

# Tobacco company helped shape European policy system favoring corporate profits over public health

January 12 2010

---

British American Tobacco (BAT), the world's second largest tobacco transnational, strategically influenced the European Union's framework for evaluating policy options, leading to the acceptance of an agenda which emphasizes business interests over public health, according to a study published in *PLoS Medicine*.

By law, virtually all new policies proposed in the European Union (EU) must undergo an "impact assessment" (IA): a review of the potential economic, social, and environmental consequences. The outcome of such review is heavily influenced by the type of impact assessment tool used. IA tools focusing on economic impacts, for example, tend to favor regulation increasing business profits, even if such policies undermine general public health. Independent experts have suggested that the EU's current IA tool, which focuses heavily on economic impacts, does not adequately take policies' health impacts into account.

Now, this new [PLoS Medicine](#) article provides evidence that BAT, working with companies from other sectors (including chemical, oil and food companies), played a key role in shaping the EU's current business-oriented IA system.

Dr Katherine Smith and colleagues (University of Bath; University of Edinburgh) analyzed over 700 internal BAT documents containing information on BAT's attempts to influence European regulatory reform,

and interviewed relevant European policymakers and lobbyists. They found that BAT created a policy network comprised of representatives from a number of large corporations involved in marketing products that are damaging to public health and the environment, to promote a lobbying campaign to alter EU policymaking rules. The campaign resulted in specific changes to the EU Treaty calling for policymakers to reduce the regulatory burden on businesses, ultimately fostering the current system of business-oriented IA, which may well stall or even prevent future EU public health regulations, say the authors. Moreover, the authors report that EU officials were often unaware of the magnitude of BAT's influence—presumably due to the latter's creation of a policy network and the campaign's use of third parties, such as think tanks and consultancy companies.

The authors suggest that BAT and its corporate allies laid the groundwork for a policy evaluation system in the EU which emphasizes corporate interests over citizens' health. Increased transparency, awareness of corporations' policy influence and greater understanding of the IA system are thus needed to ensure that EU policies required to protect [public health](#) continue to emerge.

**More information:** Smith KE, Fooks G, Collin J, Weishaar H, Mandal S & Gilmore AB. (2010) "Working the System"—British American Tobacco's Influence on the European Union Treaty and Its Implications for Policy: An Analysis of Internal Tobacco Industry Documents. *PLoS Med* 7(1): e1000202. [doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1000202](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000202)

Provided by Public Library of Science

Citation: Tobacco company helped shape European policy system favoring corporate profits over public health (2010, January 12) retrieved 9 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-01-tobacco-company-european-policy-favoring.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.