New Zealand tobacco retailers’ attitudes to selling tobacco, point-of-sale display bans and other tobacco control measures: a qualitative analysis

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Abstract

**Aims** We aimed to explore New Zealand tobacco retailers’ views on selling tobacco, the forthcoming 2012 point of sale display ban and two other potential tobacco control interventions in the retail setting: compulsory sales of nicotine replacement therapy and licensing of tobacco retailers.

**Methods** We carried out in-depth interviews with 18 retailers from a variety of store types where tobacco was sold. Stores were selected from a range of locations with varying levels of deprivation. We used thematic analysis to analyse the data.

**Results** All but four of the retailers were ambivalent about selling tobacco, would rather not sell it, or fell back on a business imperative for justification. Only one retailer was explicitly unconcerned about selling tobacco products.

Most participants had few or no concerns about the removal of point-of-sale displays. Issues which were raised were mainly practical and logistical issues with the removal of displays. Only three thought sales would definitely be reduced.

The majority of the retailers were not opposed to a possible requirement that nicotine replacement therapy products be made available wherever tobacco products are sold. Ten supported a licensing or registration scheme for tobacco retailers, and only three were opposed.

**Conclusions** We found widespread ambivalence about selling tobacco. There was considerable support for the licensing of tobacco retailers and other potential tobacco control measures. The retailers’ attitudes about potential financial costs and security issues from a tobacco display ban were at odds with the tobacco industry predictions and the views of retailers’ organisations. Some retailers appear to be potential allies for tobacco control. This is in contrast to retailer organisations, which may be out of step with many of their members in their strong opposition to retail tobacco control interventions.

The New Zealand Government has committed itself to the goal of making New Zealand smokefree by 2025.¹ To achieve this outcome, a range of tobacco control measures has been suggested.²

The *Smoke-free Environments (Controls and Enforcement) Amendment Act 2011* (SFEA Act) was developed as a step towards this goal and included provisions that addressed the retail environment, including the requirement to remove point-of-sale (PoS) tobacco displays by July 2012.
This policy reduces a tobacco marketing activity by removing the colourful reminder of tobacco availability, which can be a cue for purchases, and may promote smoking uptake among children. 3-6 Removing displays may reduce tobacco purchases by youths. 7, 8 Surveys across countries with and without display bans have found that where there were bans smokers reported reduced exposure to tobacco marketing, and lower impulse purchasing. 9

During the development of these laws the tobacco industry and some retailer groups campaigned against the changes. Arguments presented in opposition to the removal of PoS displays included that there was a lack of evidence that removing them would be effective. There were predictions that retailers would experience financial losses (including reduced sales and the cost of removing and replacing store furniture) and increased thefts and safety risks. 10, 11 The ‘Association of Community Retailers’ claimed that there was ‘huge opposition’ amongst retailers to the changes. 12

The law change provided a good opportunity to examine New Zealand tobacco retailers’ attitudes to tobacco and tobacco control measures in the retail setting. New Zealand-specific research on retailers’ attitudes to tobacco is limited, with only a few published articles in this area. 13-18 One exploratory qualitative study assessed retailers’ views on the tobacco industry and explored possible tobacco control interventions in the retail environment, particularly removal of PoS displays. 17 The study, conducted before there had been any significant public debate about the issue, found mixed views about removing PoS displays, with many of the retailers unconcerned about or even in favour of removing them. Another qualitative study investigated the views and experiences of retailers who had voluntarily removed PoS displays. 18 This study found that their experience was overwhelmingly positive, and at odds with the predictions of the tobacco industry and retailer groups campaigning against the removal of PoS displays.

International evidence specific to retailers’ attitudes to tobacco is also limited. A few studies from North America 19-22 have found retailers support tobacco control measures in certain circumstances (e.g. on sales to minors).

