

Anti-smoking move backed

By Darren Coyne The Koori Mail, Wednesday May 5th 2010 p 12

Indigenous anti-smoking campaigner Tom Calma has backed the Federal Government decision to increase the tax on cigarettes, and for them to be sold in plain packaging.

Mr Calma, who is the National Coordinator for Tackling Indigenous Smoking, told The Koori Mail the new tobacco regime would provide another incentive for people to reduce or quit smoking.

Mr Calma said up to 50 per cent of Indigenous people were smokers, with that percentage rising up to 80 per cent in some communities.

“Some of our mob will suffer (from the increased prices). But if they reduce their smoking they won’t have to suffer as much,” he said.

The Government last Thursday announced new laws making plain packaging compulsory by 1 January 2012, and has raised the tax on cigarettes up to \$2.75 a pack.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said the move would give cigarette makers no room to gloss over the fact their product was a killer.

He said the changes – along with a ban on Internet advertising – would save lives and raise additional funds for hospitals.

Tobacco companies have indicated they will challenge the imposition of plain packaging in court, but the Prime Minister said the Government would not be paying compensation.

Mr Calma welcomed the new measures, saying they would be another plank in the fight against smoking.

As part of the \$100 million campaign he is heading, ‘tobacco action workers’ would be employed at 57 Aboriginal Medical Services around the country. They would work with communities to educate people about the dangers of smoking, and develop strategies to stop or reduce smoking.

Mr Calma said evidence from around the world suggested that plain packaging and increased excise were factors, which helped people to make the decision to quit.

He also backed the Government’s claims that changing the packaging could help prevent younger people from being attracted to smoking.

Mr Calma conceded Indigenous people would feel the brunt of the new pricing regime, but he said it would also encourage people to scale back on their smoking.

“It’s been shown that people spend up to \$5,000 a year on cigarettes, and in some extended families people are paying the price of a Toyota,” he said.