



Speech by

Karen Struthers

MEMBER FOR ALGERIE

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TOBACCO LAWS

Ms STRUTHERS (Algerie—ALP) (11.46 am): I ask all members to call on the federal government to get tough on tobacco companies so that they disclose the nasty content of cigarettes. The tobacco industry has indicated that there are over 1,400 additives that can be added to cigarettes. Modern cigarettes may be more addictive than those of several decades ago because of the priority the tobacco industry has given to nicotine in cigarettes. The public needs to know that many scientific tricks are used to enhance the delivery of nicotine in cigarettes. Some of the actions include: the addition of ammonia compounds in order to speed the delivery of free nicotine to smokers, genetic engineering of tobacco plants to substantially boost nicotine content, the addition of chemicals that can strengthen the impact of nicotine on the brain and central nervous system.

There is a distinct regulation of the contents of tobacco products when compared with therapeutic nicotine. There is no regulation of the ingredients and emissions of cigarettes, including nicotine. Tobacco is specifically exempt from the standard for uniform scheduling of drugs and poisons. This is not good enough. Food products are governed by stringent food standards which require disclosure of contents on packaging. Cigarettes are not.

Since 2000 the federal Department of Health and Ageing has negotiated voluntary agreements with three main tobacco companies—Phillip Morris Ltd, British American Tobacco Australia Ltd and Imperial Tobacco Australia Ltd—to disclose cigarette ingredients. Under the terms of these agreements, tobacco manufacturers' trade secrets are protected. The three companies are not obliged to list specific additives if they do not want to publicise them. It is no surprise that under voluntary arrangements they do not. So cigarette packets do not disclose on them the contents for people purchasing them in Queensland or Australia.

State and territory representatives called on the federal government to get tough on tobacco companies at the most recent ministerial council on drugs. We wanted the federal government to get tobacco companies to come clean with the public by reporting on the contents of cigarettes. The Hon. Christopher Pyne, the minister for ageing, if I recall correctly, squibbed on this call. He cited the risk that the federal government could be liable for the harm resulting from cigarettes if there was compulsory disclosure of the contents of cigarettes. He was squibbing. He was trying to worm his way out of getting tough on the cigarette companies.

After some debate we had to water down our motion to the council. We expressly asked for a study to be undertaken on the feasibility of such disclosure and the analysis of this information to be made public to allow the potential costs and benefits of a regulatory role for government to be assessed. We did not get what we wanted. I am very proud that Queensland has one of the toughest antismoking regimes in the world. The next very important step is to get tough on cigarette companies and get them to come clean on the contents of cigarettes.

I guess all members have their stories about the first time they might have tried a cigarette. I am so grateful to an education officer from the Queensland Health department who visited my school when I was

in year 6. My friends and I had started smoking choko vines and then we graduated to buying packets of Escort 10s. For my 25c of pocket money I could get a packet of Escort 10s and a packet of PK and the smell was gone! I was caught out as a smoker on that day because I had to 'fess up to being a smoker and my mother punished me severely. She made me draw back on the fattest cigar I had ever seen. I do not know where she got it, but she made me draw back on it. I was not even drawing back on cigarettes, yet I had to draw back on this cigar! So I was sick. I gave up that day and I am forever thankful to the Queensland Health department and my mother for making me draw back on that cigar.

On average, 3,400 Queenslanders die every year from smoking related illnesses. There is no doubt about the damage that smoking causes. Increasing rates of lung cancer in women are of particular concern, with deaths from this disease having risen by 75 per cent between 1982 and 2004. Thankfully there are signs that the tough laws in Queensland and advertising are working, particularly on young people. Levels of smoking among young women, though, remain alarmingly high. That is why Queensland Health is running its Feeling Good campaign aimed at 18- to 24-year-old women who smoke. I commend the alcohol, tobacco and drugs branch of Queensland Health for the success of the antismoking campaign and its great work around the state. Let us hope that one day in our generation we can actually go out with a slogan that says, 'Nobody smokes anywhere anymore.'