



HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr AD Harper MP—Chair
Mr SSJ Andrew MP
Ms AB King MP
Ms JE Pease MP
Mr ST O'Connor MP

Staff present:

Ms R Easten—Committee Secretary

PUBLIC HEARING—VAPING: INQUIRY INTO REDUCING RATES OF E-CIGARETTE USE IN QUEENSLAND

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Wednesday, 12 April 2023

Townsville

WEDNESDAY, 12 APRIL 2023

The committee met at 12.59 pm.

CHAIR: Good afternoon. I declare open this public hearing for the Health and Environment Committee's inquiry into reducing rates of e-cigarette use in Queensland. Thank you for your interest and attendance here this afternoon. I am Aaron Harper, the member for Thuringowa and chair of the committee. I would like to start by respectfully acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today and pay our respects to elders past and present. We are very fortunate to live in a country with two of the oldest continuing cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people whose lands, winds and waters we all now share. The other committee members here today are: Joan Pease, the member for Lytton; Ali King, the member for Pumicestone; Sam O'Connor, the member for Bonney; and Stephen Andrew, the member for Mirani. We do have apologies from our deputy chair, Rob Molhoek.

On 14 March 2023 the Legislative Assembly agreed to a motion that the Health and Environment Committee inquire into and report on reducing rates of e-cigarette use in Queensland. The terms of reference for the inquiry are available on the committee's website. The purpose of today's hearing is to assist the committee with its inquiry. We will first hear from invited witnesses and then we can take comments from the floor. If people want to register and see Renee, our secretariat, we will certainly open it up for other comments should you wish to come forward. This hearing is a preceding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath, but intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. The proceedings are being recorded today by Hansard. All of those present should note it is possible you may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website and social media pages. I ask anyone present to turn off their mobile phones or put them on to silent mode.

MEAD, Mr Shannon, Executive Director, No More Butts.

CHAIR: Shannon, thank you for your contribution this morning on the tobacco bill. This inquiry is about the impacts of vaping. We are particularly interested in your submission concerning the environment. If you want to make an opening statement, then we will continue with questions.

Mr Mead: Thank you. Yes, I would. About 18 months ago, as we were on our mission to tackle cigarette butt litter, we realised there is a new threat being posed to the environment: the introduction and acceleration of vaping devices or e-cigarettes. The reason we are here today is quite simple: we do not want this new habit to destroy our planet. Whilst there has been understandably a health focus on a lot of the inquiries to date around vaping, again we should not be divorcing the discussion between the health of the environment and human health. To that end, I applaud the Health and Environment Committee and the minister for including this as a line item in the terms of reference. The bulk of my evidence will be around that.

Before I respond to the terms, I want to note that a lot of the terms we have been using or are being used around e-cigarettes—vaping devices, vapes, vape pens, pods, duals, ENDS and so on—essentially are one and the same thing. The nicotine content obviously varies between them, but those terms are generally the same thing. Let me talk about the earlier Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Amendment Bill. E-cigarettes and vaping devices do fall into those other smoking products even though, according to tobacco companies, they are not smoke products: they are smoke-free products. But it is important that we all understand the definitions so there is some consistency.

Nicotine-based e-cigarettes were introduced as a smoking cessation tool, but they have pretty much evolved into hazardous battery-operated confectionery targeted at children. Whilst considering the environment we should not really differentiate too much between nicotine and non-nicotine based. Specifically for the terms of reference, when we talk about the prevalence of e-cigarette use, particularly among our young, I would like to correct my submission. I excluded a demographic from one of my submissions. I noted that 14½ cent of Queenslanders currently vape. That is 14½ per cent of the 18 to 29 age group as per a report from 2022, so I can amend the submission to include that age group. Alarming, back as far as 2017 it was reported that 15.6 per cent of Queensland schoolchildren aged 12 to 17 had used an e-cigarette or a vape, as we know the terms are interchangeable.

CHAIR: Can you just repeat that?

Mr Mead: Back in 2017—and this is off the government’s website—it was reported that 15.6 per cent of 12- to 17-year-old children had used an e-cigarette. Using Queensland’s population data, it can be estimated that therefore more than 250,000 Queenslanders are vaping regularly. This number is consistent with percentages both nationally and also more recently from a Victorian study they conducted at the end of last year.

When we then look at the consideration of waste management and environmental impacts, vaping devices pose an issue to the environment both as litter and landfill. It is important to differentiate between the two. Based on that estimated consumption, in Queensland of the 250,000 who are regularly vaping it is conservative to say that over 100 tonnes of this new e-waste stream has been created and there has not been any consideration of how to deal with it. Although there are regulations around the sale of nicotine and non-nicotine vapes—that is, you have to be over 18 to purchase a vape; you have to have a prescription to purchase a nicotine vape from a prescribed pharmacy—there has been limited consideration of the environmental impacts of this as well.

There are different kinds of batteries: disposable, integrated and removable. Generally, disposable vapes contain a lithium-ion battery. The chemistry in these lithium ion batteries, especially the cheap disposable ones, is actually quite unstable. The most dangerous outcome that could be conceived is that it can rapidly overheat and cause fires that cannot easily be extinguished, again because of the chemistry they contain. There have been notable fires in the last three to six months which have resulted from lithium ion batteries, and some of those have specifically been related to vapes. In Western Australia there have been reports of human harm as a result of exploding vapes on people’s persons. Between 1 January 2017 and 31 December 2021 the Burns Registry of Australia and New Zealand recorded 21 admissions for burns related to lithium ion batteries, the most common products being e-cigarettes and mobile phones.

When vaping pods and cartridges are discarded as litter they can leach residual nicotine and other toxic chemicals into the environment. The devices themselves can contain lead, cobalt and other substances. According to an online vaping site, the average disposable vape—and I am happy to be corrected today by some of the witnesses—usually contains 200 to 400 puffs. It should be noted that about 400 puffs is the equivalent of about 20 cigarettes—again I am happy to be corrected by other witnesses—therefore, the average smoker would actually go through between one to three vapes per week based off smoking rates.

If we take that into account, it then means that there are up to 750,000 disposable vapes being littered or landfilled each week in Queensland. When we look at littering laws and smoking laws, generally the same laws apply to both of those. You cannot necessarily smoke vapes where you smoke cigarettes. Again the same rules apply with things like outdoor swimming areas and buffer zones and so on, but we have very limited data when it comes to litter collection. Because it is pretty new, it is not included on the taxonomy of the Marine Debris Database as well as the CSIRO database, Keep Australia Beautiful and so on. It is kind of listed under ‘other.’ However, our friends at Sea Shepherd Australia noted that they are finding increasing numbers of vapes at their marine debris beach clean-ups, and their Gold Coast clean-up crew recorded 27 vapes at one clean-up at the beginning of the year. Where you are collecting 1,000 cigarette butts, you are now potentially collecting 27 vapes as litter.

If we look at how to dispose of them, there are conflicting reports on what you should do with them. The lack of transparency on the ingredients and whether they contain nicotine poses another threat. If they do not contain nicotine, one of the recommendations is to rinse it and wash it down the drain. If they do contain nicotine, obviously we do not want to be washing nicotine down the drain and into our waterways. There is also B-cycle, which would be one of the logical implementations. Some of the suggestions are source separate yourself. Take the battery out and drop it into your local B-cycle recycling station. It is not easy for the user to do that. I have some vapes here that I can show you.

Mr O’CONNOR: Is that B-cycle?

Mr Mead: B-cycle, yes, the Battery Stewardship Council B-cycle program. That is one potential product stewardship implementation. However, having a user try to pull apart a device themselves, especially the disposable ones, is not encouraged. We worked with an Instagram blogger who did a video on that and electrocuted herself mildly in the process. The other thing is that when you drop those batteries off to B-cycle there is no funding mechanism for those, so if all of a sudden we are starting to deposit a million plus vaping batteries into B-cycle they are not funded that way. They

collect funds—two cents per battery, for example, or the AA equivalent—from Duracell and Energiser. If all of a sudden these batteries go there, we are potentially facing the fact that there is an overinflux of batteries without any funding mechanism.

There is the Return Unwanted Medicine scheme, or RUM, but that is only available for nicotine-based prescribed ones and it is only available at pharmacies. A teen or anybody who is smoking what they believe may be a non-nicotine vaping device or one they have not obtained legally cannot access that scheme. The National Television and Computer Recycling Scheme, or NTCRS, does not accept vapes. They are also not able to classify vapes. They were not sure what the UN class is. They were not sure how the importation was managed, so they cannot understand necessarily how to classify it to therefore calculate it and give funding to the local transfer stations.

MobileMuster does not accept vapes. MobileMuster has now diverted 2,000 tonnes of phones from landfill in 25 years, which is a fantastic effort. However, if we are looking at that, that is going to be the amount of vapes that will end up in landfill in the next four years and we do not have a coordinated action plan. Some councils do accept vapes. In Townsville—if I look specifically at that—residents can recycle up to 20 televisions a year, however, there is no way to recycle vapes.

CHAIR: Just on that, which councils in Queensland and how are they doing it?

Mr Mead: There are currently none that I found in Queensland that are doing it. There is the City of Sydney and there is one down the Great Ocean Road somewhere in Victoria. You have to exhaustively look at every council site, look at their requirements and follow it up. I could obtain a list, but it would have to be a one-by-one exercise.

Just briefly, internationally Scotland is reportedly considering banning single-use vapes. The New York State Senate currently has a bill to consider banning single-use vapes. A French MP has also introduced a bill to ban them. Germany and Switzerland are also taking action on this. This is from our global network of people doing similar work in other countries.

In closing, before turning to questions I would urge the committee to consider linkages between TOSPA—that is a new acronym I think we have all learned today—and ensure there is no area of doubt as to whether or not the new vaping stores that are popping up are going to be considered. If they are selling confectionery, essentially, rather than nicotine devices, are they adequately captured in any of those legislative changes?

I would also like to highlight the dangerous littering fines that exist for cigarettes. I would argue that littering a vaping device with batteries and so on is just as dangerous. At the moment it is probably classified under 'general' and therefore only receives half the penalties and the PIN that a lit cigarette achieves. I would also suggest that the committee look at that. I think that is it for my opening remarks.

CHAIR: Thank you, Shannon; that is very interesting. Picking up your point about other jurisdictions, internationally there is clearly some talk about banning them. I think, in your words, there needs to be a coordinated plan to dispose of vapes, particularly the ones with lithium ion batteries. Do you think there is a role to play for regulated tobacconists—and we will have them in shortly—to potentially take old vapes and coordinate some kind of—

Mr Mead: I think in a coordinated approach, absolutely. We worked with a legitimate vaping shop in Cairns. We supplied them with a tube marked 'recycle your vapes here.' I have a bunch of vapes I collected—if nothing else other than for edification as to what they look like—so you can have a look at them. There are different kinds as well. I can present them to you now or later on.

