Taoiseach,

We write to support you and your government’s plan to introduce the standardised packaging of tobacco in Ireland in the face of intense lobbying on the part of the tobacco industry and their front groups.

In the EU over 650,000 Europeans are killed every year because they smoke. Tobacco kills up to one in every two long-term users, half of these in middle age. The total financial burden of lung disease in Europe amounts to over €100 billion, a figure comparable to the annual gross domestic product (GDP) of the Republic of Ireland.

Standardised packaging has been proven in scientific, peer-reviewed studies to:

- reduce the appeal of tobacco products to young people;
- stop smokers believing that some cigarettes are less harmful than others;
- make health warnings more effective, and;
- increase negative feelings about smoking.

The introduction of standardised packaging in Australia in 2012 has been seen as a major success for public health there. The latest data from the Australian Government has shown that the smoking rate has dropped to an all-time low of 12.8%. The comparable figure in Ireland is 21.5%.

The tobacco industry, on witnessing these figures, is doing everything in its power to block, amend or delay legislation that aims to curb smoking. The European Parliament has seen the power of the tobacco lobby. During the debate on the revised Tobacco Products Directive, the tobacco industry employed 97 people to lobby MEPs with an annual budget of over €5.3 million and successfully delayed the adoption of new rules on packaging, flavouring and e-cigarettes.

Lithuania’s health minister, Vytenis Andriukaitis, revealed that as many as 233 meetings between MEPs and tobacco industry lobbyists were organised in 17 months.
Two key arguments employed by the tobacco lobby relate to intellectual property rights and the illicit trade.

Firstly, the argument that plain packaging infringes intellectual property has been dismissed by the High Court of Australia. They found that the government is permitted to amend their laws surrounding IP to protect public health. The State does not acquire the intellectual property of tobacco companies as governments do not propose to use the logos. Tobacco companies will still maintain full rights to their logos and brand imagery. They will simply no longer be able to use these marketing tools on cigarette packages.

Secondly, an impact assessment carried out by the European Commission rejected the tobacco industry’s claims on plain packaging and illicit trade declaring ‘no convincing evidence has been submitted’.

The UK All Party Parliamentary Group on Smoking and Health also found no evidence to back up the claims of the tobacco industry, asserting ‘evidence to our inquiry... showed that external packaging is not what is used by enforcement authorities in determining whether tobacco products are illicit. Covert and overt security markings... [including] coded numbers and anti-counterfeit marks... would still be present on standardised packaging.’

Ireland has always been looked upon by the rest of Europe as a leading light in tobacco control.

In becoming the first government in Europe to adopt a Workplace Smoking Ban, Ireland introduced a policy that has now been proven to ‘denormalise’ smoking and been adopted by many EU neighbours.

Now Ireland is – once again – seeking to be a leader in Europe in combating the devastating health and economic effects of tobacco.

We urge you and your government not to be swayed by the misleading arguments of the tobacco lobby and to stand up for public health.

We wholeheartedly support the adoption of standardised packaging in Ireland and believe that this is a key part of the fight against tobacco-related disease across Europe.

Yours sincerely,

Florence Berteletti
Director
Smoke Free Partnership