




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BONNEY

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TOBACCO AND OTHER SMOKING PRODUCTS AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (3.32 pm): The LNP is of course not opposing this legislation, but I want to make a few comments on it. The worst decision that you can make for your health is to be a smoker. It is the No. 1 cause of preventable death or serious disease for Australians. Half of all lifelong smokers will be killed by this habit and the other half will experience horrific diseases for the rest of their lives. The people around smokers often do not have a choice, so I welcome the expansion of smoke-free public spaces, especially with regard to school car parks but also with DOSAs at pubs and other licensed venues as this legislation will ban minors from going into those areas.

As the shadow environment minister, I want to put on record my support for the ban on smoking in national parks. On that point, with the lack of resourcing the government provides towards managing our protected estate, many of our parks are tinderboxes and there is a real risk that a single cigarette on its own could ignite a destructive and widespread bushfire. There are legitimate questions about how this will be enforced though, so any further clarity on that would be welcomed as we are talking about some pretty big areas of land. Enforcement in general will be vital to the success of this legislation in curbing smoking.

The bill itself will establish a licensing system—and I was certainly surprised that one did not already exist—and those licences will be \$475 for a retail licence and \$675 for a wholesale licence every year. The health department said that this would raise enough money to make the measures cost neutral. It projected that it would bring in around \$3 million annually, which to me does not seem like it will go anywhere near employing the number of inspectors who will be required to properly enforce this. Another question on the licences that I have is that around half of all venues with a liquor licence currently sell smoking products and they will all get an automatic approved licence under this scheme. I do question whether that automatic granting was the best decision and whether other approaches or an opt-in basis with a free licence was considered.

As the shadow health minister very adequately pointed out in her contribution, the biggest issue with this will be enforcement. In Townsville the committee's public hearing heard how that region has seven approved positions for environmental health officers but six actual positions. They are overwhelmed—self-described as overwhelmed—and covering so many different areas of responsibility. That was just a really tough message we got from this essential preventive health service. Illegal tobacco is rampant across the state and just one stakeholder to the committee said that they really doubted whether these changes will be adequate. On the Gold Coast in my home city we heard that there are 12 of these environmental health officers who cover tobacco, medicines and poisons, which is a surprisingly low number of positions for the second largest city in our state and the sixth largest in the nation.

I want to commend the comments from Dr Steven Donohue, the Director of the Townsville Public Health Unit. He was exceptionally open and provided probably the most useful contribution to the consideration of these laws. He essentially summed this up by saying that these laws are too little too late, too weak and too slow and he highlighted how under the current laws there has not been a single successful prosecution in North Queensland. He said this is because—

The hoops that you have to go through to determine an offence and prove each of the elements of the offence, if you even get in there, if you even get any cooperation, are so complex and time-consuming that my small team has not even bothered to try to get a warrant. As I say, for example, a warrant would have to be for a specific purpose under a specific act. If you go in there and do anything else or see anything else, then it cannot be used ...

Again, his contribution was just exceptional and we are so fortunate to have someone of his calibre working in Queensland Health doing all he can to contribute to the health and wellbeing of Queenslanders.

I also want to put on record my support for the excellent submission from Shannon Mead from No More Butts. I caught up with him recently at the regional sitting of parliament in Cairns with our fantastic candidate for that seat, Yolonde Entsch. Shannon talked about how cigarette butts are the most littered item in Queensland, with 1.9 billion of them littered annually across our state. He estimates that that means that 5½ thousand tonnes of plastic filters are sitting in our environment at any one time, so that means that each cigarette butt pollutes between 40 to 1,000 litres of water for each butt. The key point that he wants people to remember is that this is plastic. It takes 15 years for filters to break down. Even the biodegradable ones have a two- to three-year time frame for breaking down, by which point they can do substantial damage, and the filters have 12,000 to 15,000 fibrous strands of cellulose treated with acetone and they break into tens of thousands of pieces of microplastics which, if ingested by marine life, can be potentially fatal or problematic for marine life and obviously in terms of the consumption of seafood as well. That can be a huge problem for people who enjoy seafood, but that is not me. I have heard that some research from Griffith University has said that each of us has roughly a credit card sized amount of plastic in each of our digestive systems, mostly from ingesting it from marine life.

In his submission Shannon made a good, simple suggestion about better environmental signage, on top of the signage provisions in the bill, that he thought would provide a better way to highlight to smokers the impact that they can have on Queensland if they do not do the right thing with their waste. His suggestion of eventually including cigarette butts in the single-use plastic ban framework should certainly be considered or at least discussed with industry to see how it could work, what alternatives there might be and what the efficacy or the health benefits, if any—I do not believe there are any—of these filters are.

In conclusion, the government must explain how they will resource the people who will have to enforce this. They are essential Queensland Health workers and they should be supported in the work they do.