

This speech was originally posted on Philip Morris' website but has been taken down.

The politics of **harm reduction**: A perspective on public policy approaches to a controversial industry and product

David Davies, Senior Vice President, Corporate Affairs / National Press Club, Canberra / 23 March 2005

In today's climate of antipathy towards tobacco companies, it is not without some courage that the National Press Club has chosen to allow Philip Morris International to share its perspective on achieving the public health goal of reducing the **harm** caused by smoking.

There was recently a significant paper published in the European Union, the title of which was "Tobacco or Health". It was a comprehensive review of policy development and action in the European Union over recent decades to regulate the use of tobacco products. The report was authored by the ASPECT Consortium, a collaboration of leading tobacco control experts from academia and NGOs. It is a significant report because it articulates a comprehensive and challenging body of recommendations for future policy directions.

I begin with a reference to that report to illustrate one of the themes that I want to address today: the ability of my company to be a positive contributor, indeed a partner, in shaping future policy for tobacco. It continues to surprise many in the public policy and public health communities that Philip Morris International, one of the world's largest tobacco companies, is an advocate of many of the forward looking measures recommended in the ASPECT report. It continues to be a cause of disappointment among many in professional media circles that our reaction to such a report is not one driven by the reflex response of opposition and outrage that used to characterize such events. Consensus and common ground, shared beliefs and shared goals do not, it seems, make for interesting news in Europe and also here in Australia. Therein lies an enormous missed opportunity.

"With the adoption of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and governments continually seeking better ways to address the issue of tobacco use, there is no better time to take a new approach to tobacco related policy."

Giving voice to cooperation and collaboration and not only to conflict and confrontation can and does promote public good. Philip Morris International advocates collaboration and it is a fact that we have significant common ground with tobacco control experts in Europe, here in Australia and around the world.

It is reasonable, therefore, for us to seek to participate in shaping debate and policy around the contentious issues of tobacco and health. It is reasonable not only because there is much common ground between Philip Morris, public health authorities and tobacco control advocates; but also because we are able to make substantial contributions that help to shape appropriate policy directions and sound policy decisions. Our contributions can shape policies that offer opportunities to make progress towards reducing the **harm** caused by tobacco.

The principle of **harm** minimization, or **harm reduction**, has been the stated aim of the Australian Federal Government's National Drug Strategic Framework since the mid-1980s.

The principle is also reflected in the stated objectives of the Draft Australian National Tobacco Strategy 2004-2009, which was approved by the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy on November 12 last year. Those objectives are:

- to prevent the uptake of smoking
- to encourage and assist as many smokers as possible to quit as soon as possible
- to eliminate harmful exposure to tobacco smoke among non-smokers, and
- where feasible, to reduce the **harm** caused by use and dependence on tobacco and nicotine among all social groups.

The fact is Philip Morris International and its Australian-based affiliate, Philip Morris Limited, support each of these four pillars of **harm reduction** and we intend to work closely with government, public health authorities and other stakeholders to achieve these goals.

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We have knowledge and expertise to offer to enable public health authorities to achieve the goal of reducing the **harm** caused by smoking. We believe the question for governments, today, is how to best harness the expertise of commercial enterprises such as ours in promoting public policy goals.

Governments in Australia have a proven track record of addressing the first two pillars of **harm reduction** – encouraging smokers to quit and preventing people from starting to smoke in the first place.

- For example, health warnings on cigarette packs were introduced in Australia in 1973; and we will have graphic health warnings early next year.
- Gradual restrictions on tobacco advertising began in the 1970s, with – in 1992 – an effective ban on all forms of tobacco advertising and promotion.
- Progressively throughout the 1990s, state governments began introducing minimum age laws to prohibit the sale of tobacco products to young people.

More recently government efforts have included measures aimed at addressing the third pillar of **harm reduction** – to protect non-smokers from environmental tobacco smoke.

Throughout the 1990s state governments began to impose smoking restrictions in public places, starting with areas such as shopping malls and restaurants.

This has now progressed so that soon there will be bans in all enclosed workplaces, including pubs and clubs.

But what of those adults, here in Australia and throughout the world, who are either unwilling, or unable, to quit smoking? Are measures to control tobacco the solution?

Is prohibition the answer?

In relation to these questions may I cite the following:

“Better controls will not eliminate tobacco use. At least some smoking is due to dependence and experienced benefits... There is likely to be a continuing demand for tobacco products and as a result prohibition will not eliminate use, and could create social **harm** by making lawbreakers of otherwise good citizens.”

