

Plain-packet cigarettes delayed in Australia

2 November 2011

Australia's world-first plan for plain packaging on cigarettes has been delayed, giving tobacco firms extra time to prepare, the government said Wednesday, with the first sales now due in December 2012.

Health Minister Nicola Roxon said final voting on the laws had been pushed back due to "shenanigans" in the upper [house of parliament](#), meaning tobacco companies would have an extra six months before plain packets were introduced.

Roxon said a "lack of enthusiasm" from conservative lawmakers had stalled the laws for so long that the industry would now face an unreasonably short time to bring in the new packaging by next July, as originally planned.

"I don't agree with the tobacco companies about very much, but I do agree that they should be entitled to an appropriate lead time to implement this very big change," Roxon said.

"So the new date, the day that people will see plain packaged cigarettes on their shelves ... (will be) 1 December next year."

Under the proposed legislation aimed at reducing Australia's 15,000 annual smoking-related deaths, all logos will be removed from cigarette packaging, with company brand names printed in a uniform font.

Packets will be a bland olive-green, with graphic [health warning](#) pictures printed on them, such as black, diseased gums, blinded eyes and hospitalised children.

Strongly opposed by the [tobacco industry](#), the laws were passed by the lower house in August but the centre-left Labor government has been unable to get them to a vote in the upper house due to procedural delaying by the opposition.

Roxon said it was a "small setback" and she was confident that the laws would pass in coming

weeks, with pledges of support from all parties.

"I think having a few last gasps for the [tobacco companies](#) doesn't stop the fact that we are going to put an end to marketing of [tobacco products](#) in Australia," the [health minister](#) said.

The proposal is being closely watched by other countries considering similar policies, including New Zealand, Britain and Canada.

But the enraged tobacco giants claim there is no evidence that plain packaging will reduce smoking rates and complain that counterfeit products will flood the market, reducing their profits.

They have threatened to take Canberra to court over the plan, with Philip Morris launching an intellectual property lawsuit in Asia and British American Tobacco mulling similar action.

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