



**Figure 1** Support for cigarette tax increase according to proposed use, smoking status, and household income.

## SPONSORS/ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was supported by a grant from the National Cancer Institute (US-NIH). State funds were not used in the preparation of this report. Interpretations of the findings are solely those of the authors.

**A L McAlister, B H Howard**

University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston - School of Public Health, Houston, Texas, USA

Correspondence to: Professor Alfred L McAlister; Alfred.L.McAlister@uth.tmc.edu

Ethics approval: Ethics approval for this study was received from the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston Institutional Review Board.

doi: 10.1136/tc.2005.011676

Competing interests: The authors have no competing interests.

## REFERENCES

- Center for Health Promotion and Prevention Research, The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, School of Public Health. Texans' opinions on tobacco policy: settlement spending, prevention funding and taxation. January, 2003.
- McAlister A, Scott RL, Nixon S. How can taxes help end Texas' dependence on tobacco? *Tex Med* 2003;**99**(2):11-2.
- Hana R, Chaloupka FJ. The effect of public policies and prices on youth smoking. *ImpacTeen Research Paper Series*, No. 8. Chicago: University of Illinois at Chicago, February, 2001.
- Thomson CC, Fisher LB, Winickoff JP, et al. State tobacco excise taxes and adolescent smoking behaviors in the United States. *J Public Health Manag Prac* 2004;**10**:490-6.
- White MM, Pierce JP, Emery S. Does cigarette price influence adolescent experimentation? *J Health Econ* 2001;**20**:261-70.
- Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. *Special report: higher cigarette taxes: reduce smoking, save lives,*

save money, October 2003. <http://tobaccofreekids.org/reports/prices/> (Accessed Jan 26, 2005).

- Farrelly MC, Nimsch CT. *Impact of cigarette excise tax increases in low-tax southern states on cigarette sales, cigarette excise tax revenue, tax evasion and economic activity*, Tobacco Technical Assistance Consortium, Emory University, Rollins School of Public Health. September 2003. <http://tobaccofreekids.org/reports/prices/RTIRreport.pdf> (Accessed Jan 26, 2005).
- Chaloupka FJ, Warner K. The economics of smoking. In: Culyer A, Newhouse JP, eds. *Handbook of health economics*. New York: North-Holland, 2000:1539-627.
- Farrelly MC, Bray JW, Pechacek T, et al. Response by adults to increases in cigarette prices by sociodemographic characteristics. *Southern Economic Journal* 2001;**68**:156-65.
- Farrelly MC, Bray JW. Responses to cigarette tax increases by race/ethnicity, income and age groups - United States, 1976-1993. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 1998;**29**:605-9.

## What was "light" and "mild" is now "smooth" and "fine": new labelling of Australian cigarettes

We have just discovered (February 2005) a new "premium" sideline of Australia's second largest selling brand, Peter Jackson. The new members of the Peter Jackson "brand family" come in black, grey, and white packs, respectively, labelled "full flavour", "smooth flavour", and "fine flavour". We believe this is an industry response to a looming ban on "light" and "mild" descriptors.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has investigated whether "light" and "mild" descriptors breach the Commonwealth Trade Practices Act. It has told Parliament that it believes the industry has been involved in misleading and deceptive conduct, and that it is negotiating a settlement with the three manufacturers.

We know that large numbers of Australian smokers continue to believe that "light" and "mild" cigarettes provide relative health benefits.<sup>1</sup> Although product promotions are now tightly restricted, Australian smokers continue to be lured with what is probably the largest and most complex variety in the world of "milds" (the term Australian manufacturers prefer),<sup>2,3</sup> all designed to create a compelling illusion of reduced harm.<sup>4</sup>

Major Australian brand families typically have six notional strength variants, based on Commonwealth labelling regulations: "1 mg or less", "2 mg or less", "4 mg or less", "8 mg or less", "12 mg or less", and "16 mg or less". Government mandated information on the side of each pack includes notional tar, nicotine, and carbon monoxide yields in these six "tar bands". This is scheduled for replacement by qualitative information in March 2006, when new Commonwealth labelling regulations come into force. The industry also differentiates variants with various "mild" descriptors and/or more prominent use of the "tar band" figure. It is unclear whether the industry will be able to use notional tar figures once "light" and "mild" descriptors are prohibited.

