



**THE HON NICOLA ROXON MP
Minister for Health and Ageing**

**TRANSCRIPT
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Topics: Plain Packaging of Tobacco, Opposition Disunity Over Plain Packaging

E&OE

Nicola Roxon: Thank you for coming. My name's Nicola Roxon, I'm the health minister and I'm here just to talk about our Government's ongoing determination to lead the world by introducing plain packaging legislation for tobacco. We are determined to lead the world; it's now time for Mr Abbott to start leading the Coalition.

Our Government believes that these measures will take away one of the last remaining tools for tobacco companies to promote their products, particularly to new smokers.

We'd like the Opposition to be supporting this measure. Tobacco controls of the past - changing advertising restrictions and others - have been supported as bipartisan measures, and we think that this innovative world first is something that Australia should be proud of, not something that we see people fighting over in the party room.

In particular, Mr Abbott, as a former health minister, knows the harms caused by tobacco; he knows that he could work with us to lead the world, but it seems he's not even prepared to lead his own coalition.

I think it's about time that Mr Abbott kicked his habit of receiving donations from big tobacco.

And you might have seen that a number of backbenchers are moving a motion in the Parliament calling on all parties to desist from receiving campaign donations from big tobacco.

Unfortunately, when big tobacco have donated \$3 million to the Liberal Party over the last 12 years there is a question mark on why Mr Abbott is dragging his

feet in supporting this measure, and that question mark will remain when the Liberal Party continues to accept donations from big tobacco.

Of course, we've seen quoted in the papers over the weekend the member for Moore saying, and I quote, The tobacco industry's jumping up and down because they're worried about their business. I support these reforms unequivocally, and whatever my party decides to do, I don't give a shit. That's a direct quote, if maybe an unparliamentary one. And obviously the member for Moore is making clear his public support for this measure, and we hope that Mr Abbott will take heed of these sorts of comments and consider his position.

Of course, we've seen Mr Dutton, health spokesperson, come out and say that they cannot form a view until they've seen the regulation. So it seems to me now that the Liberal Party wants to argue over the font size or the font type on our plain packaging before it can determine whether it supports us or where it doesn't. We've really got a pretty crazy position if the Liberal Party needs to know whether it's Times New Roman or Ariel font before it can decide whether it will support measures that aim to support lives and save lives.

Of course, we've also seen Mr Abbott unleash Senator Joyce this morning, who said that making - introducing plain packaging was like simply going into big tobacco companies and ripping their computers off their desks and the furniture out of their living room. And this is just plain weird but shows you that the Liberal Party is in disarray over what position to take.

Mr Abbott wants to stick up for big tobacco in the same way that he's sticking up for big polluters, and clearly that is starting to put pressure on him in his own party room.

Over to you guys.

Journalist: Minister, when will the - is it legislation or regulation - [indistinct]?

Nicola Roxon: The legislation has been released as a draft - exposure draft. It's out for consultation at the moment.

Journalist: When do you anticipate it going to the Parliament?

Nicola Roxon: The consultation period closes on 6 June. There'll obviously be a period of time where any changes that might need to be made following that consultation will be considered, and it would be introduced in the second half of this year - most likely when we return after the break in sittings in July.

Journalist: Minister, some members of the Opposition say they are keen to reduce the incidence of smoking, but they say you have no proof that this will actually do it.

Nicola Roxon: Well, this is a world first. The sort of proof they're looking for doesn't exist when this hasn't been introduced around the world. We do have research that tests the interest in particular measures, tests whether or not you can make a packet less attractive, whether it makes a person less likely to buy a product. We can't look around the world to see these successes because it hasn't been introduced around the world.

And I think that, unfortunately, a number of members of the Liberal Party are looking for excuses not to support this legislation rather than looking for ways that they can work with us to combat the harms caused by tobacco.

Journalist: Isn't Mr Abbott irrelevant in this if you've already got three votes from the Liberal Party?

Nicola Roxon: Well, I don't have any indications from any members. Obviously I read what is in the media and I understand that there are members of the Liberal backbench that are very concerned about the position that Mr Abbott has taken. And, of course, his Liberal colleagues in New South Wales, the New South Wales Government; his Liberal colleagues in Victoria, the Victorian Government have said they support this measure. And, of course, we will welcome each and every vote in the Parliament in support of this legislation when it's introduced.

But it is time that Mr Abbott showed that he was prepared to stand up to big tobacco, or stand up to big donors, and make up his mind whether he supports this measure or not.

Journalist: Are you going to stand up to big tobacco if they cut the price of cigarettes and increase the tax so that it doesn't become an incentive for people to start?

Nicola Roxon: Well, I think we've made very clear that our determination - the government's determination to fight this in every way. I don't think there's a suggestion that we are succumbing to any of the threats being made by big tobacco. Frankly, I don't believe their threat that they will cut their own profits in order to make a point. They've never done that before when the excise has been increased. I think it would be a foolish and irresponsible approach for them to take, but ultimately our government will make a decision about any response if that is the approach that they take.

Journalist: Well, health groups are asking you to increase the tax if that happens. Would you consider doing that?

Nicola Roxon: I'm not going to rule in and out any options. It's not currently part of our plans. We've already increased the excise by 25 per cent; we didn't see the tobacco companies slash their prices at that time. I think this is just an argument they're making, along with a lot of other huffing and puffing, that they think that this will cause damage to them. And it is just confirming our view that this is a measure which will be successful, will affect their profits and, therefore, will actually help save lives, and that's why we're determined to go ahead with it.

Journalist: What's your position on accepting gifts and donations from big tobacco?

Nicola Roxon: Well, the Labor Party made a decision in 2004 not to continue to receive any sort of donations from big tobacco; that's a measure that I support. I think that this is an area where there is no safe amount of this product that can be consumed, and as a government determined to protect the community's health, I think it's appropriate that we are not receiving those donations and we don't think the Liberal Party should either.

Journalist: But were you a guest at Philip Morris at the Australian Open in 1999?

Nicola Roxon: Sure, I was - more than a decade ago. I don't think anyone is suggesting that two tickets to the tennis have actually been an effective investment made by big tobacco. That was something that I don't think was wise in retrospect. I think it was a long time ago and it is very clear that that has not affected our government's determination to tackle big tobacco.

You look at the contrast, which is since that time the Liberal Party has received \$3 million worth of donations from big tobacco and can't make up its mind whether it will support this measure. So the questions that really need to be asked are to Mr Abbott, and so far he hasn't answered them.

Okay? Thanks very much guys.

Ends.