CHAIR: We can have a quick look at them now.

Mr Mead: They are just over there. Working with a vape shop in Cairns and the Cairns Regional Council, who provided that tube, they have been able to collect them. Some of them are legitimately sold; some of them were not sold from their establishment. They are obviously pushing the refillable, rechargeable, re-useable route of non-nicotine vapes, and they do have some customers. Some of those devices, though, are devices that do contain nicotine which were obtained from other shops. As far as responsible corporate citizens, they are on board with that and I suggest that many legitimate vaping stores would be, but I think it needs to be coordinated rather than individual vape shops taking it upon themselves to implement.

CHAIR: First off, we need to deal with how we are going to examine these. We are not tabling them per se. We will give them back to you. The name of this very colourful one here is interesting.

Mr Mead: Ice cream.

CHAIR: Grape, raspberry flavoured, Shisha Cloudz, and it says 8,000 puffs. That is a significant amount. That is quite a decent sized one; it is never going to break down. This is a comment only: credit to you on working with the retailers to get them recycled. I think that is admirable. From the committee's point of view, a coordinated approach is something that we can definitely take away. I will open it up to questions.

Ms KING: You commented about single-use vapes. I know that in other jurisdictions there seems to be a much bigger market in those areas, but they clearly contain tobacco. Talking about other overseas jurisdictions, from what you have seen of those re-useable canister-based refill products, can you comment on the environmental harm they might cause compared to single-use products?

Mr Mead: I think that logically the more uses you get out of something then obviously there will be less damage to the environment. Naturally, there are still concerns around if and when they are finally disposed of. From an environmental perspective, we will probably leave others to talk about regulation. This is going to be an environmental issue whether it is regulated or not. Whether it is disposable or re-useable, whether it is regulated or not, we would just love a scheme to be in place. But certainly having a longer life cycle in a controlled environment where things like nicotine can be measured, things like batteries are multiuse and also the plastic casing—aluminium casings have a longer life as well—would be better for the environment.

Ms KING: For the benefit of the committee, can you talk to us about how those re-useable devices work? Are they a standalone device that is topped up with liquid, or do people buy cartridges that slot in?

Mr Mead: My understanding is that they are refillable. I would probably defer to tobacconists and vape store owners to comment about the exact mechanics of it. My understanding is that yes, they are user refillable. I liken it to when we used to get our ink cartridges refilled, that kind of scenario. It is probably not an exact science, but that sort of mindset.

Mr O'CONNOR: Can you show us which ones are re-useable? I honestly cannot tell them apart. They all have 'no bin'. It is obviously an electronic product so they all have that logo on them. Can you show us which ones are?

Mr Mead: It is also a question of which are nicotine-based and non-nicotine-based as well. I will possibly even leave them here for other members to comment on. For example, IGET ice cream apparently, according to their website, has a 1,500 milliamp battery capacity—

CHAIR: 'IGET ice cream' is the title?

Mr Mead: Yes. It is an IGET Bar with ice cream. In relation to the doctor's comment before, you cannot legally display this, but you can legally display things like highlighters and those kinds of things if you are in a convenience store. I think that is what he was alluding to. If we have a look at these other products, the Orion strawberry banana—

Mr O'CONNOR: Which ones are re-useable or refillable?

Mr Mead: I can generally tell by the USB plug at the bottom of them. This one has a USB plug.

Mr O'CONNOR: It is the ones that are the smaller sealed units that are disposable?

Mr Mead: Generally, yes. These yellow and green ones, which are Yumi, these are 1,500 or so, their website says, disposable and apparently contain no nicotine.

CHAIR: Yet to be determined?

Mr Mead: Yes.

Mr O'CONNOR: Can I just clarify that figure you said? It was sort of an extrapolation that you had on the percentage usage and the number of disposables, but was it 750,000 a week?

Mr Mead: Yes. If we have 250,000 Queenslanders now vaping and they are vaping between one to three disposables a week, conceivably up to 750,000 disposables are being consumed. I am happy to be corrected by those who are selling them at the coalface. We do have illicit vaping or black market vaping as well, so again not having the full sales data, without having regulation and without having positive licensing, it becomes very hard to get the full picture.

Mr O'CONNOR: Do you have any idea—absent the data you talked about that is missing—from the operators you talked to what proportion would be disposable versus re-useable?

Mr Mead: It is not something I would be able to say with confidence in this forum. When you talk about under 18s who cannot legally obtain—and that is where the bulk of the growth in this is—you would have to assume they are disposable.

Mr O'CONNOR: And they are hardly going to have data on whom they are selling it to.

Mr Mead: Exactly. To the point about the disposable scheme, these are young, vulnerable people. Even if a scheme is developed, are they going to be confidently going in and dropping off their vaping device? We need to be considerate and empathetic when we talk about designing a scheme for that. It is not about penalising their behaviour; it is about supporting them through the addiction and making sure they have the confidence to deal with that waste stream. Leading with the environmental discussion—at least having an environmental discussion—with young people is important because they believe and care so much about our planet. I have spoken to several of the young volunteers who are vapers or have friends who are vapers, and as soon as I start talking about the impacts vapes can have on the environment they say, 'Wow, I never thought of that before.'

CHAIR: I am not sure if this was in your submission—it is only 500 pages—or another one, but there was a comment about bushfires potentially having been started. There is some evidence now of disposed vapes having caused some bushfires. Do you have anything to add to that?

Mr Mead: I do not know. I know that, when it comes to smoking and tobacco and cigarette butts, certainly it does not surprise me. As far as bushfires, I do not have that evidence. There is certainly feedback more so around battery facilities and so on. I was alarmed when I saw the Gympie tobacconist go up in smoke a couple of days ago. I thought it could have been that, but it was apparently two offenders who set the store on fire. It may even be related to what we were talking about in this morning's session.

Mr ANDREW: What is the chemical waste composed of? What is in the liquid? Have you looked into that? Have you found anything? Obviously there is nicotine, but are there other chemicals in there?

Mr Mead: I think they generally say they are harmless for a lot of reasons unless they are vaporised and inhaled into the lungs. We will stay out of the health side of it and let the health experts talk about that. I think when they are sitting dormant as food additives, vegetable glycerol and those sorts of things, you would have to assume they are relatively harmless. I am concerned about the nicotine, but I am also concerned about the leaching of things from the circuitry. It is not just the juice that is in here; you have a coil and you have absorbed cotton which can contain nicotine as well—if they contain nicotine—and the battery—cobalt, lead, lithium ion and all those—so when it comes to the impacts of their chemical composition I am more worried about the circuitry and the batteries and trace elements of nicotine.

Ms PEASE: You mentioned internal cotton. What do you mean by that?

Mr Mead: Within here there is generally a coil. It is battery operated and it needs something to heat the vape liquid, the e-juice, the e-liquid, all of the different terms you have. I am not too sure if any of the other panel will be able to make comment, but when you open these up there is—there are a couple of nods—the different components in there which basically make the device work.

Mr O'CONNOR: Can you quantify the amount of lithium? Is that the major mineral used? How many mobile phone batteries would that be?

Mr Mead: They say approximately 15 grams per battery, but obviously that is going to be determined by battery size and so on. The vapes themselves go anywhere from 20 grams up to 55 grams. There are estimates when you come to tonnage of all these things. I think if nothing else, whether it is a million or 52 million, keeping lithium ion batteries out of landfill and litter should be the objective.

Mr O'CONNOR: In terms of quantifying, it could be 10 vapes equals the amount of lithium in one mobile phone or something?

Mr Mead: I could easily do that number. I do not have that to hand, but I could easily do that and come back.

Ms PEASE: In your opening statement you said that when you were taking them apart one of your volunteers was mildly electrocuted and you have evidence they have been set on fire. Can you elaborate on that?

Mr Mead: That was actually the *Guardian* blogger. She has a video I can circulate into evidence later. She is a vaper and she contacted us wondering what she should do with them. I talked through the various options. The fact is that none really exist, but if you want to go through the process this is what to do. She had what she called her vape graveyard, a massive bucket she had been collecting of vapes, and she took them apart one by one. There is filmed footage where she did that. The elements in a lithium ion battery cannot touch. If they do touch, they can electrocute the user.

They can short, and certainly when they hit each other that is not good either. Whilst they are in these casings it is fine, but if the casing ends up becoming eroded, if the casing gets cracked and damaged and the elements are exposed, that is when there can be an issue.

Ms PEASE: There has been such an increase in young people taking up vaping. Is there any evidence they can create, like aerosol cans, an explosion or use it for chroming? Is it only through puffing, or can they inhale it? Are there other dangers associated with vapes that we have not really heard about so far?

Mr Mead: I would leave the health conversation around inhaling aerosol and vaping to others. I think some people have also been confused about what are known as nangs, which is actually nitrous oxide, and using that. They both also pose a litter issue. They are aluminium, so they can be recycled. There are different and additional concerns with that. I would not say that I support necessarily the design of a vaping device, but when it comes to other harms we are more worried about what they do with them after they are finished with them.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for your contribution this morning and this afternoon. It has been very informative.

SOLEY, Ms Deb, Tobacconist, Tobacco Station Group

WRIGHT, Ms Pam, Tobacconist

Ms Wright: The growth in vaping is concerning. The Queensland government says that only 10.4 per cent of people in Queensland now smoke. That is great news. Even though I am a tobacconist that is really good. Unfortunately, they have not taken into consideration that we have 14 per cent of the Queensland population vaping. We have one of the largest black markets in the world for nicotine vapes. We have no control over what is in these vapes, how much nicotine is in them, how they are being sold, where they are being sold. Australia probably has the worst youth vaping in the world. The illicit shops and black market that sells these nicotine vapes targets children. They are opening shops right opposite schools, right next to schools. They are going on TikTok. You can buy them on Facebook and online. They deliver them to your door. I have a grandson in Brisbane who is a boilermaker, and his mates buy nicotine vapes for about \$7 online and onsell them.

CHAIR: I was going to ask, Pam, how young people are getting hold of them and I think you just articulated that. You would know in the regulated industry that you are not going to sell cigarettes to people under 18.

Ms Wright: That is dead right.

CHAIR: So how are these young children getting them?

