



Aotearoa plummets from 2nd to 53rd in Global Tobacco Industry Interference Index ranking

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Summary

Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) has experienced a sharp decline in its protection against tobacco industry interference, according to the 2025 Tobacco Industry Interference Index for NZ released by the Cancer Society. Ranked second globally in 2023, NZ has fallen to 53rd place, reflecting weakened implementation of the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). The report attributes this decline to several government actions, including repealing the key smokefree "endgame" measures, reducing excise tax on heated tobacco products against official advice, and allowing a "revolving door" between political and tobacco industry roles.

To strengthen protections against tobacco industry interference, the NZ Index report recommends a whole-of-government approach to restore compliance with the FCTC, establishing a government-wide lobbyist register, and enhancing transparency by collecting and publicly reporting tobacco industry data such as revenue, political donations, profits, and marketing expenditure.

This Briefing outlines key findings from NZ's 2025 Tobacco Industry Interference Index report, which documents the dramatic fall in NZ's global ranking.

Tobacco remains the biggest preventable cause of cancer in Aotearoa

Smoking causes at least 16 types of cancer and remains the biggest preventable cause of cancer and driver of health inequities for Māori in NZ.¹ Current data show that NZ is not on track to achieve Smokefree Aotearoa 2025.^{2,3}

Because the tobacco industry has an overwhelming commercial interest in opposing effective tobacco control policies and a long history of interfering with policies that would protect people from the harms their products cause,⁴ countries must safeguard their policy processes.

What is the Tobacco Industry Interference Index?

The Tobacco Industry Interference Index is a global initiative assessing how governments guard against tobacco industry interference and protect their public health policies from tobacco industry interference as required under the FCTC ([Appendix 1](#)).

This Index draws on publicly available information to rank countries using scores provided by civil society groups in country-level reports that use a standardised methodology and scoring system; the lower the score, the lower the evidence of interference.

In NZ, the Cancer Society completes the [country-level Index report](#) (the Index). More information and background about the Tobacco Industry Interference Index can be found in [Appendix 2](#).

New Zealand's ranking falls dramatically in the 2025 Global Tobacco

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This is the fourth time the Cancer Society has produced the Index report for NZ. Previous years have found that NZ scored favourably (ranking second in the [2023 Global report](#)), though NZ reports have repeatedly noted that more could be done to protect NZ from the tobacco industry.

However, NZ's 2025 Index score plummeted to 53rd in the world and the [Global report](#) highlights NZ as one of the 'most deteriorated' countries.

World-leading endgame measures repealed, 'mystery' documents, heated tobacco product tax cuts and 'revolving doors'

Significant setbacks in tobacco control policies have occurred in NZ during this reporting period, most notably, the repeal of 'endgame' measures in the Smokefree Environments and Regulated Products Act (SERPA). The 2022 amendments to the SERPA legislation would have significantly reduced tobacco retail availability, introduced a smokefree generation policy and required all smoked tobacco products to meet a new low nicotine standard (denicotinisation).⁵

Coalition agreements developed in late 2023 between the National, NZ First and ACT parties committed to repealing these measures.^{6,7} The repeal went ahead in February 2024, despite strong opposition from the public, health experts, Māori/iwi community health providers, researchers and opposition MPs.⁸ The Government drew on discredited tobacco industry arguments when explaining the repeal, including predicted increases in crime,^{9,10} despite evidence that crime would logically be expected to decrease when the measures were introduced.¹¹

Associate Health Minister Casey Costello reportedly gave the Ministry of Health a 'mystery document' containing policy advice that contradicted research evidence and echoed tobacco industry lobbying.¹² Costello initially denied the existence of the document and then told Parliament that she did not know who wrote it.¹³ Efforts to ascertain the document's source proved fruitless, and access to the document under the Official Information Act occurred only after intervention by the Chief Ombudsman.¹⁴

