In November, 27 government lawyers and policymakers from 24 WHO FCTC parties joined the Knowledge Hub on Legal Challenges in Melbourne for a one-week Plain Packaging Workshop on the World Trade Organization (WTO) Decision. The Workshop was supported by the Australian Department of Health.

The Workshop delved into the recent WTO Panel Report - in which a WTO dispute settlement panel dismissed legal challenges to Australia’s plain packaging laws - to explore what the decision means for other countries progressing such laws. Over the course of the week, participants examined the implications of the report for tobacco plain packaging, as well as for the implementation of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) and broader public health.

One of the participants from Papua New Guinea (PNG), Adrian, said, “My participation in the Workshop was primarily to learn from experiences of countries who have introduced plain packaging and have faced litigation from tobacco industries, and to understand the evidences used to defend plain
packaging in the WTO.

“Our participation has exposed us with an overwhelming body of resources that greatly benefits us in our present work in drafting of Tobacco Control Regulations. We understand the evidence and public health defence of plain packaging and we will definitely be able to defend plain packaging to be included in our tobacco control regulations.”

The Workshop also helped strengthen networks of expertise and knowledge sharing among participants, discussing their challenges and successes in developing, implementing and defending tobacco control measures.

“The Workshop helped establish valuable networks with countries and organisations to support our efforts towards pursuing plain packaging. It highlighted that inter-agency collaboration is the way forward in pursuing plain packaging and tobacco control initiatives,” said Adrian from PNG.

Experts from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; Australian Department of Health; WHO FCTC Secretariat; WHO, WHO Western Pacific Regional Office, and WHO Africa Regional Office; Pacific Island Forum Secretariat; Monash University; and Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids also joined as presenters and observers, creating a rich environment of mutual learning.