

A Research Agenda to Inform a “Sinking Lid” to End Tobacco Sales in New Zealand

Nick Wilson^{1*}, Murray Laugesen², Tony Blakely¹, George Thomson¹ [Presenter], Richard Edwards¹

¹ Department of Public Health, University of Otago, Wellington, New Zealand (NZ)

² Health New Zealand Ltd, Christchurch, NZ

* Correspondence: Associate Professor Nick Wilson, Email: nick.wilson@otago.ac.nz

Background

In New Zealand (NZ) many tobacco control organisations,¹ researchers² and some Māori political leaders,³ have promoted the goal of ending tobacco sales or making the nation tobacco-free. A recent Select Committee Inquiry in NZ on tobacco issues, was presented with arguments for such a phase-out over various time periods.

One policy to ensure such a phase-out would involve setting an annual absolute reduction in the supply of smoked tobacco products reducing to nil over a 10 year period (Figure 1), effectively ending the commercial sale of tobacco. This could involve the periodic auctioning by government of a diminishing supply of tobacco product quotas to manufacturers/importers, while allowing quota trading. Here we aim to provide an initial set of research topics around this “sinking lid” policy.

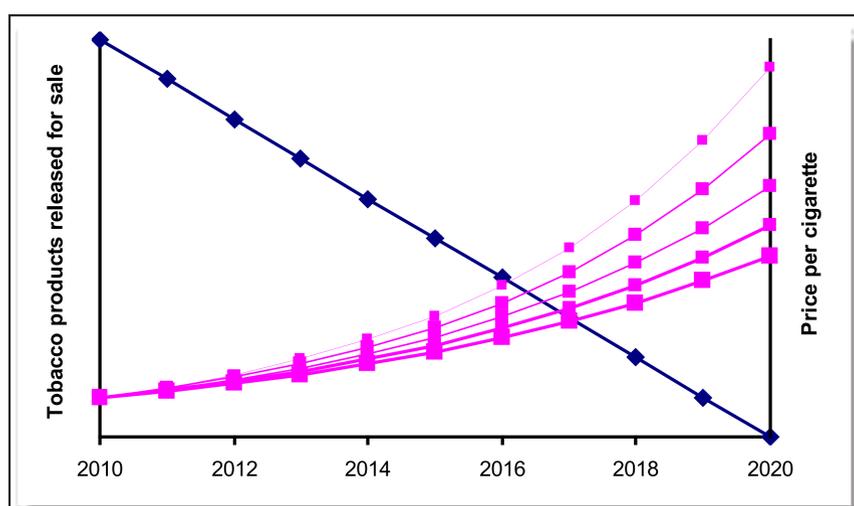


Figure 1: Model for a “sinking lid” on tobacco sales as an endgame policy. (The blue line shows a simple 10% per annum decline in supply. The thinnest pink line shows what might happen to price (second y-axis) if nothing else happens other than setting a sinking-lid on tobacco sales quotas. The thicker pink lines show what might happen to price if a range of adjunct measures are also put in place to reduce demand for retail tobacco eg, intensive mass media campaigns.)

Top five research priorities

1) Identifying NZ-specific historical lessons: NZ has achieved successful endgames in terms of leaded petrol⁴ (Figure 2), asbestos imports, and second-hand smoke inside public places.⁵ Some diseases have also been eliminated (eg, polio,⁶ hydatids and brucellosis⁷). Further study of the lessons from these endgames is very likely to be informative.

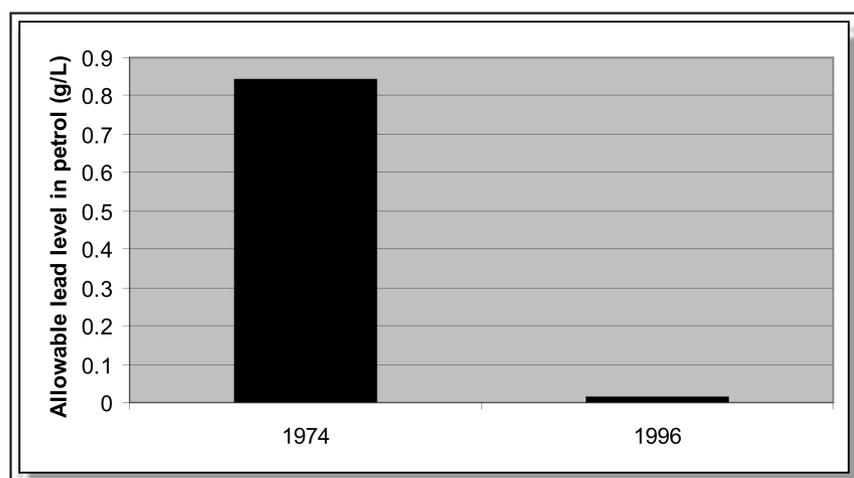


Figure 2: A previous end-game success: lead levels in NZ petrol from time of first public concern in 1974 to January 1996 (sales banned in September 1996)