Besides the recent changes on PoS displays in New Zealand, other possible tobacco retail interventions include requiring that nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) products (and other cessation support) are available wherever tobacco products are sold, and the licensing of tobacco retailers. Again, research on retailer attitudes in this area is limited. One small New Zealand study of retail staff found mixed support for the licensing of tobacco retailers. 17

Reasons for support included making tobacco less available, reducing underage smoking and that it was logical given that a licence was needed to sell alcohol. Reasons for opposing licensing tended to focus on the business aspect; it would disadvantage small independent stores, and specialist tobacconists would dominate.

Licensing of tobacco retailers provides the opportunity for health authorities to better communicate with retailers and to regulate the retail sales of tobacco products. For example, it could facilitate introducing and enforcing requirements for retailer training and conduct, and the ability to limit the number and locations of the tobacco retailers. 23
With such limited research about the views of tobacco retailers, the aims of this study were to:

- Explore the views of New Zealand tobacco retailers about changes to the SFEA Act, in particular the removal of PoS tobacco product displays, and whether this would result in the adverse effects predicted by the tobacco industry
- Explore retailers’ views about their experiences of selling tobacco, and their thoughts on other potential tobacco control retail interventions, particularly selling NRT and the licensing of tobacco retailers.

In New Zealand, the main places where tobacco products are sold are: large supermarkets (run by two supermarket groups Foodstuffs and Progressive Enterprises), service stations (dominated by the four main groups—BP, Mobil, Z and Caltex), convenience stores and dairies (the latter mostly independently owned) and some bars and cafes.

The importance of tobacco sales for retailers’ turnover and profit varies between different store types. A 2007 report found that the limited evidence available then indicated that the proportion of store turnover that was due to tobacco products varied from an average 37% for convenience stores to 3–4% of sales for supermarkets.14

Convenience stores reported a 14% gross profit margin on tobacco products (lower than the 24% average margin for all sales in those stores). However, tobacco sales may give higher profits per shop floor area unit or display area unit.14

Methods

We anticipated that 15-20 semi-structured face-to-face interviews with tobacco retailers in the greater Wellington region would be required to achieve a saturation of themes. This was in the light of the study aims, the deductive, question-driven thematic analysis, and the possible differing opinions of staff in large and small shops.24, 25

Participants were purposively selected (with an element of random selection) to ensure a diverse range of participants from different store types and areas. It was not possible to anticipate which particular retailers would be information rich, articulate and experienced, except to recruit store managers or owners. We did not consider that snowball recruitment would be sufficiently productive.

As a sampling frame we used a tobacco retailer list for the greater Wellington region from the public health authority, Regional Public Health. The region covers the local authorities of Wellington, Lower Hutt, Upper Hutt, Kapiti Coast District, Masterton, Carterton, South Wairarapa District and Porirua. The list of 496 retailers was divided into type of store (i.e. supermarket, service station, dairy/mini-market/convenience store) and local council area. From these lists, one or two retailers were randomly selected (through random number generation) for each store type and council area (see Table 1 in Results section).

To ensure that retailers from areas of higher socio-economic deprivation and varied ethnic composition were included, we sampled dairies and services stations from high deprivation areas of two cities (three sites in total). These were areas in the highest deprivation quintile, as shown in an atlas of deprivation that used the standard New Zealand area-based measure of socio-economic status (NZDep) from 2006 census data.26 Participants were eligible for interviews if they were owner/operators, or site or operations managers.

Supermarkets were defined as large, branded supermarkets. Service stations were defined as branded and independent service stations. All other retailers fell into the dairy/mini-market/convenience store type (generally referred to as dairies or dairy from here on).

The researchers attempted to contact each potential participant by phone (most commonly) or occasionally face-to-face. Up to four attempts were made to contact each potential participant. Retailers
were not recruited if they refused to participate, if contact details for outlet were unavailable, or if no contact was made after four attempts.

Ethics approval for anonymous interviews was granted through the Department of Public Health, University of Otago, Wellington through the University’s procedure for approval of low risk studies. The interview schedule included questions on attitudes to selling tobacco and NRT, the possible impacts of the PoS display ban for business and for smokers, and attitudes to two other potential interventions in the retail setting: retailer licensing and making the sale of nicotine replacement products compulsory where tobacco is sold. The interview schedule was piloted with several trial retailer interviewees. The main interviews were carried out in April and May 2012. Each interview was face-to-face, audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim.

