



Exclusive National Tobacco

The deported kingpin, the Chinese gang and the vape brand controlling an Australian black market

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Australia's illegal tobacco cartel has joined forces with a mysterious Chinese crime gang to infiltrate and control the local vape market.

The syndicate's brand of choice, Alibarbar, is being pushed into hundreds of shops across Australia in a market takeover driven by threats and extortion.

The extent of the market infiltration was apparent when the container ship Cosco Singapore started to disgorge its load on the docks of the Sydney International Container Terminal in mid-July.

The Australian Border Force (ABF) was tipped off about a stash of vapes hidden inside one of the thousands of steel boxes on board, the latest shipment of a new brand of vape flooding into the already crowded illicit market.

The container was delivered to the ship while it was docked in Shenzhen, China, and marked down on customs paperwork as



Alibarbar vapes seized by the Australian Border Force in July 2025. AUSTRALIAN BORDER FORCE

“furniture” destined for the Australian homewares market.

Three more containers were removed from the Cosco Singapore after new intelligence tripped an alert for the ABF that the haul of vapes could be even bigger than first detailed.

Inside the customs examination facility, ABF investigators found more than 115,200 vapes packed to maximum capacity inside the containers. On the street, the product would have been worth up to \$4.5 million in cash.

As seizures go, it wasn’t even close to being the largest for authorities since [the ban on importing vapes was introduced in early 2024](#).

But this seizure was notable, as all four containers were filled almost entirely with Alibarbar vapes, a new Chinese-made product that has swamped the Australian market in the past year and become one of the most common vapes available.

Alibarbar is the brand of choice for the organised crime cartel that controls hundreds of shops around the country that sell contraband tobacco and e-cigarettes.

Law enforcement and underworld sources, who cannot be identified publicly, say the syndicate allegedly run by underworld kingpin Kazem “Kaz” Hamad is driving a market takeover by Alibarbar, using threats and extortion to ensure its illegal distribution network is pushing the brand.



Stickers that must be peeled off Alibarbar vapes have become a common sight outside illicit tobacco stores.

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Hamad was a Melbourne-based organised crime figure [who was deported to his native Iraq in mid-2023](#) after a lengthy prison sentence for drug trafficking. The 41-year-old has since allegedly launched a street war for control of the multibillion-dollar illicit tobacco market.

“It was all about the cigarettes at the start. But the gangs realised they were losing money by not running the vapes too,” said an underworld source with a connection to the syndicate.

“They chose Alibarbar. They’ve got control of the stores, who don’t get a choice about whether to refuse.”



Kazem “Kaz” Hamad in 2015.

The syndicate’s domination of distribution for the tobacco trade – which came as a result of dozens of firebombings and shootings – has meant the vapes have been forced onto retailers with relative ease. There is no known firebombing linked to the vape standover, according a Victorian law enforcement source.

The concerted push into the vape market was part of a [truce that was struck by Hamad and his enemies to end two years of violence in the so-called tobacco war and create a new nationwide cartel](#) in early 2025.

Hamad was recently declared a [“national security threat” by Australian Federal Police Commissioner Krissy Barrett](#) over his involvement in the illicit tobacco industry, links to serious violence and [suspected involvement in a terror attack](#) on the Australian Jewish community on behalf of the Iranian government.

Three sources in federal law enforcement, the underworld and tobacco industry said the deal also linked the Hamad syndicate and its partners with a China-based crime group run by a mysterious figure

known as “Chinese Simon”, which has been connected to running massive drug and tobacco-smuggling operations into Australia in the past.



AFP Commissioner Krissy Barrett has declared Hamad a “national security threat”. ALEX ELLINGHAUSEN

The “Chinese Simon” syndicate has previously been designated by law enforcement authorities as an Australian Priority Organisation Target, which classifies it as a serious national organised crime threat.

The group exerts end-to-end control from export from China to smuggling to distribution and retailing in Australia.

It also has suspected links to a major Australian logistics company that was the listed consignee on the Alibarbar shipment seized by the ABF in July, according to confidential sources.

The gangland-backed attempts to push the Alibarbar brand has caught the ABF and Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) off guard as both agencies state that they do not track the identities of illicit brands seized during operations and cannot provide a breakdown of their market share.

“More than 12 million illegal vapes ... have been taken off the streets by the ABF and TGA since January 2024,” a TGA spokesperson said.

Industry market intelligence provided to *The Age* shows Alibarbar began appearing in illicit tobacco shops in May 2024. By August 2025, it was reportedly being stocked in more than 90 per cent of shops.

A Victoria Police source confirmed that the Hamad cartel is deploying the same tactics of intimidation it used to gain a stranglehold over the tobacco market with its move into vapes.

Under the racket, shop owners are forced to sell particular brands at prices set by the cartel, paying \$5000 a month “tax” to operate in a

given territory. Those who break the rules are ruthlessly threatened with firebombings and shootings.

There is massive money to be made from illicit vapes. The ABF and TGA estimate more than \$600 million worth of vapes have been seized by authorities since the importing ban was introduced.

This is expected to represent only a fraction of the supply being distributed by the syndicate's retail shops, of which more than 500 are under their direct control and hundreds more pay the so-called "Kaz tax" to operate and sell illicit tobacco brands such as Manchester and Double Happiness.

Alibarbar vapes sell for \$35 to \$50 per unit.

It remains unclear what the manufacturer of Alibarbar knows about the wholesale illicit distribution of its product in Australia.



The Therapeutic Goods Administration says more than 12 million illegal vapes have been taken off Australian streets since January 2024. iStock

Chinese incorporation records show the company behind Alibarbar, Shenzhen Dali Wanwei Technology Co Ltd, was founded in late 2023. The company did not respond to a request for comment.

Alibarbar has branched out from vapes to nicotine pouches and even smoking replacement aids such as nicotine gum.

In July 2024, government agency IP Australia granted a trademark over the Alibarbar name and logo to the Chinese company despite the sale of its smoking products remaining illegal in Australia.

It is unclear what relationship, if any, Alibarbar's parent company in China has to a string of retailers in Australia using its brand name in promotional materials.

A website purporting to be set up as Australia’s “official Alibarbar vape supplier”, which offers to ship the vapes locally, is registered to a block of townhouses in Canberra.

“In the heart of Australia, where the sun shines bright and the landscapes are breathtaking, a vaping revolution is taking place,” the website claims in its advertising.

Another online Australian distributor that uses an official-appearing Alibarbar corporate logo contains information about local staff who do not appear to exist, according to the Australian Securities and Investment Commission.

Neither of the purported Australian businesses responded for a request for comment.

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