As well as repealing strong tobacco control policies, the NZ Government has implemented, or proposed, policies sympathetic to tobacco industry interests. Most notably, in 2024, the Government implemented a 50% excise tax cut on heated tobacco products (HTP), despite Ministry of Health and Treasury advice to the contrary.¹⁵ Officials pointed out that Philip Morris International NZ (PMINZ), as the sole supplier of HTP in NZ, was likely to be the main beneficiary of this policy change.¹⁶

The NZ Index report also captures at least ten connections between the tobacco industry and current Government officials (including ministers), including many examples of the ['revolving door'](#) between lobbying and political advisory roles. For example, a PMINZ employee previously worked for NZ First and attended the Ministers' investiture ceremony.¹⁷ Several other Beehive (or Ministerial) staff, including the Press Secretary to the Minister of Health, lobbied on tobacco industry issues prior to working for Parliament, when working for organisations such as the Taxpayers Union and the NZ Initiative, that have received tobacco industry funding.^{18,19}

Better policies to implement FCTC Article 5.3 in NZ are needed

[Previous Index reports](#) for NZ have recommended implementing measures to provide stronger protections from tobacco industry interference. The results of Index 2025 show why such protections are more important than ever.

The report's key recommendations include:

- Implementing a whole-of-government training programme to increase awareness of, and compliance with Article 5.3 of the FCTC.
- Increasing transparency including collecting and publicly reporting tobacco companies' revenue, political donations, profits, taxes, marketing expenditure, "philanthropy", research and corporate social responsibility in a single public repository.
- Developing a government-wide register of lobbyists with a legal requirement for all tobacco companies, affiliated organisations and individuals to register.
- Introducing conflict-of-interest policies that prohibit public sector officials from holding positions in the tobacco industry either during or immediately (e.g. at least 6-12 months) after their public sector employment.

The full recommendations can be found in [Appendix 3](#) of the [Index report](#).

What this Briefing adds

- The 2025 Global Tobacco Industry Interference Index for NZ captures publicly available evidence of likely tobacco industry interference in NZ between March 2023 and March 2025.
- The report finds that NZ has fallen dramatically in the Global Index ranking – from 2nd in 2023 to 53rd in 2025.
- Examples of suspected tobacco industry interference in NZ include the repeal of tobacco endgame measures despite strong opposition from the public and health experts; politicians' use of arguments that echo tobacco industry talking points; benefits given to tobacco companies including a tax cut, and tobacco lobbyists transitioning into and out of political advisory roles (the 'revolving door').

Implications for policy, practice, surveillance, and research

- Legislation is needed to ensure all government agencies are legally required to protect public health policies from tobacco industry influence, in line with Article 5.3 of the FCTC.
- Measures could include controls on lobbying activity; a register, code of conduct and limits on 'revolving' doors.

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Appendix 1: The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control

The World Health Organization (WHO) developed the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) in response to the global challenge presented by the tobacco epidemic. The FCTC explicitly calls on signatories to protect policy making from influences of the tobacco industry; Article 5.3 states that: “in setting and implementing their public health policies with respect to tobacco control, Parties shall act to protect these policies from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry in accordance with national law”. Further, Article 5.3 requires governments to interact with tobacco companies only as required for regulatory purposes, and states that all interactions must be documented and transparent, [an obligation the Ministry of Health acknowledges on its website](#).

Appendix 2: The Tobacco Industry Interference Index

Who leads the Index?

The [Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control \(GGTC\)](#), based at the School of Global Studies, Thammasat University (Thailand), leads the creation and production of the biennial Global Index report. It has been designated as the FCTC Knowledge Hub on Article 5.3 and its activities focus on addressing obstacles to tobacco control from the tobacco industry and in empowering governments to advance tobacco control.

In New Zealand, the Cancer Society produces the country-level report.

Who funds the Index?

The Global Index is supported by [STOP](#) (Stopping Tobacco Organizations and Products), a global tobacco industry watchdog whose mission is to expose the tobacco industry strategies and tactics that undermine public health. STOP is funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies and is a partnership among the [Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control](#), [the Tobacco Control Research Group at the University of Bath](#), [The Union](#) and [Vital Strategies](#).

The Thai Health Promotion Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation also contributed to the development of the Global Index report.

What does the Index measure?