Ms Wright: They are getting them from TikTok, from Facebook, from social media. Even their parents are buying them online and giving them to them. I know of two or three illicit shops now right near schools here in Townsville that are selling nicotine vapes. Most of the nicotine vapes that are sold is black market. There is only 20 per cent in Australia that are obtained legally by going to a doctor and getting a prescription and going to a pharmacy. As that health man said, a lot of doctors have not even registered or done anything about the nicotine.

Ms KING: Did you say 20 per cent?

Ms Wright: Yes, about 20 per cent. That is pretty scary, but at least that is controlled. So it is quite obvious the system of going through a doctor to get a prescription and then going to a pharmacy, which most times do not stock it or do not sell the device to put the nicotine in, is not working. It is not working. You can either ban it altogether, which is not going to work because the horse has already bolted out of the paddock, so there has to be some control by the government and by licensed stakeholders—retailers—to try and do the right thing, and they are the only people that should be doing it. We know that licensed tobacconists will not sell to under 18s. That is No. 1. If then they are controlled and we had them rated so that we know they are tested and we know what nicotine value they have in them, it all helps. That will all help to try and regulate this explosion of vaping which is happening.

Believe it or not, a Roy Morgan poll says that 73 per cent of Australians they polled want nicotine vaping to become legal and regulated and sold by licensed retailers—73 per cent by a Roy Morgan poll—so I have not pulled these figures out of the top of my head. It needs to be regulated. It needs to be stopped being sold online. It needs to be not taxed to the billyo because that is what will then create the black market again which created the black market in cigarettes and tobacco, but we need it regulated so it is being sold to the proper adult person.

CHAIR: I guess the concern locally here—and I am sure every other member in their patch has concerns about this—is the prevalence of young people smoking in schools. Do you have anything that you can add to that?

Ms Soley: I have two daughters who are both teachers, one at Southern Cross Catholic school here. She was absolutely shocked the other day to find a grade 6 girl vaping. When she was pulled aside and asked about it, she said, 'Well, everybody's doing it, so why not?'

Ms Wright: Yes, that peer pressure.

Ms Soley: It is the peer group pressure for these kids and the availability. They can just walk into their corner store and buy a vape because there are no regulations on who sells it or anything like that which needs to be organised and done.

Ms Wright: I know a service station down south that puts their vapes out on the counter on the weekend because health inspectors do not come around then.

CHAIR: They would struggle to do every servo. We have about seven on Riverway Drive itself.

Ms Wright: Yes. I can say that Queensland has done a great job reducing smoking—10.4—so why can we not apply those sorts of laws and reduce vaping if we regulate it?

Mr O'CONNOR: What proportion of your sales would be vapes?

Ms Wright: A small proportion. We did not really get into it to any great extent when we opened our shops up five or six years ago. When you bought a non-disposable vaping unit, they had too many problems. There were so many online and people would burn their coils out and they would come in and want a coil for a particular model that we never even sold. They became all too hard. When the non-nicotine disposable vapes first came out, there were a lot of faulty things with them, so we stopped selling them. We have now started to sell non-nicotine vapes—IGETs—from an approved supplier as such, if you like.

Mr O'CONNOR: What does an approved supplier look like?

Ms Wright: We have the proof that these things are supposed to not have nicotine. They say that the nicotine is the addictive thing, and I will give you a story. In our Charters Towers shop all we have sold is non-nicotine vapes. We sell about 180 a week, week in, week out. They are non-nicotine, so why are they doing it? Peer pressure: 'Everybody else is doing it. I want to join the bandwagon.'

Mr O'CONNOR: You do not sell the nicotine ones?

Ms Wright: No. It is illegal and we would not do it and I have been a very strong advocate on trying to do the right thing. If we applied the same strategies to vaping, it could work. It is more a peer pressure thing, I think. Yes, there are nicotine symptoms where they get addicted, but we have not only children doing it; we have people who have not smoked for 30 years vaping because their mate is doing it. There are people that I know who have never smoked in their life and they are in their 30s and they are vaping.

CHAIR: Just taking up Shannon's comments, the previous speaker, do you think there is a role to play—and we have someone from the Vape Vault later on, Rob—to manage the waste? Would you be interested?

Ms Soley: Yes.

Ms Wright: Yes.

CHAIR: I noticed that one of your stores in Cairns is doing the recycling.

Ms Wright: Yes. No, it is not our stores. We have not been approached, but we would have been quite happy to do it.

CHAIR: Do you think there is a role to play from retailers?

Ms Wright: Yes. There were places where you go to drop your old mobile phones and your old ink cartridges and things. I do not see that that is a problem for any retailer who wants to get behind this.

CHAIR: That is good.

Ms PEASE: Thank you again, ladies, for coming in. With the non-nicotine vapes, are they all flavoured?

Ms Wright: Yes.

Ms PEASE: So they do not just come in with nicotine, like cigarette flavoured?

Ms Soley: No. Just on that as well, I would say that probably one per cent of my sales would be vapes, the non-nicotine. I do not sell many of them at all. I do not go out there and push it or anything. A lot of the people who come in and buy them, usually over the weekend or late Friday, are young people who are going out drinking for the night and say, 'My friends have got one. I want to take one with me so that I'm not borrowing theirs,' and that is it. They do not normally use them through the week, but they will take them out if they go out partying on the weekend.

Ms PEASE: Are any of them less flavoured than others so that they are more like cigarettes, or are they all heavily fragranced?

Ms Soley: I am not aware because I do not use them.

Ms Wright: They are all heavily fragranced. There is blueberry, blackberry, raspberry. There is ice cream.

Ms PEASE: I have seen them. I have seen that.

Ms Wright: There are all sorts of flavours. We have not got any through our non-nicotine vape supplier. We have not got any that are just plain tobacco.

Ms PEASE: I guess that is what my query was. What do you charge for your vapes, because you only sell disposable I understand?

Ms Wright: Yes.

Ms PEASE: So what do you charge?

Ms Wright: We are charging about \$30, \$35.

Ms PEASE: How many puffs are in those ones? Are they the three—

Ms Wright: The \$30 ones are 3,500 puffs and the 4,000 puffs are \$35, so, yes, we are making about 100 per cent mark-up.

Ms PEASE: That is okay. I am not commenting on that; I just wondered what the differences in prices are between a registered tobacco shop and others.

Ms Wright: Considering you can go to one of these illicit and buy them for 15 bucks—

Ms PEASE: Yes, that is right. I take it that you would give a receipt and you would also take credit card?

Ms Wright: Yes.

Ms KING: Thank you again for continuing your contributions. It is a bit delicate, and please understand that we just want to understand. Do you ever feel like you might be vulnerable, because we have heard about how expensive and difficult it is to test the vapes individually to ascertain that they do not have nicotine and your supplier has given you some paperwork that establishes that the ones you are buying do not have nicotine so you feel some comfort in that from what you stated earlier? Do you ever worry that one day the risk is that it turns out that they have put some nicotine in the vapes that you are selling and what the impacts for your business could be?

Ms Soley: Absolutely.

Ms KING: Do you ever feel vulnerable about that?

Ms Wright: Yes.

Ms Soley: Every day you think about that.

Ms Wright: My husband did not even want to do the non-nicotine vaping. He did not want to have IGETs in our shops at all because they are associated with nicotine, but it got to the stage where we had to put them in for survival, as I said to you earlier today, because of how much money we are losing because of the illicit trade, and we had people walking out the door. When somebody comes into our shop it is not just the cigarettes that they buy; they buy chewing gum, they buy soft drinks, they buy some of our giftware. It is all the additional sales that we get that help us survive, so if they do not come into our shop we do not get that, so our foot traffic is reduced drastically. We went along the same path and bought that in, but, yes, it worries me. It worries me that they are saying that it has no nicotine, but has it? We have done a little exercise. My girls in Sarina did a little exercise for me and the IGET nicotine vape and the non-nicotine vape have the same batch number and the same barcode.

Ms KING: So that must worry you.

Ms Wright: Of course it worries us, but what are we supposed to do?

Ms KING: Please do not think there is any criticism implied in the question; I am just trying to get it on the record that it is a concern for you.

Ms Wright: Yes. We have 52 staff. We do not want to put anyone off. They are all full-time staff except two. We treasure our staff because they are the fronts of our business.

Ms KING: I have a follow-up question for you. You have given a submission today that you would like to see nicotine-containing vapes regulated and sold through legal responsible service outlets.

Ms Wright: Yes.

Ms Soley: Yes.

Ms KING: Hypothetically were that to happen, would you want to see non-nicotine containing vapes restricted?

Ms Wright: Yes, all vapes restricted.

Ms KING: So all vapes only available through—

Ms Wright: Yes, through a licensed outlet.

Ms Soley: Absolutely.

Ms KING: Perhaps you would like to comment, but it strikes me that if nicotine-containing vapes were being sold through reputable outlets—

Ms Soley: Yes, the little corner stores.

Ms KING:—then you have a continued risk if non-nicotine containing ones can be purchased anywhere.

Ms Wright: No. I think that it has to be a completely controlled, regulated industry to have it work, because at the moment we have the corner shops. We have people going to hotels selling them. We have people out the back of their cars selling them in car parks, at markets.

Ms KING: Do you think non-nicotine containing vapes should be banned or banned for people of certain ages?

Ms Wright: I do not think anyone under 18 should be buying a nicotine vape or a smoking product.

Ms KING: I was talking about a non-nicotine one like a flavoured vape.

Ms Wright: No. It does not matter what it is: over 18.

Ms Soley: Absolutely.

Ms Wright: It is as simple as that.

Ms Soley: That comes down to simple things like I will not sell a cigarette lighter to anybody under the age of 18. They are coming to the store and asking. I will not sell them. They are not over the age of 18.

Ms Wright: Nor a box of matches even.

Ms Soley: No. There needs to be responsible people to deal with and handle these products.

Mr O'CONNOR: Is there a bit of a contradiction here though, because you are saying you want it regulated but you are also saying you do not want to sell more vapes?

Ms Wright: No, we did not say we did not want to sell more vapes; we just said we need it regulated. We are only selling the non-nicotine at the moment—

Ms Soley: Because that is all that is legal.

Mr O'CONNOR: Yes, but you want the nicotine regulated so you can sell them?

Ms Wright: So we can actually sell them. It is regulated under one banner, but we are liable then. It makes it easier for the health department to come and check, and they are regulated. They are controlled. There is product quality. With some of these nicotine vapes, we have no idea what nicotine is in them—none whatsoever.

CHAIR: Or other toxins.

