




Speech By  
**Aaron Harper**

**MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA**

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Record of Proceedings, 11 September 2024

**TOBACCO AND OTHER SMOKING PRODUCTS (VAPING) AND OTHER  
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (3.50 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products (Vaping) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I want to follow up on the comments of the member for Mudgeeraba regarding her observation about listening to public health workers. The member might remember that under the former Newman government health workers were gagged from speaking out on any policy, so I welcome the contribution from every single health worker on this bill.

Given this is probably the last bill I will talk on during this term, I want to acknowledge all members of the Health, Environment and Agriculture Committee for their dedicated work and support throughout the term and for this bill. We did make one recommendation: that this bill be passed. I want to thank all those submitters who support the work we are doing in this state to stop the illegal sale and distribution of vapes from these pop-up shops that appear in our local communities, often near schools. I speak of submitters like Townsville local Pam Wright and other retailers. Pam is a tobacconist who came to me a few years ago to talk about the impact these stores were having on kids in our community. She had been to the local federal member, Phil Thompson, and she said he was not interested in acting on this at the national level under the Morrison-Morrison-Morrison government. It took an Albanese government to introduce strong work, as well as what we are doing in this state, to tackle the issue of vaping.

There is no doubt in my mind that strong criminal links exist in these illegal pop-up shops that are putting the lives of millions of our youth at risk by selling and supplying their nicotine-laden products. Those products will have a significant impact on our youth and our health system for generations to come, so we must act now. The situation of vaping is in stark contrast to those tobacconists, those retailers, who sell their products under regulation such as in plain packaging and not being able to display products. They also pay their taxes on the products they sell.

This bill represents a monumental step in our efforts to combat the rise of illicit tobacco and vaping products, enabling us to take coordinated action to address and reverse the public health threat posed by these illicit products. While vaping may initially have been cleverly marketed as a smoking cessation tool for adults, it quickly evolved into a dangerous habit, particularly for many of our youth. This is not just a passing fad; it is, indeed, a public health crisis that demands the government's urgent and immediate attention.

The science is clear: the developing brains of children and young people are particularly vulnerable to the effects of nicotine. Alarming, studies show that vape use among adolescents has quadrupled since 2017. Vaping can impair cognitive development and mental health and increase the risk of developing lifelong nicotine dependence, but the dangers do not stop there. Vaping has been linked to a host of physical health issues including respiratory problems, cardiovascular problems and, in some cases, severe lung injuries that require hospitalisation. What is perhaps most alarming is the potency of the nicotine in these products. Some vapes contain as much nicotine as several packets of

cigarettes, leading to a rapid onset of addiction. We have heard of teenagers who are so nicotine dependent that they keep their vapes under their pillow at night because they wake up in the middle of the night to use them. Not only is this level of addiction dangerous but also it can be life altering, setting these young people on the path of a lifetime of health problems.

We know that aggressive advertising tactics have played a major role in the alarming rise of vaping amongst our youth. These strategies specifically target young people, misleading them into believing that vaping is a healthy alternative to smoking with its enticing packaging and confectionary-like flavours. We must support stronger regulations and enforcement measures to restrict the access and appeal of vaping products to young people. That is why this bill introduces new offences for individuals or businesses that display, advertise or promote illicit nicotine products like vaping goods as part of their business activity. Each offence will carry a maximum penalty of 140 units. This offence will extend to a broad range of media platforms including social media.

The bill also addresses the alarming issue of adults supplying vapes to children outside of a commercial setting. Disturbingly, children as young as 12 and 13 are reaching out to smoking cessation helplines, and we know these children are not obtaining these vapes on their own. This change aims to protect our youth from the serious harms of vaping by limiting access, including by cracking down on adult family members or friends who supply these dangerous products to children they know. Who was alarmed when they saw some of that awful vision of vapes being given to infants, babies and young people? It was absolutely alarming footage that was shown on media outlets. We have to stop this rubbish happening in our communities. The offence will carry a maximum penalty of 140 units and is designed to reverse the rising uptake and use of recreational vapes by children.

The supply of illicit tobacco and vaping products has become a thriving business in Queensland. Our children and young people are battling nicotine dependence because these products are pervasive. That is why this bill will make the supply and commercial possession of illicit nicotine products like vapes a criminal offence, with significant penalties of up \$1.6 million for corporations and two years imprisonment and around \$320,000 for an individual. By taking strong enforcement action to cut the source of supply of illicit vapes and illicit tobacco, this bill will protect Queenslanders from the detrimental health risks associated with these products.

Until recently vapes were widely stocked by retailers that sell tobacco, including convenience stores, petrol stations and gift stores. Reports from the Queensland public health units indicate that often employees at these establishments are very aware of the illegal nature of their activities, but they continue to carry them out. This deliberate disregard for the law exacerbates the public health crisis associated with the supply of these harmful products. To protect our community, the bill makes it an offence for employees of retail or wholesale venues to supply illicit tobacco or illicit nicotine products such as vapes.

Vaping is not just a trend; it is a serious threat to the health and wellbeing of Queenslanders that requires a strong response, and that is what our Miles Labor government is doing. Through this legislation our government is protecting Queenslanders from the damaging harms of vaping and illicit tobacco by introducing stronger laws and enforcement frameworks. It is an opportunity to protect our children from the dangers of vaping and ensure they have an opportunity to grow up healthy and strong.

I did not think I would ever quote the *Courier-Mail*, but they absolutely nailed it last night when they published an article with former chief health officer Dr Jeannette Young, now the Governor of Queensland, titled 'Research shows vapers aged 12 are 29 times more likely to smoke'. It stated—

Australia is losing its world-leading status with a disturbing new trend among young people that has reversed years of good work. The *Courier-Mail* nailed that. We need to do more. We are doing more through this bill. I commend the bill to the House.