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Time for a National Strategy on Illicit Tobacco

British American Tobacco Australia (BATA) has called upon the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement (PJCLE) to recommend the Government adopt a National Illicit Tobacco Strategy.

BATA spokesperson Joshua Fett said that Australian taxpayers are already haemorrhaging \$1.49 billion to criminals each year, and unless the Government acts now this number will likely top \$3 billion by 2020.

“The current patchwork of responsibilities and enforcement tools simply doesn’t contemplate sophisticated criminal networks responsible for tobacco smuggling,” Mr Fett said.

“A National Illicit Tobacco Strategy would provide clarity to government departments and law enforcement agencies on roles and responsibilities.

“The Australian Border Force Tobacco Strike Team (TST) in particular has had great success in instances where they have a clear mandate to act. The problem is that in so many cases, jurisdictional issues mean that criminals face little or no repercussions.

Clearly, the Government must continue to properly resource the TST via funding and move forward with previously announced strengthened retail enforcement and tougher penalty measures.

“Criminals are smart; they exploit loopholes to avoid being penalised. If simply moving operations from one side of a state border to another avoids prosecution, or only selling illicit tobacco of uncertain origin creates enforcement paralysis, the system is broken.

“As acknowledged by the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission (formerly the Australian Crime Commission), the organised criminals involved view the illicit tobacco trade as a low risk, high reward activity. With large excise increases scheduled out to 2020 the incentives to break the law will only increase.

“A National Illicit Tobacco Strategy can at least balance the equation. Since the United Kingdom introduced a similar strategy in 2011, UK Customs and the UK Border Force have seen a 50% increase in annual prosecutions in tobacco offences.

“BATA urges the PJCLE to make a difference by recommending law enforcement agencies are provided with a framework which allows them to act.”

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