Ms Wright: Or other toxins. These need to be tested, checked and then given to people like your vape shops and your Vape Vaults and things like that too, but licensed people who are going to do the correct—

Ms PEASE: And keep the quality control.

Ms Wright: And keep the quality control there.

Ms Soley: You have to keep the quality control in there.

Mr ANDREW: We talked about the TGA having checks on these things. They regulate it and go through it, but there is obviously lots of other stuff that gets through that does not even get anywhere near that.

Ms Soley: That is for sure.

Ms Wright: You just heard Shannon say that 250,000 people are vaping 750,000 a week potentially—vapes being sold and discarded.

Ms Soley: They are certainly not coming from my store.

Mr ANDREW: No, I know. You just told me you sell five or something.

Ms Wright: People—and it is a proven fact; I proved it in Charters Towers—keep coming back for non-nicotine vapes, so it is not just the nicotine addiction, because there is supposedly no nicotine in them; it is the peer pressure: 'My mates are doing it. We're going to do it. It tastes cool because it's bubblegum or it's pineapple or it's mango.'

Ms Soley: I just think also if it is regulated you will see a drop in the number of people being able to obtain them because they actually have to come to somebody who is licensed to purchase them.

CHAIR: Well said, Deb. With that, we thank both Pam and Deb for your contribution today.

Mr ANDREW: We appreciate all of your input.

CHAIR: Yes, we appreciate it.

Ms Wright: Thank you.

ADAMS, Mr Rob, Vape Vault

CHAIR: Thank you very much for attending today. I invite you to make an opening statement, Rob, and then we will move to some questions.

Mr Adams: That was all really relevant what Deb and Pam brought up, so that was really good. Just as a quick opening statement, I have a vaping story. I was an ex-smoker. I quit in 2013 and I chased vaping to try and quit smoking. It worked, so 10 years later I am now smoke free. I still vape. About Vape Vault's story, we have been running about six years or a little bit over six years and right from the beginning, because I had already had experience with vaping and knowing the legislation around vaping, we wanted to obviously do everything legal from the start, from the get-go. We had the health department come and visit our store the first week we opened in Garbutt. There were a couple of things that needed changing—things I did not know about—but from the very beginning no under-18s buy at Vape Vault. Even still today I get schoolkids who are 18 and they come in with their school uniforms on and we tell them, 'Go home and change. We're not selling to anyone with a school uniform on,' even though they are 18. It is ingrained.

It is the same thing with the nicotine. The whole time we have been trading we have been right against nicotine. I have helped thousands of people quit. Looking at our regular customers, my regular customers are about 95 per cent at Vape Vault, and that is between 60 and 80 customers a day. My point of sale tells me my return customers, so that tells me that they are still vaping. Yes, some might dual use, but a lot of people have quit and they come in, because they share their stories with us. I have a bunch of things to touch on which I think we can probably open up and talk about through questions rather than me just monologuing all of this sort of thing out. That is just a bit of an idea of our background at Vape Vault so you know that we have been in the industry a while and we have a few good ideas too to do with this disposable debacle.

CHAIR: Thanks, Rob. Can you guarantee that the products you sell do not have nicotine?

Mr Adams: Yes, 100 per cent.

CHAIR: How is that?

Mr Adams: Because I know the guys who make the juice. They are all in Australia. One of them came to my wedding. The other guys I have visited. I know them well. They have clean rooms set up on the Gold Coast, in Adelaide, over in WA and the other guys are in New South Wales. Actually, my major suppliers are Vapoureyes, Oz-Eliquid, Juice Freak and Clouded Visions. There are no other juice manufacturers in Australia that I deal with because I have not heard of them, so I have been very picky with who I stock in my store, including disposables. I am very against disposables. I have never been one who thought disposables were a good answer to vaping, even when they first came about. It was like, 'Look at this cool thing and then I suck on this and then throw it in the bin.' That is a waste of money and, as Shannon said, 750,000—probably most of them are disposables—are ending up in our landfill or on the streets which is totally non-progressive, if you ask me. I do stock disposables—only one brand and only four flavours—and we do not sell many of them. They are for the people who come in and say, 'Do you have disposables?'

CHAIR: So the ones you have here are more the reusable ones?

Mr Adams: Correct, yes.

Mr O'CONNOR: So it is a canister of the juice, is it?

Mr Adams: Yes. I have three types here. Two of them are practically the same, but that is a tank. Inside your tank is a coil, a heating system. You refill your tank with your juice and you vape. That coil will burn out in one to two weeks depending on what juice they are using. If it has lots of sweetener, normally the coils burn out faster. In Townsville lots of people like to vape on fruit juices. I think it is because of the warmer weather, so people are always going towards the fruits. A coil will last two to three weeks. A coil is a little metal thing about yay big that has cotton in it, and that is what is being discarded. Another thing with lithium ion batteries is that these will last me a year and a half and then I can take them down to Battery World and dispose of them safely. We already recycle these lithium ion batteries at Vape Vault if people want to drop them. Most of the time it is when people come in and they are buying new batteries and they show us what their old batteries look like, and they are dangerous because they have torn the wraps or they have dents in them. It can make the chemicals not good inside a battery, so we will take the batteries off the customer and we will dispose of them.

CHAIR: They look like a AA-standard type battery.

Mr Adams: Yes, just bigger, just fatter. If you tear the wrap and you short it out then you have a fire, so you do have to be careful. On our website we have blogs about battery safety. When people are buying a new device, especially if they are a new user and they are buying a device with these batteries, we tell them that you do not put them in your pocket. We give them free battery cases—they are a plastic case the batteries sit in—so they are safe. That can then go in your pocket because nothing is going to short out in there. The only thing that will make this battery short out is if someone runs over it with a car or it gets torn in your pocket by a set of keys and the positive and negative gets touched together and then you have a sort of out-of-control fire. You have a little bit of time before that happens. It will burn you before it starts going off. I have not seen one myself in real life, only on YouTube, but I have had instances where a customer has said, 'Hey, I had a problem with this because look at what my battery looks like,' and I am like, 'Yeah, well, maybe we should put a new wrap on it or give you a new battery.'

CHAIR: From a local point of view, Rob, and some comments earlier that around 10 stores have opened up, what do you say about those pop-up stores, cash only? What are your views on those, Rob?

Mr Adams: Pop-up stores are selling nicotine disposables. The prescription model was introduced two Octobers ago. Before the prescription model for nicotine, customers would come in and ask me, 'Where do I get my nicotine from?' I would say, 'All right. You go to New Zealand. You get your nicotine. You bring it in store. I can show you how to mix it safely.' Two Octobers ago people would say, 'Where do I get my nicotine from?' I would say, 'Oh, you need a prescription.' They would say, 'Oh, okay. Who can give me a prescription?' I would say, 'No doctor in this town.' They would say, 'Oh.' You have to do a Zoom conference with a doctor on a website that Vape Vault has just sent you to and people are like, 'Nah.' They might buy a vape, but now there is this little black market thing that has catered to them. So with all these IGETs and any nicotine-containing disposables, which is mainly IGETs—GunnPods as well, I think it is—there is a massive black market because people cannot obtain their nicotine easily. They have never been able to obtain it easily. We would like it to happen, but until now it is still not happening.

These guys are saying, 'No, I'm not going to buy this vape from Vape Vault because I can't get my nicotine easily. Oh, but this guy's opened down the road and I can get 50 milligrams disposable for 50 bucks. Sweet.' So you never see that customer again and then all those vapes go into landfill and then that person is being hooked on 50 milligrams of nicotine per millilitre. This is containing three milligrams per millilitre of nicotine. Most of our clients get to this stage and most of them we do not even advise going above eight because it has adverse effects when you start getting high in the range. It can cause heart palpitations. It gives you the sweats. It can make you feel sick, so you do not want to overdo nicotine. It is the same as smoking. You do not sit down and smoke a packet in half an hour, do you, because you are going to get sick from it, mostly from nicotine poisoning? The same thing happens. These disposables are a massive problem. Where are the disposables ending up mostly? The schoolkids are getting them, and we have talked about this already. The schoolkids are getting them through Snapchat, social media and from the odd shop that has no morals and has no problems selling them to our schoolkids.

What is keeping the black market open is people with money. I can—you can Deb; you can sir—jump online and search igetbulkbuy in Australia and you can buy 10,000 of them. If you work at the mines you can then go out to your mine site and sell them to all your friends. That is just one instance. I have heard of people taking truckloads of them up to Cape Tribulation and selling them at the backpackers and things like that. That is where the bigger money is coming from and also from the vendors who are doing the wrong thing. They are feeding the black market. It is leaving it open for the really sly ones who want to sell to the kids. They buy them in bulk, put them on Snapchat, make a fake name and even post them to the kids. I have heard plenty of stories about kids getting vapes posted to them and all that sort of thing. That is what I think about the black market and the disposables.

CHAIR: It is at your fingertips. I just looked up IGET.

Mr Adams: There you go.

Mr O'CONNOR: From what you see of the industry, what proportion of legitimate stores or illegitimate stores or whatever would sell this sophisticated device you sell compared to some of the other ones we have seen?

Mr Adams: That is a bit hard to say. How about we just say all legitimate vape stores that are grassroots and have been in this industry for a long time and maybe emerging vape stores that want to become real vape stores and have a go at it, they are going to be stocking these types of machines because they are a long-term machine. I do not see any value in the disposables.

Mr O'CONNOR: And they are only a small portion of what you sell?

Mr Adams: Absolutely.

Mr O'CONNOR: Very tiny, is it?

Mr Adams: Very tiny. It is by choice. I did not rush out and buy a whole lot of disposables because I am competing with stores in Townsville that have nicotine in their disposables so why would I waste money on non-nicotine disposables. I want to sell them something better so then I can say to them, 'Right, now you need your prescription. Now you need to go and get your nicotine imported and then you can start on your quitting journey.'

Mr O'CONNOR: For your business it is that they come back to get the juice, they come back to get the oil, they come back to get expert advice?

Mr Adams: They come back to get the juice which is made in Australia. They come back to get the coils which are supplied by the same suppliers who make our juice—they are not made here; they are made in China. They are getting expert advice. People come in with nicotine and say, 'I don't know what I do.' I say to them, 'Legally, I am not even allowed to tell you.' That is what I am told by the health department. What are they going to do? There is no information around how to mix it.

Mr O'CONNOR: Are there any health issues with the non-nicotine disposables that you are aware of?

Mr Adams: With non-nicotine?

Mr O'CONNOR: Yes.

