




Speech By
Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

Record of Proceedings, 17 April 2024

HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (2.06 pm): I too rise to address the Health and Environment Committee's report titled *Vaping: An inquiry into reducing rates of e-cigarette use in Queensland*. I was a member of that committee at the time that this inquiry was undertaken and the report was prepared. I want to pick up where the previous speaker left off.

We looked at a range of things in this inquiry, including the prevalence of e-cigarette usage and associated risks, which, as was just mentioned, are quite extraordinary. There is strong evidence that e-cigarettes pose a serious risk to the health of individuals, often exposing them to nicotine and a range of harmful chemicals, heavy metals, pesticides and carcinogenic substances. I was the same with tobacco. I am definitely the same with e-cigarettes—if you knew that that is what you were putting into your body, why the heck would you do it?

Vaping is increasingly prevalent particularly among young people. We were asked to look at education programs—what is working and what is not—and ways to increase awareness and also whether we needed to look at inquiries, legislative frameworks, policies and preventive activities related to e-cigarettes in other jurisdictions. When the committee was looking into this matter, the Australian government announced they would be strengthening their regulations and enforcements around e-cigarettes and making it tougher to access e-cigarettes. That is why the committee's first recommendation specifically calls on the Queensland government to investigate establishing a joint taskforce involving Queensland and Commonwealth agencies with the primary objective of ending the illegal retail supply of e-cigarettes, including online, especially to people under the age of 18.

It is that recommendation I want to focus on. Like many of us here, I have been contacted by legitimate businesses that do the right thing, that do sell tobacco products and that are concerned about the increasing proliferation of illegal tobacco sales, including those centred around e-cigarettes. One of the small business owners in the electorate of Glass House is incredibly frustrated at the loss of revenue through the illegal sale of tobacco and related products and asked me to chase up what is actually being done to enforce the existing Queensland health legislation when we talk about that improved enforcement by the Australian government.

I put a question to the health minister back in February of this year when I asked—

With reference to legislative changes in 2023 regarding the sale of illicit tobacco—

Will the Minister provide (a) the number of monitoring and enforcement activities undertaken by Queensland Health Environmental Health Officers in the City of Moreton Bay and Sunshine Coast Regional Council ... and (b) the number of specific breaches, warnings and on-the-spot fines issued in each jurisdiction ...

I appreciate that councils do not easily align to hospital and health services, but what we discovered was that 45 retailers suspected of supplying illicit tobacco had been identified in the Metro North Hospital and Health Service area, and that includes the City of Moreton Bay, and that they were

all still under investigation. We also found that 21 retailers suspected of supplying illicit tobacco had been identified within the Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service and that 18 of those 21 retailers were still undergoing investigation. Interestingly, between July and December 2023, Queensland Health identified 315 retailers suspected of supplying illicit tobacco across Queensland. That is an extraordinary number—315. The answer stated—

Over the same period, 206 on-the-spot fines for supplying or possessing illicit tobacco, displaying and advertising smoking products and failure to display mandatory signage were issued. There were 87 seizures of illicit tobacco, bongs, and vapes. Five written warnings and five improvement notices were also issued for breaches of retailers supplying or possessing illicit tobacco.

That answer shows the scale of the problem we are facing and that enforcement is a huge task. That is why I commend all of the recommendations of this report, particularly the first one. I think we need to work closer with the Commonwealth government to come up with a better form of enforcement to ensure we can prevent these kinds of products being sold illegally, particularly to young people. Let us shut this down as soon as we possibly can.