The Index rates countries on their response to tobacco industry interference using seven indicators:

Indicator 1: The industry's participation in policy development

Indicator 2: Tobacco industry-related corporate social responsibility activities

Indicator 3: Benefits given to the tobacco industry

Indicator 4: Unnecessary interaction between government and industry

Indicator 5: Measures for transparency

Indicator 6: Preventing conflicts of interest

Indicator 7: Measures that prevent industry influence

What is the Index methodology?

The Index uses a 20-question questionnaire developed by the Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (SEATCA) based on the Article 5.3 Guidelines. All information used is obtained from the public domain. A scoring system is applied to make the assessment. The score ranges from 0 - 5, where 5 indicates highest level of industry interference, and 0-1 is low or no interference. Countries are ranked according to total scores provided by civil society groups. Hence the lower the score, the lower the overall level of interference, which augurs well for the country.

The report covers information on incidents from March 2023 up to and including March 2025.

What are the Index limitations?

Dependence on information from the public domain is a limitation, since tobacco industry interference is often hidden. Lack of government and industry transparency makes it hard to collect information on industry interference. Furthermore, what is available for civil societies to capture and to be able to comment on may vary by country. This limitation is acknowledged, and the rankings of countries should be viewed with this limitation in mind.

Where can I read the Index reports?

The Global Tobacco Index is available at <https://globaltobaccoindex.org/>

The New Zealand Index report can be found [here](#).

Appendix 3: Recommendations of the Cancer Society 2025 Tobacco Industry Interference Index for New Zealand

The full recommendations of the Cancer Society 2025 Tobacco Industry (TI) Interference Index for New Zealand are:

1. Implement a whole-of-government (all branches) training programme to increase awareness of, and compliance with Article 5.3 consistently across all branches of government. Establish independent oversight to monitor compliance, investigate violations, and ensure accountability.
2. Increase transparency:
 - Collect and publicly report tobacco industry data on revenue, political donations, profits, taxes, marketing expenditure, philanthropy, research and Corporate Social

Responsibility in a single public repository (e.g., Ministry of Health website) for each tobacco corporate entity that operates in New Zealand.

- Interactions with TI should occur only when strictly necessary for regulation, and all interactions must be transparent. Publish all communications between the TI and any Government branch, departments and agencies including when interactions occurred, participants, purpose, and information exchanged. Make this publicly available on the website of the respective department or agency.
 - Mandate that the Government does not provide financial aid (including privileges, incentives or benefits) in any way to the TI.
 - Exclude the TI and its representatives from consultation on or input into international treaties.
3. Require that no branch of government participate locally or nationally in any activity that constitutes or could be reasonably assumed to be a CSR activity for the TI or its associates.
 4. Create a government-wide register of lobbyists with a legal requirement for all tobacco companies, affiliated organisations and individuals to register with.
 5. Conflict of interest policies:
 - Update code of conduct for all public officials prescribing standards for how they should deal with the TI. This includes the Standards of Integrity and Conduct issued by the State Services Commissioner under the State Sector Act 1988, section 57. Government departments should ensure that all state employees understand the obligations set out in the code of conduct on commencing employment within the public service.
 - Prohibit public officials from holding positions in the TI either during or immediately (e.g. at least 6-12 months) after their public employment.
 - Require all public officials to declare previous positions with TI or TI-funded organisations.
 - Prohibit political parties, public employees, and organisations/institutions from accepting all forms of contributions (monetary, other resources or 'in kind') from the TI.

In May 2025, the Labour Party (currently in opposition) launched a members' bill, The Tobacco Transparency Bill, with the purpose to give legal effect to New Zealand's obligations under Article 5.3 of the FCTC. Hon Dr. Ayesha Verrall said in the launch that "This Bill aims to prohibit government support for the tobacco industry and requires transparency around tobacco lobbying" (20). If passed, this Bill would address many of the recommendations raised in this and previous Index reports (21). However, as a private member's bill from an opposition MP, it is unclear whether the Bill will gain sufficient political support to be introduced to Parliament (at least in the current electoral cycle).

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