Mr Adams: To tell you the truth, I have never heard of any health issues with vaping non-nicotine vape products. The only health issue that arose—and there were deaths in America—was when there was black market crap on the streets and it was full of vitamin E acetate. This was causing a pulmonary condition. This happened a little over two or three years ago. Then there was a big smear campaign around vaping which really hurt us. At least we got to the bottom of it. They were vaping not what we put in our vapes.

Essentially what is in this vape is propylene glycol—not the antifreeze propylene glycol; that was the smear campaign as well—which is also found in asthma pumpers and air filtration systems in hospitals, vegetable glycerin, which is used to make cakes, and flavours. The flavours are chosen from flavour manufacturers out of Italy, Poland and America that have extracted all of the not-vape-safe chemicals in them. A lot of food flavours have sugar, fats and oils. If you vape those it is not good for your lungs because what happens is it heats up on the coil and combusts so you are essentially smoking combusted fats and oils, which is no good for you.

Mr O'CONNOR: How much is one of these vapes compared to a disposable one?

Mr Adams: A new set-up with juice is going to slug you \$160 and it is going to last you close to two years, as long as nothing goes wrong with it.

CHAIR: Can I recognise the member for Mundingburra in the audience. As we heard this morning, vape stores are opening up everywhere. Thank you for being here today, Les, and for taking an interest.

Ms KING: To clarify, the way your model works is that you are effectively providing, as you see it, informal smoking cessation advice?

Mr Adams: Correct.

Ms KING: You sell the devices and provide after-sales service around batteries and things, you sell the juice and then people get their script for their nicotine and they then add that in in advisable quantities.

Mr Adams: They actually put it into their juice. They buy a nicotine-free juice bottle from me. We show them how to work out the percentage, which is not all that hard once you know the calculations. You put your nicotine in, you shake it up and use that. You make three milligrams, which is 0.03 per cent not three per cent. If it were three per cent it would be 30 milligrams. That is another bad advertising point that is on a lot of these disposable vapes. They say five per cent and people think it is five milligrams. It is 50 milligrams—0.05 per cent is five milligrams. We are there to try to control people from doing the wrong thing when they want to start their vaping journey. Realistically, we have all of that after-sales service.

Mr O'CONNOR: To quickly wrap that up: you would like a distinction made between your business and your products and the other vapes that are covered by this inquiry? That is the key message for us?

Mr Adams: Absolutely. I would like to add to what Pam and Deb were talking about earlier about nicotine being made as a consumer product in Australia. I know the prescription model was introduced, but I do not believe it is working—I know it is not working. I believe that model has obviously created the black market.

I believe that if registered stores with licences could sell their nicotine and it were regulated properly it would work. In New Zealand there is a framework. There is some vaping crowd in their government and that vaping crowd look after all of the vape juices that are allowed to be sold. Every vape juice in New Zealand has to be registered with them. Maybe they need to be in the clean room to be—

CHAIR: Are you saying there is more regulation and control over there?

Mr Adams: There is a little bit more regulation over there.

CHAIR: Are you aware of illegal stores in New Zealand?

Mr Adams: There is no reason for them to be there because they are selling nicotine in all their legal stores.

Mr O'CONNOR: And they mix it in in a clean environment?

Mr Adams: They are already made in a lab—in the clean room. The guy who owns Vapoureyes in Australia, Morris Lazootin, is over there—he actually got chased out of this country—so he can expand his vaping business. Because of the issues around prescriptions here it was hampering him and holding his business back. He has labs in New Zealand and they premix the nicotine into the bottles and they get distributed to all the stores that they supply. He also sends nicotine to clients over here who have their prescriptions because he deals in bulk nicotine as well.

Ms PEASE: You said that you used vaping as a way to give up smoking.

Mr Adams: Yes, absolutely

Ms PEASE: But you still use nicotine in your vapes; is that correct?

Mr Adams: Yes.

Ms PEASE: What are the benefits of not smoking and vaping?

Mr Adams: I am not sucking on smoke—burnt bits of tobacco. There is no fire involved in it. There is no tar from vaping. I have not experienced any adverse health effects from continuously vaping. Nicotine is not linked to cancer so I am happy about that. Nicotine helps me operate on a day-to-day basis. I started smoking when I was 16 so I still like my nicotine. Having the use of a vape replicates a smoke so it keeps me calm.

Ms PEASE: When you were smoking cigarettes, how many cigarettes would you smoke a day?

Mr Adams: A pack a day.

Ms PEASE: And your vaping, what would be—

Mr Adams: I would go through 10 milligrams per day.

Ms KING: Of your juice?

Mr Adams: Of my juice.

Ms PEASE: How many puffs is that?

Mr Adams: I really do not know how many puffs that would be.

Ms PEASE: Can I explain that the only reason I ask that is that on the front of all the IGET vapes they have how many puffs are in a vape. That is why I ask about that?

Mr Adams: I know. I really could not tell you how many puffs are in 10 milligrams of vape juice. With the IGETs I wonder how big the things are in them.

Ms PEASE: The reservoir.

Mr Adams: I could probably tell you then because it would be similar.

Mr O'CONNOR: Shannon has them in his bag, I think.

CHAIR: In relation to your statement about there being little evidence around health issues, I quote a 2023 Curtin University research paper which says—

E-cigarettes are increasingly popular in Australia, but little is known about the chemicals inhaled by users. Evidence is mounting that e-cigarettes are not benign and can pose significant health risks.

They go through that. There is some evidence to say that—

Mr Adams: There will be trace elements in them that are not healthy for you, absolutely. It is not the nicotine, actually; that is addictive.

CHAIR: The next thing it says is 'potentially toxic chemicals have been found within these things'.

Mr Adams: Are they saying formaldehyde and things like that?

CHAIR: Acetone.

Mr Adams: Okay. That is probably from them overcooking their coils because their cotton is burning and starting to combust. Formaldehyde and acetone in vaping was talked about 10 years ago. A lot of that comes from the cotton that is burnt in the coil. When people are using them and the coil is burnt out it tastes awful. I would believe it is not very—

Mr O'CONNOR: So it is the coil, not the juice?

Mr Adams: Yes, the coil itself. You have cotton in the coil. It starts to break down because it has all this heat going through it all the time and all of sudden it starts getting little burnt areas on it. When it starts to taste burnt you throw it out and put a new one in.

Mr O'CONNOR: So you are absolutely certain it is not harmful because of the relationship you have with the juice manufacturers?

Mr Adams: No, I am also a big backer of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians and what they said about vaping—that is, it is 95 per cent safer than smoking. I know it does not include long-term evidence. We do not have the long-term evidence. A lot of my customers are back playing sports now and they are very happy with their health.

I have people with emphysema who come into our shop. They have to give up smoking because they are going to die and they have taken up vaping. I have said to them, 'I don't know what vaping is like with emphysema. I'm not going to say it is great for you. I believe it is a lot healthier than smoking.' Some of these people have gone back to work, their emphysema has pulled up, they are still vaping today and they do not have many healthy effects. I am going on my observations and the Royal Australasian College of Physicians that warned the world that smoking is going to kill everybody and vaping is a lot of safer for you.

Ms PEASE: There is much discussion around the age of the person who is selling the vapes and also the people you are selling to. You mentioned in your opening statement that you do not let that happen. Would you support that for the non-nicotine vapes as well as the nicotine vapes?

Mr Adams: Absolutely, yes. No-one should be sticking a vape in their mouth unless they are 18 or older. Whether it is non-nicotine, nicotine, dry herb vaping or smoking, you have to be an adult.

Ms PEASE: Are you aware of any vapes that taste like cigarettes—that taste like tobacco?

Mr Adams: Yes, we sell them; not very many of them because they taste like tobacco. I will give you an idea of flavours. I know there is the campaign behind vapes being sold as confectionary and it is sucking kids in. Definitely that is the case with disposables. I have been vaping mixed berries and chocolate for 10 years and I love them. I tried vaping tobacco. It was okay for a transition, but to tell you the truth it tastes almost worse than smoking tobacco. The flavour of the tobacco in the vapes is quite awful. I vape chocolate when I am having a coffee and I vape mixed berries or lime any other time of the day. Grape is probably the most popular flavour in our shop.

Who is buying it? People who are 60, 50, 40, 30—whatever. It is what they like and what they enjoy vaping. Maybe if you get rid of some of the labels, make them plain packaged, it might that sort of stop smearing of, 'Oh, vape shops. They just want to suck kids into their confectionery,' because we do not. We want to not smoke. I want to not smoke. I am a non-smoker now, but I do not want to vape on something that makes me cough like menthol or tastes crap like cigarettes. That is just from the heart. That is how it is.

Mr ANDREW: Deb told us earlier that she gets a safety data sheet from the manufacturer.

Mr Adams: Safety data sheets, yes.

Mr ANDREW: So you do get them as well?

Mr Adams: If I want it at any time, I can.

Mr ANDREW: You can?

Mr Adams: Yes, absolutely.

Mr ANDREW: So it gives you the breakdown?

Mr Adams: And also, just to let you know, juice manufacturers like Oz-Eliquid also import. They import juice from the US, and that is all reported with safety data sheets as well. They know that what they are bringing in is all up to speed to be safe. Yes, if I want a safety data sheet on anything, I can ask them for it.

CHAIR: Just for the record, the Curtin study I referred to is 2021, not 2023, although there is a later one. They did say that they found a range of harmful effects present and that the heating and cooling agent process can affect the chemical composition. That just goes to the point that you made. I would ask, Rob, if you could provide the committee with a copy of that. I think you quoted a Royal Australasian College of Physicians statement around the difference between tobacco and vaping. That would be beneficial.

Mr Adams: They said 95 per cent safer, but it also does mention that there are no long-term studies so they cannot base it on the long term.

CHAIR: Funny you say that, because the Curtin conclusion says that more studies need to be done. I found that is a common theme.

Mr Adams: Yes, and I think more studies do need to be done, absolutely. They did not have to study tobacco too long because they just figured it was killing people. They have been studying this for quite a while and they still have not found anything that is really like, 'Hey, everyone should quit now because it's going to burn you.' Do you know what I mean? Yes, study away and find out. One of the reasons I sell vaping is I believe in the product. If I thought that it would hurt somebody to the point tobacco is doing, I would not sell it and I would not use it. I would probably still be smoking, but at least this is my alternative. That is my outlook on vaping.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for your contribution to the committee. It has been informative. We appreciate you being here.

SPORN, Mr Deven, Private capacity

CHAIR: Deven, thanks very much for being here today. Do you wish to make an opening statement before we go to any questions?