The transcripts and recordings were then checked for accuracy by one of the authors and analysed to identify the main themes of the interviews that were related to the research questions. These were: retailer attitudes to and views on the removal of PoS tobacco product displays, possible adverse effects, selling tobacco, and potential tobacco control retail interventions. Where material was found across some interviews that was not related to the research questions, this was noted and explored.

Themes were discussed and agreed with the other authors. This largely deductive, question-driven thematic analysis was carried out as generally outlined by Braun and Clarke for deductive analysis. That is, by manually assigning codes to data areas, forming themes from the coded data, and refining and reviewing the themes.

Idea elements were identified while reading written transcripts and then one researcher (MR) grouped material into the themes. The themes were then rechecked against the transcripts. A second researcher (RJ) then read all the transcripts and allocated further material to the themes. A third researcher (GT) read all the transcripts, checked the material allocated to the themes, and suggested a number of changes. Differences in allocation were discussed and resolved.

Results

Participants and saturation—We attempted to contact 55 different businesses. Of these, 11 were no longer in service or contact details were unavailable. Of the remaining 44 contacts who were eligible, 18 agreed to participate (a response rate of 41%).

Of the 26 that were not recruited, 14 stated that they needed approval from their respective head offices to participate, and this was not provided (these were mostly supermarkets and one brand of service stations), eight refused to participate, and for the remaining four no contact was made after multiple attempts.

We completed 18 interviews from a variety of store types and locations, and from different deprivation-level areas (see Table 1).

Table 1. Numbers of retailers recruited from each category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Supermarkets</th>
<th>Dairies, etc.*</th>
<th>Service stations</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wellington</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hutt Valley#</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porirua#</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kapiti Coast</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wairarapa</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Includes convenience stores and mini-markets

# This included high deprivation areas
Most interviewees had been in the retail business for more than 10 years (range 3 to 35 years) and the majority had been involved with their current outlet for most of that time.

Except for one of 10 minutes and one of 49 minutes, the duration of the interviews ranged from 17 to 33 minutes, with an average for the 18 interviews of 25 minutes.

In the supermarkets and petrol stations the interviews were held in a separate office, but for the convenience stores, dairies and mini-markets the interviews were with retailers at the counter. These retailers sometimes stopped to serve customers, so the total interview times do not always represent actual speaking times.

It was clear during the analysis that a saturation of themes had been achieved with the 18 interviews. There were very few new themes or opinions emerging during the last few interviews.

**Attitudes to selling tobacco**—When asked ‘how do you feel about selling tobacco’ all but four of the retailers were either ambivalent about selling tobacco, would rather not sell it, or fell back on a business- or job-related imperative for their involvement. Of these four, three appeared to be relatively neutral:

- I’m not really interested in cigarettes. If they take it away tomorrow so be it.  
  *Service station retailer, Interview 9*

Only one retailer was explicitly unconcerned about selling tobacco (he was an ex-smoker who had given up smoking while still at high school):

- I’ve got no problems with it because I used to be a smoker… when you need one, you need one that’s it. Irrespective of the harm.  
  *Dairy retailer, Interview 17*

Of the 14 who were not neutral or positive about smoking, nine had concerns of some sort, for instance:

- I feel that it’s really bad [for the] whole society. Because [when] you start smoking your siblings and your children automatically try to copy you and start smoking too. Because it goes on and on.  
  *Supermarket retailer, Interview 1*

- It would be good if we didn’t sell them… I would rather not sell them.  
  *Supermarket retailer, Interview 13*

- [It] should be completely stopped by Government, smokefree should be 2015 not 2025.  
  *Dairy retailer, Interview 12*

Four of those with concerns about selling tobacco noted that their concerns were in conflict with the requirements of the job or business, e.g.:

