



Speech by

Mark McArdle

MEMBER FOR CALOUNDRA

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TOBACCO AND OTHER SMOKING PRODUCTS AMENDMENT BILL

Mr McARDLE (Caloundra—Lib) (12.37 p.m.): I rise to support the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Amendment Bill. In doing so, I congratulate the government for endorsing the motion proposed by my party in May of this year, yet I must ask why it has taken the government so long to bring this bill into existence when medical research stretching back many years is quite clear as to the effect of both smoking and passive smoking. My party is dedicated to ensuring that the lives of Queenslanders are not adversely affected by smoking, and we will continue the fight to ensure that people—in particular our children—are not adversely affected by it.

This is an emotive debate, and so it should be as it deals with lives. As such, it falls to this House to assist people in protecting themselves from what all the scientific evidence clearly states is a dangerous substance. Tobacco contains over 4,000 chemical compounds which are taken into a smoker's lungs every time they inhale and into the lungs of passive smokers whenever they are with or around smokers. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, we have an obligation to protect children from the ravages of tobacco when we consider the number of chemicals contained therein. It is important that children be provided with correct guidance, and this is one more instance where adults have an obligation to ensure that children are protected.

On many occasions the protection of children has to be, in fact, from themselves and their actions. It may seem harsh to children, but it is an obligation we cannot shy away from. Our actions, of course, may mean constraints on certain groups for the benefit of the whole of our community, but this is nothing new as history is littered with many such instances.

What is important to understand is the danger caused by smoking. In 2001 well over 15,000 people died in Australia as a result of tobacco smoking compared to 4,200 deaths from illnesses and injuries associated with excessive alcohol consumption and 821 deaths by way of illicit drug use. Let us not kid ourselves: smoking is a major contributor to the unhealthiness of the Australian population and places significant strains on our health system.

The Australian government's Department of Health and Ageing states that for men the largest number of tobacco related deaths is caused by cancer, which is responsible for around 43 per cent of all male tobacco related deaths, whereas cancer in women is responsible for 32 per cent of all tobacco related deaths. Of equal concern are those who choose not to smoke but inhale cigarette tobacco as a consequence of their employment and children who commence smoking at an early age and thus expose themselves to significant health risks as time goes by. The Australian government Department of Health and Ageing states that children who are exposed to environmental tobacco smoke are 40 per cent more likely to suffer from asthma symptoms than children not so exposed. The government goes on to state that an estimated eight per cent of childhood asthma in Australia is attributable to passive smoking, and it is estimated to contribute to the symptoms of asthma in 46,500 Australian children a year. Asthma in our children is an increasing concern and therefore must be a concern for this House. In addition, people who never smoke but live with a smoker have a 30 per cent greater risk of developing lung cancer than those who never smoke and live with a nonsmoker.

Legislation sometimes needs to take a definitive stand. Nowhere is that clearer than when we are dealing with the lives of the people we have a responsibility to serve and to protect to the best of our ability. The bill itself is divided into a number of areas with one of its prime purposes being to remove smoking from certain areas by 1 July 2006. It is not my intention to go into detail in relation to those areas as they have been dealt with by others in this debate. Suffice to say that the exclusion of these areas will also assist in reducing passive smoking.

One of the contentious issues raised by the opposition has been the advertising of products. If this legislation is to be effective—and let us bear in mind its intent is to limit the number of deaths and major health issues in the Queensland population including smokers, family members of smokers and the community as a whole—there needs to be a regime that deals with all potential risks that could induce smoking or could further encourage people to continue smoking. Equally—and this is the important issue—let us stop our children even contemplating smoking. Given this background, we should not be apologising for taking a definitive, firm stand on an issue that we believe in and that all members in this House see as needing to be undertaken.

The penalty provisions have seen large increases in fines. I hope that there is a much stronger resolve to enforce the laws surrounding the sale of tobacco products to children than there has been to date. The bill achieves a major step forward—a step forward that has been coming for many years—and now it is time to make the hard determinations and make it law.