Mr Sporn: I have been vaping for about 10 or 11 years. I was a smoker. I had my first smoke when I was nine years old. All through my Army career and work career I was a smoker. I found vaping and have not turned back. That is my device there, as Rob showed you earlier, with the disposable parts, like Rob was saying, that are in the top. This one is a little bit different: you can actually see the coils wrapped, sort of dark in colour, then that has cotton inserted through the inside. Once a week I will clean that out. I will take that cotton out and replace it with an organic cotton. Those coils get cleaned. They can last me six to nine months, so the amount of e-waste from that device itself is minimal compared to disposables, which has a little lithium battery similar to what is in your solar chargers for your Christmas lights and all that. Whereas the batteries in that are in your laptops, they are in your Tesla power banks in your house, in your Tesla cars, remote control cars—everything. They are a very common battery.

The two types of vaping are your disposable market, which is just based out of pure convenience, and locally it is for greed, which we have all heard. I have worked in the industry for five years with Rob. As a parent myself, a couple of years ago my daughter bought three off Snapchat and had them delivered to her boyfriend's house.

Mr O'CONNOR: Off Snapchat?

Mr Sporn: Off Snapchat. I do not know why, but I just went through her room and found them. I lost it because (1) I work in the industry; and (2) she is 16 and buying them on Snapchat. I have three kids in high school. The youngest has just turned 13. He knows all about vaping. The kids vape in the toilets. I have gone to three separate shops in Townsville myself, and each time I have bought a vape with nicotine in it.

Mr O'CONNOR: Do they do it on Snapchat because the messages delete?

Mr Sporn: Yes.

Mr O'CONNOR: Is that part of it?

Mr Sporn: Yes. Absolutely.

Mr O'CONNOR: So a parent or whoever is not going to find access to it?

Mr Sporn: Yes. I did not know about it. There are three separate places: one in Deeragun, one on Flinders Street—I cannot even remember where the other one was. They were all disposable vapes containing nicotine.

CHAIR: Clearly, as an adult you can go into a store, you are over 18, you make that choice.

Mr Sporn: Yes.

CHAIR: But you have major concerns, by the sound of it, about access to vapes for young people, which just goes back to the terms of reference. The Premier asked us to look at the harmful effects of vaping, particularly with young people and how easily they can access them.

Mr Sporn: It is ridiculously easy. I had a customer come in last Thursday who works next to a convenience store in Kirwan. The kids just file into that shop after school and they are buying them from there. I have reported these breaches at least 50 times to the Department of Health. Every one of those shops is still operating. I know that one of them is definitely selling illegal tobacco, chop-chop, all that kind of thing. I have even reported that to the ATO because everything they do is for cash, under the counter, and that is tax evasion. I was thinking if the Department of Health is not going to do anything, the ATO might be chasing the dollars.

Mr O'CONNOR: Did they do anything?

Mr Sporn: I have not heard a single thing. That shop is still operating. Where I grew up in Victoria there was a service station selling tobacco and illegal vapes to underage kids. The police went in and shut them down. They are not allowed to open unless it is with new ownership. You guys can establish a task force that can—not federally—go in and check these joints out. One of our customers is a police officer. There is a vape shop 200 metres from the city police station, apparently.

Mr O'CONNOR: I think we might have a photo of that.

Mr Sporn: They went in and went through them and they were selling all this sort of thing. These reports that we are putting in—we probably put in 50 reports through everyone at work—nothing.

Mr O'CONNOR: What does that process look like?

Mr Sporn: There is a website. We have it on our computers at work. It is just reporting illegal nicotine sales. It is just a form you fill out.

Mr Adams: There is a Queensland government website.

Mr Sporn: Send that through and that's it. You do not hear back. I have done them via phone calls.

Mr O'CONNOR: And you think you have put in 50 of them?

Mr Sporn: At least. Not a thing has happened.

Mr O'CONNOR: There is no follow-up?

Mr Sporn: There is no follow-up back to us. One I bought just opposite the railway station. I had the receipt and everything. I just put it in my report. 'I have the receipt, the product if you want proof of it'—I never had a response. That is the thing, we are doing all this reporting, but there is no response to the public reporting it.

Ms PEASE: Thanks very much for coming in. I am really intrigued as to how to work out whether vapes have tobacco or nicotine in them or not. I purchased these from a little vape shop which is, I assume, an illegal vape shop. When I asked the girl behind the counter she said, 'Yeah, every one of them that we sell here has nicotine in them.' When I read the ingredients it means nothing to me. Can I let you have a look?

Mr Sporn: Absolutely. The biggest thing is when you ask for them, if you say, 'Are they good?' they will go, 'Yeah, they're good.'

CHAIR: Can you try and keep it in the pack?

Ms PEASE: Just do not take them out of the pack.

Mr Sporn: Straight up, the IGETs are probably the No. 1 disposable that kicks around with nicotine in it.

CHAIR: How much were they, Joan?

Ms PEASE: They were \$15 each—cash only.

Mr Sporn: On the ingredients it has your propylene glycol, your vegetable glycerin flavour and then your benzoic acid. There are two types of nicotine: the freebase nicotine, which is a lot harsher and is predominantly used in the smaller strength; you have then got nicotine salts, which is what is used in pod devices and all these disposables. It is formulated with benzoic acid. That says it has benzoic acid in it.

Mr O'CONNOR: So it does not straight up say nicotine—

Mr Sporn: Does not say.

Mr O'CONNOR:—but it indicates that could be the form it is in?

Mr Sporn: That is what they are getting around now. They are not actually putting that they have nicotine in them. Once upon a time they would have five per cent or zero milligram, if they are a zero milligram. Yes, just having that benzoic acid in there says to me that it has nicotine in it, because why would you put benzoic acid in something that is nicotine free? It should only have PT, PG, food flavourings.

Ms KING: Thank you for coming in. We have heard today that legitimate tobacco shops have some concerns about how they can be sure their non-nicotine vapes are in fact non-nicotine. What do you reckon the chances are that in fact vapes purchased through a regulated outlet would in fact have nicotine?

Mr Sporn: I know of only two legitimate companies in Townsville: the Vape Vault and Super Vape Store. Super Vape Store has 50 something shops. They are like TSG, but for vaping. For legitimate shops it is not worth touching nicotine because for the Vape Vault, it is the business down the toilet, basically, if they get caught because of the fines. It is just not something a family-run business can come back from. But for reputable suppliers, as Rob stated through that list he read off, it is in their best interests to do the right thing as well.

Ms KING: I am more talking about ones like these ones where supposedly there are versions that do not have nicotine and there are ones that do, but they have the same batch numbers.

Mr Sporn: Me personally, I think it is a real fifty-fifty. Unless you are dealing directly with the manufacturer or the next step down from the manufacturer like a wholesaler/distributor that is linked with them, that is probably going to be your best bet. If you are dealing third- or fourth-hand, like such and such bought them from here, here and here, there are a lot of issues in that chain to drag it back.

Mr O'CONNOR: Is that why you are so confident, because you know where your juice comes from and you know that you are—

Mr Sporn: Absolutely. As Rob said, he is pretty picky on what we sell in the shop. Back in the early days there were a lot of backyard juice makers. Literally guys would be making it from their houses and places. These days, because it is such a big market money is being invested into a business, to have a proper lab with a clean room, proper bottling facilities that is like a factory. So it is not just two blokes sitting at home having a few beers knocking off some juice.

Mr O'CONNOR: And it is in Australia, so you can actually go there.

Mr Sporn: In Australia, yes, absolutely. The liquid I have in this one is a peach and pear flavour. One of the guys is actually a chef, so he mixes his juice pretty well. There are a lot of juices I will not touch because I do not like them basically, but, yes.

Mr O'CONNOR: On the compliance activities, have you been visited for those? Has anyone come in?

Mr Sporn: At the store?

Mr O'CONNOR: Yes.

Mr Sporn: Twice, I believe, in five years.

Mr Adams: We have had two visits from the Department of Health and both visits were very good. They never asked to test anything. I have always opened my doors because there is nothing (indistinct).

Mr O'CONNOR: What do they do? What does the visit look like?

Mr Sporn: I have not been there for them, but they basically go through and make sure you have the Quitline signage up, you have not got things on display that you are not supposed to because we literally cannot—our shops look like a surgery in a way because we cannot display anything. We can only advertise the business itself. It is all white cupboards.

Mr Adams: Which is not a bad thing, really. That is not a problem.

Mr Sporn: No.

Mr ANDREW: You spoke earlier about the children and the effects it is having on the schoolkids every day. What are your thoughts about trying to reduce that? Is it awareness and education—the kids not understanding the damage these things do, the toxicity?

Mr Sporn: It is social media. It is literally all about social media. They will see people on TikTok, YouTube, whatever, vaping. I will see it on YouTube myself. Every one of them is using something like that. I used to follow and watch a lot of YouTube channels on these because I literally build these coils myself by hand—I have done so for about six years—as a cost-saving matter. Instead of paying 20 bucks for a packet of coils, I can buy \$10 of the appropriate wire and manufacture it myself. The biggest thing is social media, whether there is a celebrity using them or whatnot, but just how prevalent they are for sales. The algorithms—someone will start watching something and all of a sudden they are vaping; everything vape is popping up through the algorithms.

Mr ANDREW: Having them at parties is a huge thing, too, I see.

Mr Sporn: Yes. There are kids aged 12 and 13 at high schools vaping.

Mr ANDREW: Yes, I have seen them.

Mr Sporn: I live in Deeragun. I drive past the skate park near the KFC there. They will be there before school skating and you see vape clouds just—I don't know, I am like, 'Did they get it?' It is highly likely because these little corner stores will sell them to them. They do not care. It is cash. It is affecting businesses like us trying to be legitimate and do the right thing. I am sure we could underhandedly sell them, but at what cost? Morally, no.

Mr ANDREW: It is wrong. It is a moral issue.

Mr Sporn: There are not enough people with the right morals.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Deven. That is right on time. We do appreciate your contribution today, thank you.

DONOHUE, Dr Steven, Director, Townsville Public Health Unit, Townsville Hospital and Health Service

CHAIR: Steven, thank you for remaining for this afternoon's topic on vaping.

Dr Donohue: Pleasure.

CHAIR: You have been present and heard some of the earlier contributors. We will hand over to you for a public health perspective on vaping, particularly.

Dr Donohue: I would like to start by saying that I am a member of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians. The 95 per cent less harm figure has never been put out by the college. That is a factoid that has been perpetrated by certain individuals who are proponents, none of whom are qualified in public health. Anybody who says that non-nicotine vapes are harmless or that nicotine vapes are a good way of quitting smoking is not paying attention to the evidence. We are very fortunate now because the first ever international systematic review of the evidence around harm, vaping and health was published last year by Professor Emily Banks of the ANU's National Centre for Epidemiology.