- I don’t want to sell smokes to any people [but] you have to follow the company rules, if there is a smoker, you have to sell smokes.  
  *Service station retailer, Interview 2*

For two others, their concerns were about young people:

- Don’t like selling it to people that are just of age, I don’t really think people are old enough to actually realise, but if it’s an older person,… it’s up to them.  
  *Supermarket retailer, Interview 16*
Of the 14 who were not neutral or positive, a further four indicated that it was part of the job or a business necessity to stock tobacco products, but did not express concerns:

We have it because our competitors do, because everyone else does.
(Supermarket retailer, Interview 10)

Another was aware of the harm, but any concern appears to have been pushed away:

I’m selling them something that’s going to harm the m but I don’t really think about it.
(Service station retailer, Interview 4)

**Profit from tobacco sales**—When asked about the profit from tobacco sales, the majority implied that the profit margin was low, and/or that the contribution to overall profits or turnover was modest. Twelve of the retailers indicated that the profit was ‘very little/very small/very low’ (n=6), ‘low’, ‘not much’, ‘small margin’ or ‘not very profitable’. Another indicated it was only 2.5% of store profit (Service station retailer, Interview 6).

One said a quarter of their turnover was from tobacco (Service station retailer, Interview 15) and one gave a figure of 12–18%, which appeared to be store turnover rather than profit (Dairy retailer, Interview 14).

One pointed out that the profit partly came from the payment by the tobacco company for store space (Supermarket retailer, Interview 16). Two interviewees didn’t know or were unsure of their profits from tobacco sales.

Retailers pointed out that though it could be a relatively high turnover product, the profit margin was low.

There’s not much profit involved anyway.
(Dairy retailer, Interview 18)

For supermarkets, tobacco was a small part of their turnover and profit. A supermarket retailer indicated that tobacco was not very important for them:

It is such a small contributor, of course it [the display ban] will affect but to us not a great deal.
(Supermarket retailer, Interview 13)

**Anticipated impact of PoS display bans on business operations**—Opinion was mixed as to whether PoS display bans would affect sales: 10 retailers thought it would not affect sales at all or very little, while three thought sales would definitely reduce. The other five did not mention sales when responding to the question about the impact of the ban.

Of those 10 who thought the impact would be nil or limited, three indicated that price was a much more important factor:

Sales are already down from recent price rises. New changes won’t affect profit much…. Not much impact. More people will give up.
(Dairy retailer, Interview 12)
Others from those 10 focused on impacts other than sales. One mentioned a possible move by ‘starter’ smokers to brands that are most widely known. Because ‘starters’ would not be able see the brands displayed and thus be able to choose a brand so easily, after the change the most well-known brands will be more likely to be asked for:

I have heard the reps talking about that in Australia, that the popular lines will stay and the little ones will phase out. It will be hard for the starters to choose their brand, makes it more difficult to start.

(Dairy retailer, Interview 11)

A further three from those 10 thought the effect on sales of removing PoS displays would be limited because it would only affect smoking uptake, not current smokers:

I don’t think it’s going to stop the smokers now. I guess it’s not about that, it’s stopping the ones that aren’t smoking, it’s the uptake.

(Supermarket retailer, Interview 16)

Others, who acknowledged there might be an impact on sales, downplayed the effect it would have on their business. For example, one retailer suggested there would be a substitution effect if smokers quit:

If a customer gives up on smoking, they might buy other grocery lines or they might buy a pie and a drink instead of a pack of smokes.

(Dairy retailer, Interview 3)

Another believed any impact on sales would be temporary:

(Sales will] probably drop off for the first couple of months, and then come back to its normal [rate].

(Service station retailer, Interview 4)

Of the three who thought sales would definitely reduce, one mentioned the ‘reminder’ effect of displays:

People won’t see that continual reminder.