2) Identifying international lessons: To inform a “sinking lid” policy, research should cover the sulphur dioxide cap and trade system in the USA and the evidence for its effectiveness⁸ (Figure 3). Similarly, for the largest multi-country, multi-sector greenhouse gas emission trading system in the world (ie, for Europe⁹). In the resource management area, research could examine the issues around the management of fisheries via quotas.¹⁰

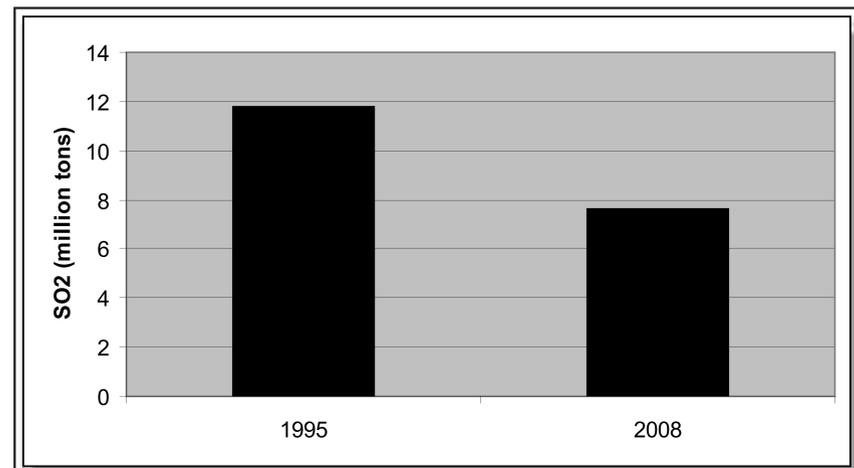


Figure 3: Reductions in sulphur dioxide (SO₂) as an air pollutant associated with annual “allowances trading” in the USA (programme implemented in 1995)

- 3) Identifying factors relating to support:** a “sinking lid” endgame policy would require long-term political and public support, research could examine: (i) policy-makers’ views (including key drivers or barriers for support); (ii) any changes in public support using both quantitative and in-depth qualitative methods; (iii) the nature and extent of media reporting; and (iv) the optimal design of mass media campaigns (ie, that both inform the public and build/sustain political will).
- 4) Identifying policies to minimise black-market risks:** We have started to consider these issues elsewhere,¹¹ but further research to clarify the need for law changes (reducing the limits on personal tobacco growing), and implications for Police and Customs activity is desirable.
- 5) The role of supplementary measures:** How worthwhile and cost-effective are various supplementary interventions such as additional mass media campaigns, retail supply restrictions, provision of less harmful forms of nicotine, banning tobacco additives, and reducing nicotine levels in tobacco (which has already been modelled in the NZ setting¹² and is considered further in companion work¹³)? Furthermore, what is the best mix of such supplementary measures?

Conclusions

Enough is already known to implement the early stages of a “sinking lid” endgame policy in NZ, but a research agenda is highly desirable for refining and improving it as the policy unfolds. The ideas presented here may also be relevant to those other nations which are best placed for developing tobacco phase-out plans: those that have minimal smuggling problems, good border controls, and low levels of corruption.

Acknowledgements: The thinking of three of the authors (NW, GT, RE) on this topic has benefited from work on a tobacco control endgame research project supported by the Marsden Fund (grant UOO0716) and via the ITC Project (funded by the Health Research Council).

References

- Smokefree Coalition. Tupeka kore/Tobacco Free Aotearoa/New Zealand by 2020. Wellington: Smokefree Coalition, 2009.
- Laugesen, Glover, Fraser, McCormick, Scott. N Z Med J. 2010;123(1314):55-65.
- Gifford & Bradbrook S. (Occasional Paper 2009/1). At: <http://www.wnmeds.ac.nz/itcproject.html>
- Wilson & Horrocks. Environ Health. 2008;7:1.
- Edwards et al. Tob Control. 2008;17:e2.
- Ministry of Health. Immunisation Handbook 2006.
- Davidson. N Z Vet J. 2002;50:6-12.
- Chestnut & Mills. J Environ Manage. 2005;77:252-66.
- Ellerman et al. Pricing Carbon: The European Union Emissions Trading Scheme. Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Costello et al. Science. 2008;321:1678-81.
- Thomson et al. Ending appreciable tobacco use in a nation: Using a sinking lid on supply. Tob Control (in press).
- Cavana & Tobias. Syst Res Behav Sci. 2008;25:675-694.
- Laugesen & Wilson. Description of plausible policy options to reduce nicotine [...]. [Oral presentation, APACT Conference, Sydney, October 2010].