CHAIR: We have that one.

Dr Donohue: That is a superb summary of all the evidence from all around the world, very up-to-date, along with a number of associated papers, including all that we know about prevalence and different harms. It is quite clear from the summary—the evidence is in—that vaping, with or without nicotine, is harmful. The evidence is preliminary. Long-term data is not yet available, but we already know of severe lung disease which is not always associated with vitamin E acetate nor cannabis, we know of addiction, and we know of cardiovascular effects. The proposal that vaping nicotine may be less harmful than smoking is unproven and it is simply based on less burning and fewer toxic ingredients. I want to talk through that with you.

Let us take, for example, tomato sauce which is generally held to be completely harmless. If you were to inhale tomato sauce deep into your lungs, which is supposed to be sterile, you would immediately get chemical pneumonitis and then a bacterial pneumonia. If you were to inhale small amounts of tomato sauce over years, you are very likely to get lung cancer, scarring and a number of other chronic lung diseases. We know this from lots of other evidence. Although we do not have long-term evidence from vaping, the other key problem is that we do not know what is in the vaping. The other witnesses here today or the other people giving information say that their vapes and vaping liquids are certified, nicotine-free, but there is no such certification system with any legal status in Australia. One cannot know what is in or not in the vapes.

I wanted to talk about why we now know that vaping is actually a pretty poor method of trying to give up smoking. It certainly is not the best. We now have drugs, partial agonists, which prevent you getting the high and prevent you getting the ill-effects from withdrawal. The very reason smokers can easily turn to vaping—namely hand-to-mouth behaviour, inhalation, same social context—is the reason it is so easy to slip back into smoking. Secondly, you are not doing anything about the nicotine addiction, you are simply feeding it indefinitely. We know that the majority of people who vape are also smoking. They are not necessarily replacing the smoking with vaping. The evidence is in that there are far better methods of quitting smoking than vaping nicotine. In fact, if vapes, with or without nicotine, were put before the TGA today, they would be banned completely from Australia and they would never have been put on prescription. That is the evidence; you can download it for free.

Unfortunately I do not have a lot better evidence from my own experience, and I certainly do not have better prevalence data locally. All I can give you is some anecdotal evidence. We do know that vaping is a gateway to smoking. The summary of the international evidence is that children who vape are three times more likely to start smoking than other people who have not vaped, and people who start with non-nicotine vapes, because of all of the uncertainties and difficulties of knowing when or when not nicotine is in the product, eventually will become addicted to nicotine and then will be seeking out nicotine containing vapes.

The medical evidence is accumulating. It is very strong. There is no doubt that vaping with or without nicotine causes lung damage, and nicotine causes addiction and the addiction leads to smoking. That is very settled evidence.

I would like to make a couple of comments flowing on from this morning about regulation. I did say that currently the TOSPA Act—

Unidentified Speaker: Can I just comment? I don't mean to be rude—

CHAIR: We will pause this for a moment. I know you might not agree with everything that is being said, but—

Unidentified Speaker: No, I am fine with everything that is being said—

CHAIR: Sir, if we can just allow the speaker to continue. If you have any comments to make after—

Unidentified Speaker (Indistinct)

CHAIR: If you have any comments to make after, we can welcome you to come to the table and make a contribution, too. Thank you.

Dr Donohue: The TOSPA and amendments could potentially encompass nicotine vaping, but it depends on the Commonwealth legislation because this empowers us to enforce the Commonwealth legislation, and whether by regulation we would define a nicotine vape as an illicit tobacco product. If that were done, then it could be done in Queensland to regulate them, but we would still have the problem of the extreme difficulty knowing what is in the vapes and knowing whether or not they contain nicotine.

If I could continue some of this quickly. I will not talk about the environmental harms which have been covered very adequately. We know locally that this is a problem for every school. We know locally that the majority of vapes and vaping liquids contain nicotine. We believe that people who did not sell nicotine containing vapes would go out of business. We can see no clear distinction between goodies and baddies here.

I would like to talk a little bit about awareness and harm reduction because I think this is incredibly important and an important consideration for the committee. When we look at the evidence for, let us say, a new medication or a new form of surgical intervention or even a type of therapy for psychological therapy, there are extremely high standards in medicine for evidence. It is normally done by randomised controlled trials where you compare blinded those who get the intervention and those who do not to see whether it actually produces the effect that you want. It is not about popularity or how much it is being consumed. Unfortunately, all of the so-called awareness raising and harm reduction websites and Dr Karl videos that you can see have not been evaluated adequately. It is done under not a medical paradigm but an advertising paradigm. What they will say is that, 'Oh, we had lots of hits. There were likes. People forwarded this to other people.' But when you ask, 'How can you show that this intervention reduced vaping?', they cannot do so. They will point you to a voluntary online survey which, of course, is among self-selected people who liked the video. There is not a shred of evidence that any of this has been tested in the real world about vaping or smoking rates.

This is central comms which is in Brisbane. It caters to the general population. In fact, Dr Karl was planned around adults and not children, based on a handful of commercially secret focus groups. There is no acceptable evidence that any of this works, and none of it is regional or based on Indigenous, remote or culturally diverse people. We have no resources for health promotion in public health. I think there is one person in the alcohol, tobacco and other drugs section here and they do again some seminars in the schools, but it is a drop in the bucket compared to the massive amount of promotion online. The idea that doing a few things on the internet is going to reduce harm by raising awareness is a fantasy. The resources are simply not there.

To sum up, a lot of people will be telling this committee that the horse has bolted, that we cannot regulate nicotine vaping, that it is so widespread that an entire generation are using it, and therefore we should just give in, run up the white flag, as some other countries have done, and legalise it. That would be a dreadful mistake. Not one of my public health colleagues would advise that. We know that we can stop the vapes largely at the level of importation and we can make much more stringent restrictions on finding and prosecuting the sale of these things other than through a single product on prescription. I would prefer that it was made to taste like rubber or burnt toast which you can do. However, we have not run out of time here. There are possibilities of doing this and I am glad we are making a little bit of progress in the regulation. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you, doctor. Part of the terms of reference the Premier has set is particularly around the harmful effects on young people. As you have heard earlier this afternoon from those who have set up stores, they have issues around young people and access to vapes with nicotine that are sold as disposable. In the medical arena, a young person using a vape, is there more chance of lung tissue and brain development issues with young people, particularly in the medical context? Is there any evidence of young people becoming addicted to smoking—I know you said three times more likely and that is out of that evidence—but are there harmful effects to a young person's body? We are talking about year 5 and 6 kids taking vapes which I am hearing from primary school principals.

Dr Donohue: It is a great question. Nicotine is a nervous system stimulant. It also has cardiovascular effects, including increasing pulse, heart rate and blood pressure. We know that teenagers have underdeveloped nervous systems. Their brain is not completed in development and they are probably at that stage even more vulnerable to anxiety, to addiction and to the effects of addiction and withdrawal, and they are also highly suggestible which is why this has become a sort of a party drug. We do not yet have enough solid evidence to say that this is more harmful at this age than another age, but on first principles this is exactly what we expect to find.

CHAIR: The Chief Health Officer publicly made very similar comments around we have made such great inroads in reducing smoking rates, but with the increase in vaping we could have a medical crisis and we are back to square one in 10 to 20 years where you would have similar concerns over the young people who are vaping today.

Dr Donohue: Absolutely.

Mr ANDREW: I know you are very passionate about the whole thing. You talked about chemicals and all the rest of it and percentages of chemicals and all that and you mentioned earlier about the TGA if they went back and had a look at this. Would there not be a review? Would the TGA do a biannual review or have some sort of review marker where they go back and have a look at this in case the horse has bolted on some of the ways that people unscrupulously put together chemicals or juice or whatever?

Dr Donohue: You would think so. I guess the catch there is the Therapeutic Goods Administration only looks at items that make therapeutic claims. When you make a claim that vaping nicotine helps people to stop smoking—and there is very limited evidence in this area—then you are comparing pretty well-known harms against unknown harms. It is a bit like doing Russian roulette with two bullets in instead of three bullets; there is no doubt that it is harmful. We now have proven interventions, medications and other ways of replacing nicotine which are safer because it is not going into the depths of your lungs. Even among the therapeutic claims, I do not know that they would have allowed it. Certainly for vaping for no purpose whatsoever other than entertainment and blowing smoke rings, that should never have been allowed. It is absolutely harmful and there is no real purpose for it. You could inhale almost anything in that way and it would be causing harm.

Ms KING: I want to ask for your commentary on an area that you may feel is out of your wheelhouse, but I will let you give us your information on that. We have seen some very substantial donations to political parties by the tobacco industry. I am wondering if you can reflect the importance of those donations from a public health perspective. We have whole areas of donations that are not allowed. In the context of the emergence of vaping, what does it mean that some industry players are donating to political parties?

Dr Donohue: We know that the public advertising of drugs is illegal in this country. We know that these donations create potential conflicts of interest that would need to be disclosed. The same problem at a political level happens at the medical level. There are researchers, practitioners and doctors who are taking money as part of this international campaign to normalise and to legalise and to promote vaping as some sort of cure-all. This is heavily funded, mainly by the tobacco industry because it gives them a guaranteed income stream for the life of every person who is addicted. It is a really good business model, but it is a major issue in terms of ethics and conflicts at multiple levels, and certainly health and medicine is no exception. A lot of the research is as well. When you look at some of this literature which is claiming wonderful benefits from vaping or nicotine replacement through vaping, you have to look very carefully at who is putting this out and where their finances have come from.

Ms KING: When we talk about nicotine replacement as a therapy, what other methods are there of nicotine replacement?

Dr Donohue: We have patches, we have sprays and we have gums. In addition, particularly if you use the patches and the sprays, or more than one method, to avoid getting the cravings and the withdrawal symptoms, that seems to work a lot better, particularly along with various drugs. There is one called Champix or varenicline, and another one called Zyban or bupropion. Those are drugs that will help you with the symptoms and not simply replace the nicotine addiction, because the danger with just feeding the addiction indefinitely is that when the pressure is on or when there is some circumstance, people will very easily slip back into tobacco smoking. The problem with the evidence we have is that it is short term. Okay, they might be three times more likely to start smoking over a short-term study, but what happens over the next three decades? What percentage of them will end up smoking? It is not going to be less. The evidence is accumulating. The weight of evidence is all heading in one direction. Nicotine replacement through vaping is harmful and there are much better ways of doing this and helping people to get off nicotine and smoking.