(Supermarket retailer, Interview 8)

Other anticipated adverse impacts tended to be practical issues: re-stocking shelves; issues of opening and closing cabinets; speed of service; and security. Some retailers were aware that the way they re-stock would require some changes, as, legally, the public should not be able to see tobacco products during re-stocking. As a high turnover product, re-stocking sometimes had to take place daily and may have to be done out of opening hours to prevent customers seeing tobacco. Five retailers mentioned one or both of re-stocking or speed of service:

It will reduce the space,… efficiency when you are trying to serve other customers.

(Dairy retailer, Interview 5)

However, for one supermarket, re-stocking would be easier:

Filling [cupboards] will be easier… if it’s not visible we can fill it at any time of day, now it has to be done before we open which is 6am.

(Supermarket retailer, Interview 10)

One retailer anticipated disgruntled customers:

I think they will probably get grumpy at us because they can’t see what they want to buy. I know we will probably cop a lot of flak like that.

(Service station retailer, Interview 15)
None of the retailers indicated that there would be significant financial cost to their
store in terms of changing cabinets, and this included a supermarket that was building
new modular units itself. Six retailers said that the tobacco companies owned the
cabinet stand, would be paying to change it and would ensure it complied with the
legislation.

Security and theft—Eight retailers raised concerns about security and theft. Six
stated they were not concerned about thefts, with or without the display ban. Four did
not comment on security or theft. Of the eight with concerns about tobacco-related
security of staff and theft, for seven this was not because of the display ban. Only one
indirectly related the change with security. Three of these eight retailers with concerns
stated that closed cabinets would result in reduced risk of theft:

If people don’t see the smokes there would probably be less robbery.
(Dairy retailer, Interview 18)

When asked about the impact of the display changes on their business, one dairy
retailer appeared to be more concerned about security than sales impact:

I feel more safe because I don’t have my smokes open and people coming in and just grab
them, and probably the turnover would be lower.
(Dairy retailer, Interview 18)

For one dairy retailer, closed doors were already used as a means to increase security
and deter theft:

We’ve always had the practice of closing the cabinet door, for security as well, we don’t need
everybody seeing all the cigarettes all day every day.
(Dairy retailer, Interview 14)

One supermarket had taken the opportunity of the change to address security:

For the security side of it, we will build a modular unit [with drawers] and then at night we
will just wheel those drawers/cabinets to another area.
(Supermarket retailer, Interview 16)

Only one retailer mentioned security concerns, when asked about the likely impact of
the change:

Don’t like turning [my] back on customers. A few little incidents where people run off
without paying.
(Dairy retailer, Interview 11)

For at least three of those concerned about security, the potential theft of valuable,
transportable stock was a worry, but these concerns did not seem to relate to any
obvious effect from the removal of point of sale displays. Rather they were concerned
that the amount and value of tobacco products that were in stock may promote theft:

The more stock we hold, the more risk we are of being a target.
(Dairy retailer, Interview 3)

Attitudes towards selling nicotine replacement therapy—Retailers were asked if
they currently sold or would consider selling NRT products, as well as how they
would feel if stores that sold tobacco products were required to sell NRT. Only four
retailers currently sold NRT products.

Common reasons for not selling NRT included that it did not sell well, and that it
could be obtained elsewhere at highly subsidised prices:

People that want to give up usually tend to go to a chemist for stuff like that.
(Service station retailer, Interview 9)
We have the gum only. It’s in the health and beauty aisle with the panadols. Doesn’t sell very well, as they can ring Quitline and get it cheaper or free in a lot of cases.

(Supermarket retailer, Interview 10)

Up-front price was important, with one retailer wanting a pack of NRT to be the same or less than a pack of cigarettes:

What I’d like to see, and that would be the biggest difficulty, is that the two [NRT and tobacco] are equal [in price].

(Service station retailer, Interview 6)

For one chain of service stations, the wholesale supplier had stopped stocking NRT:

[We used to sell NRT but we] can’t access them anymore… not through the suppliers that we have. We’ve just started putting in the electronic cigarettes… we used to get the gum and that through [the supplier], they now don’t stock it any more.

(Service station retailer, Interview 6)

Despite most retailers not stocking NRT, all but one had no objection to compulsory stocking of NRT alongside tobacco products and two explicitly supported this measure:

I think it would be good if every retail supermarket selling tobacco would have to have nicotine gum too.

