




Speech By
Aaron Harper

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

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TOBACCO AND OTHER SMOKING PRODUCTS AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (2.53 pm): I rise to contribute to this debate supporting the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Amendment Bill 2023. Smoking remains a significant cause of death, disease and health inequality in Queensland. In recent years, the trade in illicit tobacco has exacerbated the negative impact of smoking on the community, and it also has a huge cost to our health system in Queensland. We should be very proud of the reduction in smoking rates in Queensland that has been achieved over the last couple of decades. This should be a positive contribution, as opposed to the member for Mudgeeraba's negative, whingeing and whining contribution. She is just rushing off to have a quick smoke, I understand.

On behalf of the committee, I want to thank those individuals and organisations who made written submissions to the bill and who appeared at public hearings. I also thank our parliamentary service staff and officers from Queensland Health. I particularly want to thank and acknowledge those submitters and witnesses we heard from in my home town of Townsville. The illicit tobacco industry is having a notable impact on licensed retailers in North Queensland and other parts of the state. Those who came before us bravely provided their concerns to the committee about the worrying criminal element involved in the illicit tobacco industry. It is clear that more must be done to combat this growing trend and I thank all committee members for working in collaboration to make recommendations in our report to tackle the serious issue from an enforcement point of view.

The Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Amendment Bill aims to reduce smoking rates in Queensland and better protect the community from second-hand smoke and the illicit tobacco trade. Townsville is always No. 1. To achieve this goal, the bill proposes the introduction of a new licensing scheme for the wholesale and retail sale of smoking products. This change will facilitate more effective enforcement of the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act 1998 and align Queensland with other Australian jurisdictions.

To achieve its objective, the bill also proposes: prohibiting the supply and possession of illicit tobacco; strengthening enforcement capabilities and powers under the act, including by facilitating intelligence sharing with other jurisdictions; modernising and clarifying restrictions relating to the advertising, display and promotion of smoking products, including their application to online trading; prohibiting the supply and handling of smoking products by children; extending the prohibition on supplying smoking products to children to include supply by parents and guardians; expanding smoke-free places, including community spaces used by children; and improving restrictions and protections that apply to liquor licensed premises.

This bill aims to strengthen, modernise and futureproof the requirements, restrictions and protections in the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act 1998. The bill will improve monitoring of the smoking product industry and enable more effective enforcement of the act. It will also assist smokers to quit, discourage youth uptake of smoking and further protect the community from exposure to second-hand smoke.

I was pleased to chair the committee inquiry into this bill. We heard from medical staff, scientific specialists, health advocacy non-government organisations, retailers, businesses, community groups and individuals. Their strong support was clear. They had clearly been involved in the policy development process, and I think the health department should be commended for their work on this front. Similarly, I want to acknowledge two submitters in Townsville—Pam Wright and Deb Soley. They are retailers who came before us and shared their concerns about that illicit trade. I thought it was quite brave of them.

I want to pick up on the comments from the member for Mudgeeraba. Perhaps she should talk to her own public health unit because I do not think she is across what they have achieved. They have seized over 10,000 products and have had convictions in the courts. They are doing a stellar job with a team of 12, which is proportional to the population. Townsville has a team of six with 200,000 people, while the Gold Coast has close to 600,000 people. I think the Gold Coast Public Health Unit is doing a stellar job and I commend it on its work.

The illicit tobacco industry is having a notable impact on retailers across Queensland. The bill establishes a licensing scheme for the wholesale and retail sale of smoking products. This will enable Queensland Health to identify and monitor businesses supplying smoking products in Queensland more effectively. It will also send a clear message that selling smoking products must only be entrusted to legitimate businesses to deter the unlawful supply of smoking products. The bill introduces significant maximum penalties for noncompliance. The bill modernises and clarifies existing restrictions on the display, advertising and promotion of smoking products, including in relation to online sales. It improves protections from second-hand smoke at outdoor markets as well as other outdoor eating and drinking places where families and children gather, including through new smoke-free buffer zones both inside and immediately outside those places.

There is clearly strong support across the community to make sure children do not start smoking or vaping. Our vaping inquiry is underway and, as indicated, the report will be tabled in due course. The bill restricts children's access to smoking products and reduces their potential exposure to harmful second-hand smoke. As we heard, our committee made three recommendations to strengthen the bill: firstly, to pass the bill; to summarise the second one, to streamline the search-and-seizure powers of authorised officers; and to summarise the third recommendation, to take a tougher approach to enforcement. I note the minister's comments around recommendation 2 and certainly support the working group that will make further recommendations to government in regards to the better aligning of the Medicines and Poisons Act and the TOSP Act to provide officers more opportunities to conduct the activities they do. I am pleased to see the government has accepted these recommendations in principle and I am sure these issues will emerge in our continuing inquiry into reducing e-cigarette use.

As I said when I started my contribution, the rate of smoking in Queensland has decreased by more than half over the last decade. This has been the result of committed and continuing reforms by our government that restrict supply and reduce demand. The bill will continue that work. I commend the bill to the House.