These are not my words. I quote from a paper published by Dr Ron Borland of the VicHealth Centre for Tobacco Control.

"The debate must shift from one of whether you want a tobacco industry, to one of what kind of a tobacco industry do you want?"

The simplistic view often laid before us is that, if we do care about reducing the **harm** caused by our product, we should simply stop producing it – move into another industry. That would not contribute to a **reduction** in tobacco use and, certainly, not to a **reduction** in the **harm** caused by tobacco use. There is more than sufficient capacity in the world to substitute tobacco products from other sources for tobacco products made by Philip Morris. Nor is prohibition of all manufacturing a viable solution. The Draft Australian National Tobacco Strategy recognizes that and states: “One in five adults uses tobacco and many are unable to stop despite numerous attempts. Prohibition is clearly an inappropriate choice for Governments in these circumstances.” Several public health authorities around the world have acknowledged the reality that tobacco consumption is here to stay. The World Health Organization (WHO) has acknowledged that, and others have been similarly realistic; New Zealand and the European Parliament prime among them.

Even some of the tobacco industry’s strongest critics in this country have said that prohibition is not an option. In fact, Professor Simon Chapman of Sydney University is quoted in December 2003 as saying the notion of prohibition is "philosophically repugnant". It is also impractical. Even today, there are many willing to make cigarettes unlawfully, distribute them unlawfully and sell them unlawfully. They and only they will benefit from prohibition.

The debate must shift from one of whether you want a tobacco industry, to one of what kind of a tobacco industry do you want? The debate should acknowledge that prohibition is not viable and should focus on collaborative approaches to reducing the **harm** caused by smoking. That is what we advocate and that is what we seek.

With the adoption of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and governments continually seeking better ways to address the issue of tobacco use, there is no better time to take a new approach to tobacco related policy.

The approach has to be comprehensive and holistic. There needs to be regulation addressing all four pillars of the **harm reduction** objectives I outlined earlier. We must focus on solutions for the smoker and not just solutions to discourage smoking. Legitimate and responsible manufacturers can contribute to the achievement of

government goals in these areas.

In Australia, much public debate about tobacco related issues seems stuck in the past. We repeatedly hear news accounts alleging that tobacco companies resist all tobacco control efforts; that tobacco companies engage in product placement in the motion picture industry; that tobacco companies covertly market their products to minors.

On product placement – the simple fact is we don't do it. We have had a policy here in Australia and everywhere in the world not to pay for product placement for many years.

"We don't want kids to smoke. We don't need kids to smoke. It is from the existing adult smoker market that we seek to grow our share."

On the issue of youth smoking let me be very clear. We don't want kids to smoke. We don't need kids to smoke. It is from the existing adult smoker market that we seek to grow our share. We have been playing our part in helping to prevent kids from smoking for many years. Here in Australia, for example, since the early 1980s we have developed and implemented, with our trade partners, retail access prevention programmes.

We want to work with governments to strengthen enforcement of minimum age laws. For example, at the current time four states in Australia still don't have a licensing system for the sale of tobacco products. We strongly support a licensing system with strong enforcement and appropriate penalties for those who illegally sell to children.

Philip Morris International, and Philip Morris Limited here in Australia, support a range of strong and comprehensive regulations that apply to all tobacco products as well as to all companies engaged in the manufacture, distribution and sale of such products. For example, each participant in this industry should be required to obtain a licence, which could be withdrawn for non-compliance with very specific rules regarding its sector of business.

We advocate a range of other regulatory approaches that we believe will help governments achieve their public health objectives.

I do not suggest that governments in Australia have failed to pursue policy measures and regulatory actions to address the **harm** caused by tobacco consumption. As noted by Dr Omi, WHO's Regional Director for the Western Pacific, Australia has been for many years in the vanguard of these efforts.

However, the Federal Government has acknowledged that more remains to be done. That is a view we share. The Draft Australian National Tobacco Strategy acknowledges that "there has been little consideration of broader regulation of tobacco products" in Australia.

I think, equally, there has been little consideration of whether government policy is better served by the politics of inclusion rather than the politics of exclusion. The

politics of inclusion lead to increased scientific understanding of the product itself and will assist in framing future regulation.

Product regulations should play an important role in reducing the **harm** of smoking for those adults who continue to smoke and for society as a whole. Regulations should identify, and mandate action in, areas for further scientific enquiry and understanding. Regulations should require manufacturers to develop and responsibly market products that reduce individuals' exposure to harmful smoke constituents and that may ultimately reduce societal **harm**. And regulation should allow adults who choose not to quit to receive information about the availability and attributes of such products.