(Supermarket retailer, Interview 1)

Yes, I’m happy with [compulsory stocking of NRT], because sometimes people say ‘I want to quit’ and you [say] ‘good luck’, what else can you do. But if you have this product here, I [could] say, look, take some of these, try and see if it works.

(Dairy retailer, Interview 18)

The one that disagreed expressed this as more of a general objection to excessive regulation:

Generally I believe we are over legislated in New Zealand, I wouldn’t be comfortable with [the government] introducing that [requirement to sell NRT].

(Supermarket retailer, Interview 8)

Attitudes towards tobacco retailer licensing—Retailers were then asked how they would feel if those who sold tobacco were required to be licensed (in a similar way to alcohol outlets). Ten of the 18 interviewees would support tobacco licensing in the same way that alcohol is licensed. One said:

Maybe [a tobacco licensing scheme] might be helpful to learn… if people say I don’t want to smoke… some knowledge about how to advise them not to smoke.

(Dairy retailer, Interview 18)

One pointed out that alcohol licence training was considered a hassle at first, but:

With change you get used to it, it just becomes part of the equation.

(Supermarket retailer, Interview 16)

Of the remaining eight retailers, three were opposed and five were unsure or undecided. Of those eight retailers who had some reservations about licensing, at least three were concerned about resource costs, including the financial cost of a licence and the time cost of applying and training for the licence.
Some suggested that introducing licensing may result in them reappraising whether it was worth their while to sell tobacco products:

> We would have to get all the paperwork and everything…and then they maybe might give an exam or test or something for that.
>  
> (Dairy retailer, Interview 7)

One retailer who was opposed to licensing suggested that better enforcement of the current laws was needed, in particular, ensuring that retailers were not selling tobacco to people under 18 years of age.

> I don’t believe it’s necessary… It’s unnecessary when all we’ve got to do is actually enforce the Act and if we enforce the Act then the bad retailers don’t exist.
>  
> (Supermarket retailer, Interview 8)

Another was concerned about extra ‘pressures’ on staff from licensing:

> The staff sort of begrudge having to do what they do now, so having to have their names on a register and things like that, and again because we have young ones here like school age kids, we don’t employ anybody under 15 but they have to be 15, it puts a lot of pressure on those types of people, to decide whether somebody is 18 or not.
>  
> (Service station retailer, Interview 15)

Providing support for customers—While it was not an explicit topic of the interview schedule, a few retailers made unprompted comments that they would appreciate having further ways to support customers who are making quit attempts. These retailers felt that they would like to offer further cessation support to customers.

One retailer had provided Quitline information for customers, and had offered to no longer stock the attempting quitters’ brands of cigarettes. One suggested that with the tobacco out of sight, they could refuse to sell tobacco to those trying to give up:

> Basically we’ll be able to say to the customer no. If they see stock on the shelf, they’ll request it, they’ll ask for it and we can’t really say no straight off… But not having it on display we can just say no.
>  
> (Dairy retailer, Interview 3)

Other findings—The retailers’ views did not systematically differ between store types. There was no difference in attitudes to compulsory NRT availability with tobacco products by retailer type; small, independent retailers were as likely as large chain retailers to support this. We did not detect any difference in attitudes by geographical area or deprivation level of store location.

Discussion

Our findings contrasted markedly with the picture that is often portrayed of retailers being overwhelmingly opposed to tobacco control interventions in the retail setting. For example, there was little enthusiasm for and widespread ambivalence about selling tobacco. This was consistent with previous New Zealand research.

Our study indicated that the profit from tobacco was generally seen as a small part of their businesses, although there may be some effect of secondary purchases by customers who come into the store to buy tobacco products. Profit may also come from tobacco distributors paying retailers for store space (although the extent of this profit is unknown).

