI is also a major player in the e-cigarette market and has, since 2011, been present in the heated tobacco category with Ploom. Headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, the company employs close to 40,000 people and was awarded Global Top Employer for four consecutive years. JTI is a member of the Japan Tobacco Group of Companies. For more information, visit www.jti.com.

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