

Corporate interests may have influenced key public health declaration

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Corporate interests may have influenced a key public health declaration, intended to promote integrity and transparency at the interface of science and policy-making, warn a trio of leading academics in an analysis published online in the journal *Tobacco Control*.

The Brussels Declaration had extensive involvement of the [tobacco](#) and alcohol industries during its development and offers the potential to advance their agendas, say the authors.

The 20-point blueprint was launched at the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Boston, Massachusetts, in February 2017.

Despite the widespread backing of many leading scientists and institutions, "there are major concerns about how it was developed, and, in particular, the extensive involvement of tobacco and alcohol industry actors," highlight the authors.

The initiative, which reportedly originated with a communications consultancy (Sci-Com), was developed on the back of a series of consultations with more than 300 interested parties from 35 countries.

But only 165 of these people are named, so it's not clear who else was involved, nor is there any information on how they were all selected, the authors point out.

And senior level people from the [tobacco industry](#) were involved, with

representatives from British American Tobacco far exceeding those from any other company. Yet Article 5.3 of the Framework Convention on Tobacco precludes the tobacco industry and associated vested interests from having any input into [public health](#) policy.

Seven different alcohol organisations were also involved, including the Brewers of Europe, Spirits Europe, the Portman Group, and the Scotch Whisky Association, all of which have variously critiqued individual scientists, research agendas, and initiatives in the public health arena, say the authors.

In all, 20 of the 165 named individuals directly represented tobacco or alcohol industry organisations: the Declaration proposes that policy-makers give much greater access to industry, and the organisations that represent its interests.

An email sent to the head of Sci-Com from the authors asking how the costs were met, and from which sources, went unanswered.

A similar process is now in train for Africa, with a further statement along the same lines as that for the Brussels Declaration, the authors point out, adding that as smoking rates fall in traditional markets, Africa is seen as an important growth market for tobacco.

The authors caution that as yet it's not clear if the Declaration has influenced policy-makers' views and intentions. But it has the potential to do so, they argue.

"The Brussels Declaration argues for the need to protect science from distortion by vested interests. Yet it appears to be a vehicle for advancing the vested interests of certain corporate sectors," they write.

"Calls for research integrity reflect core values of the research

community. They should not be used as instruments to undermine science or to assist harmful industries." Careful monitoring is needed to ensure that science policies and public health are not unduly influenced, they conclude.

In a linked editorial, Professor Lisa Bero, of the University of Sydney, says that industry has form when it comes to influencing scientific evaluation/standards and shaping [science](#) policy to promote its own interests.

What is surprising, she says, is the low level of awareness of this activity among scientists and public health researchers. She provides 10 top tips on how best to spot industry involvement.

"Collectively, scientists need to learn to recognise when genuine commitments to research integrity are being hijacked to advance [industry](#) agendas. Investigating new initiatives based on the 10 tips...should make it easier for scientists to expose such initiatives and walk away from involvement with them," she declares.

More information: Special communication: Brussels Declaration: a vehicle for the advancement of tobacco and alcohol industry interests at the science/policy interface? [DOI: 10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2018-054264](https://doi.org/10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2018-054264)

Editorial: Ten tips for spotting industry involvement in science policy, [DOI: 10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2018-054386](https://doi.org/10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2018-054386)

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