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Chair/Deputy Chair
Maori Affairs Select Committee

Tena koe e Tau Henare/Hone Harawira

Recommendation to test all cigarette and cigarette tobacco brands including cigarillos, for nicotine content to allow smokers to taper their nicotine, and government to rationally tax nicotine.

Background on tobacco addiction policy

- Manufacturers sell around 150 brand variants, untested for the ample nicotine content that enables these products to maintain addiction.
- Nicotine is the addictive ingredient in tobacco, which ensures smokers smoke long enough to suffer ill health and worse from smoking.
- **Nicotine yields** are annually reported by manufacturers, but these data are based on smoke tests which grossly underestimate the amount of nicotine inhaled. *Nicotine yields are no longer printed on packets because they were misleading.*
- **Nicotine content of cigarettes** is the more reliable measure of the smoker's dose of nicotine, but there are no up to date data on nicotine content, and smokers cannot access this information.
- **Nicotine content testing** requires a laboratory bench top test of the unburnt cigarette. No smoking machine is needed. Nicotine content is not subject to misleading results and can be tested at several laboratories in New Zealand. Ministry of Health would adopt a standard test method on recommendation of the laboratory chief of Crown Research Institute, ESR Porirua, and draw up a list of laboratories independent of the tobacco industry, approved for this purpose by the Ministry of Health, and at the manufacturer's or importer's expense. Commercial laboratories would be glad of the work.
- ESR laboratory in 1997 tested the top ten brands of cigarettes and found high levels of nicotine content.
- **Nicotine content testing should apply to all brands** of cigarettes and cigarette tobacco and to cigarillos. (For roll-your-own comparability, RYO cigarette nicotine could be based on the nicotine in a standard 0.7 g tobacco cigarette).

Nicotine content information empowers smokers and government

1. Nicotine content will provide a rational basis for tobacco addiction policy It will for example, provide a rational basis for applying nicotine tax in a fair manner in future, to persuade smokers to shift to truly low nicotine brands, and thus reduce addiction to cigarette smoking, or, as a basis for a sinking lid lowering nicotine content stepwise across all brands.

2. Nicotine content stated on the packet will help smokers wishing to wean themselves off nicotine. Smokers will have accurate information for tapering their nicotine dose, based for the first time about the nicotine content of their cigarettes, so that if they wish to, they can use this information to identify and shift to truly low nicotine brands (called tapering) prior to quitting. (Nicotine yield was so inaccurate that tapering previously was found to be unsuccessful).

Recommendation

I urge the Maori Affairs Select Committee and its Inquiry into the Tobacco Industry to recommend to Parliament that current regulations under Section 33 of the Smokefree Environments Act 1990. be amended so that:

1) Tobacco manufacturers and importers be required in future to report the nicotine content on all brands and brand variants of cigarettes cigarette tobacco and cigarillos, offered for sale, based on tests by an industry-independent laboratory recommended by the Ministry of Health, at the expense of the Ministry of Health.

2) Ministry of Health require nicotine content information to be printed on the packet or otherwise made available to smokers, so they can use this information to wean themselves off nicotine at any time they so decide.

I have no commercial interest in the above issue.

Sincerely

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