Current industry conduct demonstrates that tar yields are very important to it. The most recent *Australian Retail Tobacconist* has a cover advertisement for leading "budget" brand, Horizon, informing retailers:

Now your Horizon customers can get their favourite brand in an exciting new look pack. With new descriptors and clearer numbers all our packs are much easier to identify. Research proves that your customers will find the new pack more appealing and a lot easier to recognize.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, a number of brands are labelled with notional tar yields not listed in the labelling regulations. For example, Marlboro Lights and Winfield Special Mild 6 are both labelled as "6 mg or less". Trade promotional material for Winfield Special Mild 6 indicated that the "6 mg or less" notional tar yield was intended to attract smokers of the "8 mg or less" variant of Winfield interested in switching to a lower yield brand.<sup>6</sup>

The new Peter Jackson Select Blend varieties push the envelope by combining innovative verbal descriptors with non-prescribed notional tar yields. "Full flavour" is labelled "9 mg or less", "smooth flavour" is labelled "6 mg or less", and "fine flavour" is labelled "3 mg or less". The backs of the packs describe the varieties as respectively delivering a "rich, full-flavoured smoking experience", "an extra smooth smoking experience", and "a more refined smoking experience". This language does not suggest gradation in risk as clearly as "mild", "extra mild", and "ultra mild", but linking these terms and visual imagery suggesting differential experience to tar yields will build belief that "smooth" and "fine" mean "safer".

If the industry can make "smooth" and "fine" effective replacements for "light" and "mild", we will lose some of the potential public health benefit from prohibiting the latter descriptors and removing ISO tar yields. There is a strong need for improved monitoring of industry responses to efforts to end the "lights" and "milds" deception, as well as for increased political will to prevent

responses which amount to continuing the deception by new means.

**B King, R Borland**

VicHealth Centre for Tobacco Control, The Cancer Council Victoria, Australia

Correspondence to: Bill King; bill.king@cancervic.org.au

doi: 10.1136/tc.2005.011692

## REFERENCES

- 1 **Borland R**, Yong H-H, King B, *et al*. Use of and beliefs about light cigarettes in four countries: Findings from the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Survey. *Nicotine Tob Res* 2004;**6**(supp 3).
- 2 **King W**, Carter SM, Borland R, *et al*. The Australian tar derby: the origins and fate of a low tar harm reduction programme. *Tobacco Control* 2003;**12**:61-70.
- 3 **King B**, Borland R. The "low-tar" strategy and the changing construction of Australian cigarettes. *Nicotine Tob Res* 2004;**6**:85-94.
- 4 **Kozlowski LT**, O'Connor RJ. Cigarette filter ventilation is a defective design because of misleading taste, bigger puffs and blocked vents. *Tobacco Control* March, 2002;**11**(suppl 1):i51-61.
- 5 **Anon**. The dawn of a new look horizon [advert] *The Australian Retail Tobacconist* Dec 2004/Jan 2005.
- 6 **Anon**. New Light Blue Winfield Special Mild 6. *The Australian Retail Tobacconist* Jun/Jul, 2003:3.

## BOOK REVIEW

### Smoke-free: how one city successfully banned smoking in all indoor public places

Edited by Barbara McLintock. Published by Granville Island Publishing ([www.granville-islandpublishing.com](http://www.granville-islandpublishing.com)), 2004, pp 216. ISBN 1-894694-31-7.

### Banning smoking in public places

This book is simultaneously depressing and reassuring for people involved in the battle to remove environmental tobacco smoke from public places. The tactics used to oppose a bylaw requiring all public places, including bars, to be smoke-free in Greater Victoria in Canada in the late 1990s are depressingly familiar to those currently fighting for smoke-free bars in Australia. On the other hand, it is reassuring that the opposition does not seem to have developed any new strategies, their moves becoming increasingly predictable.

For that reason, this is an excellent tool for people trying to bring about tobacco control through legislation and public policy and will provide a good insight for people working in other areas of public health. While the players in this story are very specific to Greater Victoria, Canada, the logistics of the campaign strategy are almost universally applicable. The tactics used to oppose tobacco control are global and the lessons learned from this campaign are worth sharing with the international tobacco control community.

*Smoke-free* has been written by a journalist, Barbara McLintock, so it is a comfortable, easy to read story. Those who want more academic details of the campaign, with statistics, evaluation, and analysis, can find that in journal articles published elsewhere. The value of this book is the insight into the power struggles and spheres of influence which are the hidden drivers of legislative change.

It also puts a human face on the battle and reinforces the need to support staff given the unenviable job of enforcing tobacco control policies among people who do not want them. I have to admit that I found the description of the aggressive hostility against the Capital Health Region staff, orchestrated by some of the bar owners, confronting and wondered what provision has been made in

Australia to deal with the possibility of such tactics.

But it is those details which make the book a very powerful blueprint for what is needed to bring about effective policy change. The growing acceptance of anti-smoking strategies by the general community has not removed all the heat from the issue and the battle does not end with the passing of legislation. The need for strong leadership and a commitment to resources to enforce the legislation once it is in place may well continue for a number of years.

**W Oakes**

The Cancer Council NSW, Australia;  
wendyo@nswcc.org.au

