

# Some smoking bans are just 'ridiculous'

By Danielle Cronin  
Health Reporter

The push to ban smoking in outdoor areas has backfired, according to one of Australia's leading specialists on tobacco control.

The University of Sydney's Professor in Public Health, Simon Chapman, has also slammed the World Health Organisation's stance against employing smokers.

He showed the same contempt for campaigns to cut smoking out of films, saying some anti-smoking lobbyists had lost the plot.

Professor Chapman has penned a new book, *Public Health Advocacy and Tobacco Control: Making Smoking History*.

He says Australians had been convinced to stop smoking based on evidence showing the link between tobacco use and disease.

But campaigns to ban smoking in outdoor areas had backfired by undermining public trust. There was "very little" evidence people were exposed to harmful levels of tobacco smoke in typical outdoor settings, except crowded sports stadiums or al-fresco dining areas.

"Some places around the world, including Australia, are now talking

about doing things like banning smoking in parks and in the street," Professor Chapman said.

"Frankly, this has just moved into the realm of being anti-smoker rather than anti-smoking . . .

"To say that a smoker couldn't go around the shores of Lake Burley Griffin with a picnic lunch and have a cigarette - I call it sort of like a 'North Korean solution'."

He had the same view on attempts to censor movies, particularly films set in eras and places where smoking was common.

"I'm all for talking about smoking in film and how influential it can be, because there's some strong evidence that when young people see very glamorous depictions of smoking by starlets and models and so forth, they kind of latch on to that.

"But you know there's a lot of things you can see in the cinema. You can see people being racist, people being sexist, people being violent, people shooting people, people driving cars very fast . . .

"The idea that health authorities could come along and say, 'We don't want to encourage gluttony or sedentary lifestyles, so any films showing any of that we will not allow that', it's just ridiculous." It was also

stupid for the WHO to refuse to employ smokers.

He could understand if smokers were excluded from working in the tobacco control section, but the WHO had programs to tackle other health problems, ranging from malaria to HIV-AIDS.

"Basically, they're making a statement that if somebody smokes, that's all you need to know about their value to . . . improving health, which is just nonsense," Professor Chapman said.

"Fred Hollows, for example, smoked a pipe almost incessantly and he did marvellous work on eye disease in some of the world's poorest nations.

"So basically the WHO would be saying, 'Well we would not employ Fred Hollows', which is really stupid. And when I see things like that I just sort of think - golly we just don't need to shoot ourselves in the foot."

Australia had more success than most countries in reducing the smoking rate. About 60 per cent of men were smokers in the early 1960s compared with about 15 per cent today. This had been achieved through campaigns such as mass education and graphic warnings on cigarette packets.