




Speech By  
**Hon. Mark Furner**

**MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE**

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### **TOBACCO AND OTHER SMOKING PRODUCTS AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Hon. ML FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities) (12.12 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Amendment Bill 2023. Before I make comment on the bill, I want to thank the Health and Environment Committee, including the committee chair, the member for Thuringowa, for its diligence in reviewing this legislation. Labor governments in Queensland and Australia have a strong recent history—and going way back in fact—in curtailing smoking, and this bill seeks to continue that great work. I want to commend the work of the former health minister and the current health minister for their diligence and their commitment to bring about this legislation that will no doubt encourage better health lifestyles for the people of Queensland.

I was privileged to be a senator for Queensland when the federal government, led by then prime minister Kevin Rudd, took the initiative to introduce cigarette plain-packaging reforms during my time in the Senate. I am sure that we are all familiar with the graphic health warnings and the drab, feculent brown modern cigarette packaging that was brought about to curtail the number of smokers at that time. It may be unpleasant, but the ugly uniformity serves a purpose. I would wager that, because of those brave reforms like plain packaging that have involved standing up to the powerful tobacco companies, there are now more reformed smokers in Queensland than there are current smokers, and I am one of those—a reformed smoker dating back to the turn of the century. Queensland is a far healthier state for those reforms.

If I reflect back on my time, I grew up in a household where my mother smoked, my father smoked and all of my siblings, so I was destined to become a smoker myself. Nevertheless, over a period of time you realise that that is never the course of continued practice and you curtail your lifestyle. These days I work out at the gym and have a healthier lifestyle and enjoy jumping on my Harley Davidson on occasion to enjoy the wind and travel around the beautiful state of Queensland—on a rare occasion. That is what you supplement your unhealthy habits with in order to enjoy a better lifestyle.

I also want to commend the Albanese government for its plan to ban recreational vaping. This ensures that those who want to use e-cigarettes to try and quit smoking may still do so with a prescription while taking stronger meaningful action to curb the use of vapes by young people. This work is certainly not done. As the former minister for health and ambulance services said in this House earlier this year, the annual cost of smoking in Queensland is estimated to be over \$27 billion. We are also seeing the rapid rise of electronic cigarettes, or vapes as they are called, and the alarming trend of young people taking up this fad, which can better be described as a health hazard.

I note from the committee's report that there was strong support for the proposed changes in this bill by the majority of submitters. This bill proposes a new licensing scheme for the wholesale and retail sale of smoking products, facilitating more effective enforcement of the act and aligning Queensland with other Australian jurisdictions. Among the objectives of this change, I note that tracking the number of tobacco outlets and preventing the sale of smoking products to minors are among them. I also note that this bill will give retailers and wholesalers a full 12 months to obtain a licence before the offence of

unlicensed supply takes effect on 1 September 2024. This will give small businesses time to ensure that they are following the rules, many of which will be in rural and regional Queensland. As the Minister for Rural Communities, I commend this commonsense time frame for this implementation to take place in those regions. I also note that the bill makes a commonsense licence exception for pharmacists who are selling prescription e-cigarette products as aids for Queenslanders who are trying to quit smoking. This bill ensures strong action to curtail smoking rates without punishing Queensland's small businesses.

This bill also proposes changes to the rules around the advertising, display and promotion of smoking products. We can all remember—those with some age—the advertisements in the past. There was the Marlboro Man and Paul Hogan saying, 'Anyhow, have a Winfield'. There was all of those advertising incentives to try to get people to take up smoking or continue the habit. In fact, I remember a time in Bandung in Indonesia when they were trying to encourage people to take up smoking by using promo ladies on the platforms of the train stations, so there have been all sorts of enticements put in place to try to encourage people to smoke. This is a prime example of a strong initiative of a Labor government trying to stop people from taking up and continuing this habit. These are absolutely critical amendments to the current act and it was not all that long ago that smoking was prolific in the community. I can still picture cigarette smoke blowing out of bars, pubs and clubs across Queensland which was very much a product of rampant cigarette advertising and availability which, by and large, were targeted at children and young people. It is vital for the health of young Queenslanders that we cut this off at the pass when it comes to vaping.

This bill also seeks to prohibit the supply of smoking products to children by parents or guardians or by other children. Kids should not get their hands on smoking products, including vapes. I do not think much more needs to be said. It is a principle through which smoking rates have been minimised in Australia for decades and it is a principle that we should now extend further by blocking another avenue for kids to get their hands on harmful smoking products.

I note this includes the eventual prohibition on children handling smoking products even if they work in a tobacco retailer. I note that time will be given, for businesses until September 2024 and for small businesses until 2025, to adopt these changes. The bill also seeks to make life tougher for those who acquire and sell illicit tobacco. As the committee heard from Pam Wright of the Tobacco Station Group, illegal traders are a serious problem for Queensland businesses that follow the rules. She told the committee—

We have been very successful but our profit margin is now really hurting because of this illicit trade.

...

Intimidation with these guys—

that is, the illicit tobacco traders—

is happening all the time. I have been subject to it on several occasions.

I support the continued work of the government to pursue and enforce the penalties against those who are doing the wrong thing and causing grief for legitimate Queensland enterprises.

The Palaszczuk Labor government takes seriously its obligations to protect the health of Queenslanders. As the landscape changes and new issues arise, we commit to tackling them with thoughtful and purposeful legislation such as the bill before the House today. This is an excellent move that we are making and, once again, we are creating history in this place. I note the opposition's support for the passing of the bill. It is a prime example of how, through collaboration, we can ensure good legislation prevails and passes through this House to protect the health interests of all Queenslanders. I commend the bill to the House.