

## Evidence-based policy is key to the success of Smokefree 2025 Ambition

**Media Statement** – BAT (New Zealand) Ltd

**Wednesday, 21 September 2022** - BAT New Zealand (BATNZ) has encouraged Health Committee MPs to focus on science and evidence-based approach to best achieve the New Zealand Government's Smokefree 2025 ambition.

Speaking today on the Smokefree Environments and Regulated Products (Smoked Tobacco) Amendment Bill, BATNZ's General Manager Andy Hrstic and BAT Group's Science Expert Gavin Mullard said, "BAT supports the Smokefree 2025 goal but believes there is a better way to achieve it than the three drastic policies in the Bill".

"This Government has so far embraced a progressive, world-leading and evidence-based approach to reducing smoking rates, and it's working. This success can be ramped up to reduce demand and avoid the slew of negative consequences arising from shifting supply to the illegal black market.

"The latest health surveys show that close to 100,000 adult smokers quit in the last two years<sup>1</sup>, which public health experts attribute to the parallel success of vaping products," Mr Hrstic says.

"BATNZ supports strengthening harm reduction regulation enabling better access, education and more options of '*significantly less harmful alternatives*'<sup>2</sup> for adult smokers, while at the same time tackling the illegal, unregulated tobacco trade. We believe this can better achieve the Smokefree goal without the negative unintended consequences of the prohibitive measures in the Bill.

"This Bill seemingly abandons the proven success of tobacco harm reduction in favour of eradicating legal supply of smoked tobacco, which will fuel the growth of illegal tobacco.

"Setting an extremely low nicotine ceiling on smoked tobacco products is not backed by the weight of scientific evidence. Independent studies published just this year suggest more research is still required.

"The NZ Customs Service have also warned that such measures will drive a further increase in illegal tobacco and benefit '*transnational organised crime groups*'<sup>3</sup>. This de facto prohibition would make the black market the **only** source of normal-strength tobacco products.

"BATNZ has recommended an alternative policy, which is supported by real-world evidence from notable legislation, including that of European Union, and more than 90 other countries globally.

"The generational ban on sale and supply is equally unproven and further entrenches illegal activity. BATNZ has recommended a differentiation of '*significantly less harmful alternatives*' at R18, while enacting a fixed age increase for smoked tobacco products to R21, which evidence from the US shows is effective, and could be enacted sooner than the proposed generational ban.

"Rapidly restricting retailers' licence to operate will disproportionately impact legitimate, hardworking small businesses. Despite thousands of retailers warning that their livelihoods are at risk from the proposal to reduce the approved store numbers from 8000 to 500 overnight, the Government has not undertaken any financial impact analysis or provided robust evidence to suggest this policy would be fair or effective.

"BATNZ recommend a fairer licensing approach be implemented gradually. This could be supplemented by a win-win measure of allowing retailers who voluntarily stop selling tobacco to sell a wider variety of '*significantly less harmful alternatives*'<sup>4</sup>, enabling a sustainable transition, and supporting adult smokers to make the switch."

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Note to editors:  
The BATNZ written submission is available [online here](https://www.batnz.com). – [www.batnz.com](https://www.batnz.com)

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ash.org.nz/>

<sup>2</sup> Supporting smokers to switch to significantly less harmful alternatives | Ministry of Health NZ

<sup>3</sup> Investigation finds black market tobacco being sold online out of homes to avoid taxation | Newshub