

**A divided state:
Bureaucratic and corporate influences on tobacco control policy-making
in New Zealand during 1984-2001**

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores aspects of the tobacco control policy-making process in New Zealand during 1984-2001, examining the degree to which policies were formed by the nature of the organisations involved, and by the context in which they operated. The study focuses on tobacco taxation and the control of the tobacco industry.

In concentrating on the policy process, the thesis considered institutional factors such as rules, customs and language. The research method was an intrinsic case study, placing the policy activity in its context. The data were principally obtained from 40 in-depth interviews, and documents such as official advice to Ministers, parliamentary speeches and tobacco industry internal material. These sources gave particular versions of reality. The problems inherent in the data sources and analysis were countered by actions to increase the transparency of the research process and to enable others to assess the way that the research was done.

A consistent division was found between Treasury and government health agencies concerning tobacco, including opposing attitudes about the value of tobacco, the use of tobacco tax revenue, and the effects of nicotine addiction. Treasury had inherent advantages in the policy arena as the main official provider of taxation and expenditure advice. Its further advantages over the official health agencies stemmed from its ability to set the language and disciplines used for such advice, and from its general ability to delay, modify or halt the policy proposals of Ministers or of other agencies.

Governments have tended to ignore the implications of; (a) using tobacco – a lethal addictive substance – to tax those who are more likely to be poorer, Māori, or Pacific Peoples, and (b) of using less than 3% of that tobacco tax revenue to prevent the harm from smoking. The very low priority for population based activity, within the health sector budget, has impacted adversely on tobacco control. Where government

agencies invest in and nurture a tobacco control policy team, that investment can be the platform for major policy advances.

The inner workings of the tobacco industry have been commonly seen as untouchable, their activities as legal, and any potential criminality as not a priority for action.

Tobacco use has been seen as just a ‘health’ problem rather than an economic and social issue. The health sector has tended not to adequately invest in legal resources to deal with tobacco issues.

The tobacco manufacturing companies have achieved a high degree of cooperation, focus and resilience in the face of tobacco control efforts, with some evidence of sympathy for the tobacco industry within the government during 1991-1996. The companies’ multinational commercial nature has given them advantages over New Zealand government agencies, with relatively simple criteria for the companies’ decision making, compared to the complex and slower government processes. The industry generally has adopted longer-term strategies, in contrast to government’s short-term approaches to tobacco. An exception has been government support since 1999 for the World Health Organization’s Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. New Zealand policy processes have allowed the tobacco industry to exert considerable and effective pressures to limit the controls upon them.

The use of wider perspectives for tobacco control policy-making could help efforts to more effectively address the inequitable outcomes of tobacco use and the externalities of the tobacco industry. Such perspectives could focus on those most disadvantaged by tobacco use, and on the nature of the industry