




Speech By
Hon. Mark Ryan

MEMBER FOR MORAYFIELD

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TOBACCO AND OTHER SMOKING PRODUCTS AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. MT RYAN** (Morayfield—ALP) (Minister for Police and Corrective Services and Minister for Fire and Emergency Services) (12.39 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate and speak in support of the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Amendment Bill 2023. As many speakers in this debate have acknowledged, this bill is about health, safety and, to be frank, fairness—fairness of opportunity for those businesses that are engaged in the legal sale of tobacco products.

This bill builds on the Palaszczuk government's 2020 election commitment to strengthen tobacco laws and increase smoke-free places across Queensland. It is about reducing the risks and harm associated with smoking, second-hand smoke and the illicit tobacco trade. It is about establishing a licensing scheme. It is about ensuring there are effective deterrents against the unlawful supply of smoking products. It is about ensuring there are strong penalties for such breaches. It is about empowering Queensland Health to monitor compliance. It is about modernising and clarifying requirements around advertising and promotion of smoking products. It is about expanding smoke-free public spaces, including community spaces for children. It is also about enhancing offences that protect children from the dangers of smoking.

Essentially this is a bill that aims to improve the health of the public by reducing exposure to tobacco and other smoking related products. In practice, that will mean restricting the supply of smoking products to children, limiting their advertising and promotion, reducing public exposure to second-hand smoke and establishing a framework for compliance monitoring and enforcement activities.

Despite progress over the years, the effects of smoking products are a significant public health concern in Queensland. No other single risk factor contributes as greatly to the burden of preventable health and disease. Smoking also contributes to health inequality in many communities across the state.

One of the most important reforms contained in this bill is the licensing reforms which are specifically focused on eliminating, to the best extent possible, the opportunity for the sale of illicit tobacco. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, this is ultimately a question about fairness in business. The sustainability of businesses that want to legitimately engage in lawful activity is being threatened by those engaging in the provision of illegal tobacco products—tobacco products which may be imported illegally and do not attract the necessary tax treatment or may be sold in a way which does not contain the legally required warnings and descriptions on plain packaging or may be sold to people they should not be sold to like those under the age of 18. It is an important step.

I am very pleased to see that this has the support of industry and retail groups like the Australian Association of Convenience Stores, the Master Grocers Australia Independent Retailers and the Australian Retailers Association. It just goes to prove the point that when it comes to regulation, regulation done right supports good business. We often hear the mantra of the red tape of regulation getting in the way of business activity, but here we have industry and business specifically asking for regulation to improve safety regulation, to support legal and lawful activities and to ensure that those who are not operating within the legal framework and not prioritising the health and safety of others are restricted to the extent possible from participating in those activities.

Under the bill, it will now be an offence to supply illicit tobacco or for retailers to even store illicit tobacco at their shop unless they are part of the licensing regime. These offences will be backed with high penalties and enhanced enforcement powers. These combined measures will allow us to confront the illicit tobacco problem head on to further protect the health of Queenslanders and the interests of legitimate retailers and businesses in this state. As no excise tax is currently paid on imported illicit tobacco, it may be sold cheaply. This is obviously one of the key concerns of those law-abiding businesses. Not only does it cheat those law-abiding businesses and individuals who pay their taxes, but deprives the public health system of revenue used to fund health services for patients with smoking related illnesses and to promote public health initiatives to discourage and help people quit smoking.

A further point on that is the pricepoint that will often start the conversation between individuals and their families about whether continuing the habit of smoking tobacco is in the best interests of their finances. We know it is not in the best interests of their health. There is plenty of science and evidence to support that. When people cheat the system when selling illicit tobacco without paying the necessary taxes and without the necessary pricepoints there is a whole series of significant consequences for the system beyond just the avoidance of tax.

By cracking down on illicit tobacco, the bill will remove these dangerous and cheap smoking products from the market. I am sure other members have acknowledged that, on recent estimates, nicotine addiction costs the Queensland community more than \$27 billion annually. That is a massive impost on the community. We have listened to industry and health experts and we will introduce a licensing scheme for the wholesale and retail supply of smoking products. There are also a number of provisions contained in the bill around monitoring and enforcing compliance with the relevant act and enabling the necessary enforcement activities of the authorities.

This is an important conversation for the community to continue to have. The conversations that we have had over the past decades have resulted in the reduction in the number of people who are smoking and using tobacco products, but we need to continually work towards that being zero because of the evidence and the health impacts. The proposals and initiatives contained in this bill will certainly not only enhance the work around reducing the number of people who are smoking and using tobacco products but also protect those in the community who have made the decision not to smoke or use tobacco products and allow them to enjoy the environments they wish to visit in a way that is smoke-free and prioritises their health.

I take this opportunity to commend the relevant departments on engaging on this. As many members have highlighted, this has been an important reform journey but also a long reform journey because of the need for a regulatory impact statement and conversations with industry about how the licensing scheme and framework might work. I am pleased to see this reform and I am pleased to see it has widespread support not only in this House but also across the community and industry. I commend the bill to the House.