"Would it be morally right to withhold such products from the market if they do have the potential to reduce the **harm** caused by tobacco consumption?"

Currently, the ingredients used to make tobacco products are disclosed to the federal government as part of a voluntary agreement. Philip Morris believes ingredients should be regulated. Requiring tobacco product manufacturers to provide comprehensive ingredient information and toxicological data to the federal government is a necessary predicate for the regulated development and commercialization of reduced **harm** products.

The focus, however, should be on understanding tobacco smoke. And this is very important: it is tobacco smoke, not cigarette ingredients, that causes **harm**. The WHO recommends that tobacco smoke emissions be examined, both quantitatively and qualitatively. We strongly agree, and encourage the federal government to establish regulations requiring tobacco product manufacturers to provide smoke constituent information to the government and, as the government deems appropriate, to consumers.

Ultimately, regulation could and should establish standards that define whether a product has the potential to reduce smokers' exposure to tobacco toxicants, risk of disease, or **harm**, and establish manufacturing and quality control processes for making such products.

The Draft Australian National Tobacco Strategy states: "Regulation of tobacco products would allow governments to mandate evidence-based, potentially **harm**-reducing innovations across the whole market." Philip Morris agrees: product regulations should be based on scientific understanding. One approach could be to establish a scientific advisory committee on tobacco product regulation, comprising experts in epidemiology, toxicology, pharmacology and other disciplines, much as the WHO did when it established its Scientific Advisory Committee.

All governments around the world need to address this issue now and we do take heart from the fact that some governments have begun to move down this path. For example, the New Zealand Ministry of Health in a recent paper has focused on "Tobacco Product Modification and **Harm Reduction**" and we have welcomed the opportunity to engage with the New Zealand Government and share our scientific knowledge and expertise.

What if products that have the potential to reduce smokers' exposure to the harmful substances in tobacco smoke could be developed? How would a tobacco company or public health authority communicate about such products to ensure smokers understood that, while these products have the potential to reduce exposure, they are still not “safe” cigarettes? Conversely, would it be morally right to withhold such products from the market if they do have the potential to reduce the **harm** caused by tobacco consumption? Would it be morally right not to be able to communicate to smokers to tell them such products are available?

Any comprehensive regulatory regime must address these issues.

So where do we fit in? We have a business goal to ensure that those adults who are buying cigarettes – conventional or in the future reduced **harm** - are buying our brands.

We have been researching and seeking to develop products that have the potential to reduce **harm**. We have knowledge, we have scientific expertise, and we want to share our knowledge and expertise to reach a better understanding of how products can be made less harmful.

Put differently, we share a common goal with many in the public health community to devise a system where the incentives on tobacco companies are consistent with reduced **harm**, where there is the capacity to allow smokers who are currently unwilling or unable to quit smoking to switch to less harmful products.

"The record is clear that when government and any industry work together openly and honestly to resolve differences, the ultimate beneficiary is the public good."

The record is clear that when government and any industry work together openly and honestly to resolve differences, the ultimate beneficiary is the public good. Fostering conflict instead of cooperation between government and the tobacco industry ignores the public policy ramifications of ongoing acrimony. It is a lost opportunity to make meaningful progress on a number of important public health issues involving tobacco.

We, along with governments and the public health community, should be working together to reduce the **harm** caused by smoking. These are ambitious goals both for Australia and for Philip Morris. We believe they are achievable and we are committed to working with federal, state and territory governments, public health experts – and also tobacco control advocates – to achieve them.

It is a fact that Australian governments and health authorities have made great progress in encouraging people who don't smoke not to start; in helping smokers who choose to quit to do so; and in protecting non-smokers from exposure to environmental tobacco smoke.

But if world health authorities and governments agree that a significant proportion of adults will continue to smoke, even when fully informed of the risks, more has to be done about reducing the **harm** to those who continue to smoke.

More has to be done than simply focusing on reducing the level of smoking incidence. Of course, this should include strong, effective regulation but we believe the next effective step is through addressing the issue of reduced **harm** products. It is to that end that we are researching innovative new products that, we hope, will significantly reduce the harmful effect of smoking.

Continued demand for tobacco products is a fact. The **harm** caused by smoking is most effectively addressed through collaboration, with all involved working towards the joint goal of reducing the **harm**. The challenge for us all is to put away bias and suspicion stemming from conflicts of the past; to recognize our common ground; and to work towards a comprehensive regulatory framework that embraces all four principles of **harm reduction**. It can be accomplished.