

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2024/mar/06/british-american-tobacco-donation-national-party-vape-ban> (6 Mar 2024, Melissa Davey Medical editor of the **Guardian Australia**)

British American Tobacco makes first donation to Nationals in over a decade amid vaping crackdown.

British American Tobacco has publicly donated to an Australian political party for the first time in more than a decade, as the Albanese government prepared to introduce vaping reforms.

The \$55,000 donation in the 2022-23 financial year was disclosed by Laneway Assets, the body that collects membership fees for the Nationals, the disclosure return form published by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) shows. It is the largest donation British American Tobacco has made to the party in 20 years. Corflutes at a polling booth. Labor poised to cap donations and spending after key report released

The last time British American Tobacco donated to the party was in the 2011 financial year as the federal government prepared to introduce plain-packaging reforms to reduce the appeal of cigarettes and other tobacco products. The latest donation came as the federal government in 2023 announced the most significant tobacco and vaping control measures in the country in a decade, including reforms targeting the importation and sale of vapes. A British American Tobacco Australia spokesperson said the donation was made in the form of “an annual membership to engage proactively on solutions to combat the rapidly growing unregulated nicotine market”.

The top-tier, \$55,000 “foundation” membership to the party’s national policy forum gives members access to Nationals ministers and politicians at policy events, luncheons and budget dinners.

Tobacco company Philip Morris Limited also donated \$75,000 to the Nationals on 10 May 2023, one week after the health minister, Mark Butler, announced the vaping reforms. This is \$20,000 more than the amount donated by Philip Morris Limited the year before, and in excess of the \$55,000 required for foundation level membership. It brings the total Philip Morris Limited has given the Nationals since the 1999 financial year to \$570,000, of which \$304,000 has been donated in the past decade.

Tobacco company funding to the **Nationals** (leader David Littleproud) in the 2022-23 financial year reached \$130,000, comprising almost a fifth of the receipts disclosed in the Laneway Assets disclosure form, totalling \$628,950. The Electoral Act requires that donations totalling more than \$13,200 be disclosed. There has been growing concern about the potential influence of harmful industries in politics. When the Senate debated the public health (tobacco and other products) bill in December, independent senator David Pocock called on politicians and political parties to stop accepting donations from tobacco companies and to revoke access given to tobacco industry representatives to enter Parliament House. “There is obviously no transparency around who holds sponsored passes to access Parliament House,” Pocock said at the time. “But we know big tobacco do wander these halls, presumably to find choice moments to bump into their mates and to give them copies of the latest talking points. “I find it disgraceful that an industry that has caused so much despair in our community could be allowed to curry favour with politicians by making donations. I’m certain they don’t make these donations with the expectation that they’ll get nothing in return.”

The chair of the Centre for Public Integrity, Anthony Whealy, said: “These are not what I would call donations made for democratic purposes, but donations made to try and influence decisions. And so it’s yet another example of the way in which our system is failing.”