

Media Release

Hon Jacinta Allan MP
Premier



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TOUGH NEW LAWS TO SMOKE OUT TOBACCO CRIME LORDS

The toughest penalties in the country are coming for the illegal tobacco trade and the criminals who profit from it.

Premier Jacinta Allan today joined Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation Melissa Horne and Minister for Police Anthony Carbines to introduce the *Tobacco Amendment (Tobacco Retailer and Wholesaler Licensing Scheme) Bill 2024*.

The Bill will create a strict new licensing scheme, putting more boots on the ground and providing more powers to crack down on illicit tobacco and organised crime – with massive consequences for breaking the law.

It builds on the work of Victoria Police's Taskforce Lunar, which has already seen more than 80 offenders arrested and \$37 million worth of cash, vapes and illegal tobacco products seized.

Strict new licensing regime

The Bill will establish a tobacco business licensing scheme – so tobacco can only be sold by licensed retailers.

A licence is only available for fit and proper persons who pass a strict test, and you can be refused a licence based on your history and known associates.

This will help protect legitimate business from getting undercut from criminal syndicates and ban those who have criminal affiliations from having anything to do with this trade.

More powers

Victoria Police's search powers will be beefed up to make it easier and quicker to raid, search and seize illicit products from a retailer suspected of having links to organised crime.

Police will also play a key role in ensuring the suitability of licensees under the scheme. There will also be powers to impose further licence conditions.

Dedicated inspectors

A new tobacco regulator will be established, with dedicated inspectors to hit the streets alongside Victoria Police.

The regulator will administer the licensing scheme and will be responsible for enforcement and compliance of licences. This includes the power to search shops, suspend licences, and seize illegal items.

Inspectors will also support police with extra intelligence gathering in the fight against organised crime.

Toughest penalties in Australia

If you break these new laws, you'll face the toughest penalties in Australia.

Any person found to be selling illicit tobacco will face fines of more than \$355,000 or up to 15 years in jail, while businesses will face fines of more than \$1.7 million.

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These reforms build on the work already underway by Victoria Police to disrupt and deter crime associated with the supply of illicit tobacco, as part of their specialist operation Taskforce Lunar.

This work has seen more than 80 offenders arrested and \$37 million worth of cash, vapes and illegal tobacco products seized.

Tougher penalties will come into effect immediately when the Act commences. The roll out of the new licensing scheme will start from the middle of next year.

Quote attributable to Premier Jacinta Allan

"We're implementing the toughest laws anywhere in the country to smoke out the illegal tobacco trade and keep Victorians safe."

Quote attributable to Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation Melissa Horne

"This strict licensing scheme will establish a dedicated tobacco regulator to help ensure all businesses are operating within the law."

Quote attributable to Minister for Police Anthony Carbines

"Victoria Police has been tireless in its work to disrupt and dismantle organised crime."

"These new search powers will give police new ways to crack down on crime lords and keep the community safe."