Security and theft were significant issues for some retailers, because of the high value and transportability of tobacco products. However, only one retailer indicated that the
display ban could increase risk, and this appeared questionable as they already had to 
turn their backs to get tobacco products. Several others either considered that security 
would be enhanced by the PoS display bans or had used the legislation changes to 
 improve security in their stores.

There were mixed, but mostly supportive reactions to other tobacco control 
interventions in the retail setting. There was majority support for making it 
compulsory to have NRT products available wherever tobacco is sold and for a 
tobacco retailer licensing scheme. This support for compulsory NRT sales with 
tobacco products strengthens New Zealand evidence from Williman et al.\textsuperscript{7} which 
found half the retailers in that study supported the idea.

Several retailers were aware that NRT is subsidised and could be obtained far cheaper 
than at retail outlets. This was seen as a barrier to stocking NRT. For such a scheme to 
succeed, NRT in the retail environment would need to be subsidised to a similar level 
to NRT products available elsewhere.

There was some support for requiring tobacco retailers to be licensed, but there were 
frequent reservations. In particular, there was concern about the likely cost and time 
involved in applying for a licence. This finding is consistent with a previous New 
Zealand study.\textsuperscript{17} Some retailers in our study suggested they would not stock tobacco if 
licensing introduced these extra costs. As such, a licence fee may be a way to 
decrease the number of outlets. In South Australia the number of outlets dropped by 
over 20\% after a licence fee increase in 2007.\textsuperscript{28}

The level of concern about the PoS display ban was generally low. It is clear from this 
study that the retailers’ attitudes to tobacco control measures were at odds with the 
predictions of the tobacco industry and retailer organisations.

While the tobacco industry and retailer groups have argued that removing PoS 
 displays would be a financial burden on retailers (in terms of shelving and cabinetry), 
this study found that retailers generally did not hold these concerns. A number of the 
retailers believed that this cost would be borne by the tobacco industry. Concerns 
rased by the industry about security issues and increased thefts due to the display ban 
were also not supported by the retailers in this study.

Interestingly, a number of the retailers expressed unprompted interest in encouraging 
their customers’ cessation attempts. It is possible that these views could be more 
widely held in the retail sector. These positive views on customer support may be 
because retailers (especially small retailers) are closely linked to their communities 
and often know their customers on a personal level. These retailers, therefore, have 
empathy for their customers’ and community’s wellbeing.

Our findings suggest that retailers may be supportive of tobacco control measures as 
part of their service to the community. These findings contrast with the views of 
organisations purporting to represent retailers, and suggest that retailers could be 
 enlisted as supporters of tobacco control measures rather than being assumed to be 
opposed. Measures such as a tobacco retailer licensing programme could provide 
them with further assistance and knowledge to support their customers who wish to 
quit smoking.
A strength of this study is that it canvassed a range of interviewees based on retailer type, geographical area and deprivation level of store location. A saturation of themes was achieved during the 18 interviews, suggesting it was a sufficient number to identify the major themes. The range of stores from which the interviewees came (including some rural retailers) helped ensure that the study gained a variety of opinions.

A limitation is that this study took place in the greater Wellington region, and may not be representative of all New Zealand retailers. Furthermore, the interviewees were at the retailer level, and policy for supermarket and service station chains will generally be made at their head offices. However, a previous New Zealand study that included senior managers from national retail chains also found support for retail tobacco control measures at that level.17

This study identified further areas for research. Follow up research could identify how retailers were impacted by the removal of PoS displays and whether their concerns were realised. It may also identify any unexpected outcomes from the legislation at the retail level. Future research could also explore retailers’ attitudes to other tobacco control measures that we did not mention, and explore further their relations with tobacco suppliers and retailer organisations.

In conclusion, this study found that the views of most of the retailers interviewed did not align with views about the new PoS regulations attributed to them by the tobacco industry and some retailer organisations. Many of them also supported further tobacco control measures in retail settings.

Tobacco control policy interventions, including the PoS display bans, are a positive step towards achieving the Government’s 2025 smokefree goal, and it is encouraging to find that these retailers generally supported interventions aimed at achieving this goal.

Competing interests: Nil.

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