Ms KING: We have seen proposals today that the sale of vaping products should be regulated effectively through tobacconists in the way that tobacco sales are currently regulated. What would you assess is the public health implications of a scheme of that nature?

Dr Donohue: We have seen from experience that it is very difficult to regulate nicotine containing versus non-nicotine containing. It is very easy to hide the nicotine. It is very easy to deny the nicotine. We simply do not have enough laboratories. The cost would be astronomical. We do not have the staff. Therefore, we need to simplify the whole matter. I would prefer that maybe only one product was available on prescription in Australia for those who remain on the prescriptions, but every other imported liquid or vape, nicotine or otherwise, was a banned import and was a banned sale, and then you would not have to do this whole thing of is it legal or illegal.

I have another exhibit here. This one I picked up on the street. It has two words on it, 'Gunnpod' and 'grape'. It feels heavy; it is actually full. I gave it half a puff and I got the shakes. This thing has got nicotine in it; I know that, but I cannot prove it. This thing is widespread in the schools. My daughter works in a high school in Charters Towers, and it has become a bit of a game. The children will have highlighters in their pockets, so that they can be caught by the teacher and showing that they are not carrying a vape. I have even had pieces of paper with 'grape' and 'bubblegum' written on these things because it is all fun to tease the teachers about whether or not they are having vapes.

This is incredibly difficult to regulate, even if we fixed all the holes in TOSPA and through the amendments. We need to simplify this. We need to have it so that there are a restricted number of products, a restricted number of outlets and licences and real teeth in terms of enforcing the few people who are supplying it to those who are on prescription.

Mr O'CONNOR: Do you have any ability to test these?

Dr Donohue: No, we have about 24 of them still in storage because we do not have an arrangement for disposing safely, as our friend has mentioned. They are now state property because we did not seize them technically correctly. It is probably going to cost us \$10, \$20 each because they have to be disassembled. Nicotine has to be normally disposed of with normally high-temperature incineration, not to mention the batteries, plastic, metals, heavy metals and the circuitry. It is a nightmare. There has been really no planning about that. A whole lot of these products are lying around, accumulating, and it is a headache for health departments. Schools ring us mainly to ask what to do with confiscated vapes, but many of the teachers have no idea how dangerous they are.

Mr O'CONNOR: Can you test them? Does the health service have any ability to—

Dr Donohue: In theory I can get that tested and they will tell me it contains nicotine.

Mr O'CONNOR: Internally at the health service or do you have to use—

Dr Donohue: Yes, Queensland Forensic and Scientific Services can do that for us.

Mr O'CONNOR: How many have you had tested? Do you have any data on what you—

Dr Donohue: Here in Townsville, none. There has not been much of a point and it takes too long, it is too expensive, and it has not helped us to do any enforcement.

Mr O'CONNOR: Because you have no ability to really enforce, there is no point even getting it in the system?

Dr Donohue: Yes. This would take weeks. We would have to send it down to Brisbane and it is valued as evidence.

Mr ANDREW: Would it not be valuable, though, to put that evidence out there? Maybe you are not able to do anything about it because there is no legislation to cover removal or taking them away or confiscating them, but surely you could use that evidence then to tell schools, departments and people about the warnings of what is actually in there?

Dr Donohue: Yes, in fact there is already a website which tells you about who else has tested nicotine and what brands, batch numbers and barcodes have had positive nicotine detections. In fact, that is what my team will use in trying to decide whether or not they should be seizing for evidence or testing. Often there will be a range of multiple different shapes, sizes and brands, and then they will only seize the ones on the website as having no nicotine because it is just not feasible to test anymore.

CHAIR: Locally, doctor, I had a vaping forum at Kirwan State High last year, organised by the principal and deputy principal. There is a cost to that. I cannot remember the name of the fellow off the top of my head—Tony someone. It was an informative session. We had some members of the public come along. Part of the terms of reference looks at the approaches taken in Queensland schools relevant to children and young people to discourage uptake of e-cigarettes or vaping. Do you think the Department of Education should do more in this space?

Dr Donohue: There is a home for this information in the curriculum. I would much rather see it mainstreamed so it is part of the HPS curriculum for all students instead of having to have a charity or a special invite. I could, for example, go along and talk at schools, but then I would not get my job done. We need to look for efficiencies here. We have a large-scale problem. They are trying to beat us as scale and we need to respond at scale.

CHAIR: That could be in the public domain as well. We see antismoking ads that the government puts out, generally federally.

Dr Donohue: Yes. Aaron, if I could just tell you a story about this. You may be old enough to remember when Australia had a really terrible road toll—absolutely terrible—and what they used to do at the time is they got the police chief or the minister for health to get up on TV and personally beg people to be careful on the roads. The impact was measurable and the impact was zero. What they changed is that they turned around and made safer roads, seatbelts, a whole lot of regulations, changed the environment, improved licensing and testing of drivers and we drove it down to one of the lowest on earth. Simply telling people to change their behaviour, particularly teenagers, without any of those structural supports is ineffective. We would be very naive to think that simply telling youths, 'Hey, this is dangerous. Don't do it,' from some authority figure without any evaluation is somehow going to reduce harm. It becomes a place holder as an excuse for doing something when it may not have any effectiveness.

CHAIR: Fair point. Maybe we get young people to talk to young people about it.

Dr Donohue: That would be better, yes.

CHAIR: As there are no further questions, we thank you once again for your contribution to the committee. They are very informative, as usual, and thanks for your work in the public health area.

Dr Donohue: I thank you as a proud public servant.

CHAIR: Thank you very much.

ELLIOTT, Mr Bob, Private capacity

CHAIR: Mr Elliott, we did articulate this morning that we would open it up to the floor if people did have some contributions to make, so we welcome you to the table. The floor is yours.

Mr Elliott: Mine is just about me pretty much. I smoked for 38 years. That was killing me—two packs a day. I met Rob from the Vape Vault. I got talking to him about vaping. I was not convinced about that because all I was doing was replacing one thing and putting something else in my lungs which is no good—and I agree there, definitely. With that I have ended up with emphysema. Over probably the last five years I have been vaping, so it has been five years since I had a cigarette. I have been nicotine free now for about eight months, so I am still vaping. It is very little these days, but I am just about ready to give it up.

It has helped me but, mind you, it has not been easy. I did try the patches, the gum and Champix. With Champix I had a few side effects from that, so the doctor took me straight off it. That was fair enough. I was wearing the patches and doing the chewing gum at the same time. I do not know, but it just did not work for me and then I tried the vaping. Maybe I am one out of 100—I do not know and I do not know what my results are going to be down the track—but it does work for people, and I know of other people who have given up smoking that do not vape now. They took up vaping, but they do not vape now, so it does work. I am not saying it is a cure and I am not saying it is the right thing to put something else into your lungs. I am not saying that at all. What I am saying is that it worked for me.

CHAIR: It is good to hear, Mr Elliott. Congratulations on that. In the context that when you were diagnosed with emphysema, if you hypothetically had not taken up vaping and continued to smoke, where do you think you would have found yourself?

Mr Elliott: I would be a lot worse off now I think.

CHAIR: So your personal experience is that it has helped?

Mr Elliott: Yes. When I was smoking I used to suffer chest infections and all sorts of chest related problems all the time. Since I stopped smoking, probably within about eight months I just felt a big improvement in my breathing—not a massive improvement, just a bit of an improvement. That first winter came around and I was just waiting for it. I was just waiting for the onslaught as usual with my chest infections and that and nothing. To be totally honest with you, I have not had a chest infection since I stopped smoking.

CHAIR: That two packs a day, that is a lot of nicotine.

Mr Elliott: Sixty smokes a day I was smoking. Sixty cigarettes a day.

CHAIR: Wow!

Mr Elliott: And there would probably be another half a pack on the weekends if I am having a few sherbs.

Mr ANDREW: You would have been glad to drop that habit.

Ms PEASE: You would have a bit more money in your pocket now.

Mr Elliott: Yes, I have a lot of toys now.

Mr ANDREW: And the feeling of it. It must have made you crook, mate.

Mr Elliott: It did. It was killing me—definitely killing me.

Ms KING: That was eight years ago, did you say?

Mr Elliott: Five years ago, six years ago.

Ms PEASE: Congratulations. It is a really big achievement. Smoking is harder than heroin to get off.

Mr Elliott: I am definitely not coming up here trying to say that vaping is a good thing. All I am saying is that it helped me, so there is maybe an avenue there for it. I totally disagree with the disposables. I do not like that idea. This here is what I use myself, so that has no nicotine in it—to my knowledge. That little bottle there is going to last me probably three days. That is how much I vape these days, so I do not vape very much and I am just about ready to give it up.

Ms KING: Well done.

CHAIR: We thank you for coming up and sharing your own personal experience. I think that is certainly noteworthy.

Mr ANDREW: You must be glad to be rid of it, mate.

Mr Elliott: Smoking? Definitely, yes.

CHAIR: I will open it up to any other members of the public. Are there any final comments people want to make? Dr Donohue, did you want to say something? You will have to come back to the table.

DONOHUE, Dr Steven, Townsville Public Health Unit, Townsville Hospital and Health Service

Dr Donohue: I am the first to congratulate you. I admire people who have been able to give up smoking through nicotine vapes or other vapes, but I want to remind us that the people who we are not seeing in front of this committee are the young people and what happens to them in 20 years time once they have started vaping and then smoking. In terms of public health, unfortunately the benefit of curing one smoker who already has lung damage is much less than preventing one young person from taking it up, and unfortunately they are not the people that we are going to see in front of this committee.

CHAIR: No. I think we have some young people who are vaping coming to the Gold Coast hearing tomorrow potentially, so we will hear from them. An overall theme from today has been as adults we get to make choices. If I could summarise it, I think the big focus here is exactly what you just said about the impacts on young people which takes us back to the core of the issue.

Ms PEASE: Bob, perhaps you might be a champion for discouraging young people to smoke and vape given your experiences.

Mr Elliott: Definitely, yes.

Ms PEASE: Because you have good stories to tell about the damage that it can do.

Mr Elliott: I have four kids. None of them smoke.

Ms PEASE: You do not want kids picking it up and taking it on to experience those life choices. My father died of emphysema from being a lifetime smoker. It is a terrible way to end your life.

Mr Elliott: Definitely.

CHAIR: On that note, I thank everyone for being here today given the interest from locals and the contributions right across the spectrum—retailers or individuals like yourself, Bob. With that, we will close the hearing. Thank you very much.

The committee adjourned at 3.07 pm.