




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MACALISTER

Record of Proceedings, 17 April 2024

HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mrs McMAHON** (Macalister—ALP) (2.11 pm): I rise to make my contribution to this significant report done by the health committee. I thank the committee for their detailed consideration. I followed this particular inquiry with great interest because this is one of the issues that is frequently raised by community members and stakeholders in the electorate of Macalister, particularly by school principals. They are finding it really hard to be able to identify and crack down on this. Back in my day, if kids were going down the back of the school to have a smoke, they had to do that by sneaking away and then there was an act of lighting as well as other things. Kids these days are telling me that they can have the little vaping products in their pockets and just take a puff while walking between classrooms. Also, many of them are sold to look like everyday common school items. This tells me that it is specifically being directed and targeted at schoolchildren, which is quite a concern.

People who are informing themselves of these issues are aware of the problems associated with the availability of vapes as well as the dangerous consequences of vaping, but it is an area where we obviously need to do more. It is also an example of how as a parliament we need to be extremely flexible in the legislation because this is not something that we were overly considering 15 years ago.

I remember the first time I encountered vaping and e-cigarettes. I was in Liverpool for an extended period of time and some streets were just wall-to-wall vaping stores. I remember having to ask one of the nurses at the hospital what this vaping thing was and they were talking about e-cigarettes and those kinds of things. I remember thinking, 'I'm glad we don't have that in Australia.' Australia has a fantastic international reputation, particularly when it comes to the work we have done around reducing cigarette use and tobacco use throughout the country. Some of the biggest reforms that have been made throughout the world started here in Australia—whether it was the plain packaging or all of the warning signs.

Due to that, the trend in tobacco consumption among Australians had always been on a downward trend. We saw a 24 per cent reduction in smoking between 1991 and 2000. However, what we are now seeing is an inverse upwards increase in the use of e-cigarettes, particularly among young people. The statistics that were provided were that 14 per cent of young adults—that is, those aged 14 plus—vaped on a regular basis. Vaping is being sold as a harmless activity. Vapes are able to be purchased because there is allegedly no nicotine and no tobacco in them. Therefore, a school student can walk in after school and buy a vape. I looked at my local high school and within 500 metres of the school there were seven retailers who sold vapes and could easily sell vapes to high school students. This is how prevalent it is in my community.

We are looking at a future health epidemic unfolding unless we do something right now to address the number of kids who are accessing vapes because e-cigarettes do contain nicotine. I refer to the evidence provided by Queensland Health that tested 17 e-liquids contained in vaping products available in Queensland at the time of the inquiry. The analysis found that every one of the e-cigarettes contained

some nicotine. This was despite the fact that none of the e-cigarettes tested were able to be obtained on prescription, meaning that none of them should have had any nicotine and were therefore readily available to be purchased by teenagers.

It is more than just the nicotine in the products. The testing found that some 200-plus chemicals were found in e-cigarettes. Queensland Health testing found that some of those chemicals included formaldehyde, acetaldehyde and acrolein, which are all cancer-causing agents. If it is not the nicotine that is going to be causing long-term health damage—and we know that nicotine is one of the most addictive substances in the world—it is going to be some of those other substances found in vapes.

The other aspect I want to touch on briefly is the waste issues we find with these disposable e-cigarettes. Clean Up Australia Day this year was the first time I encountered a large amount of e-cigarette waste by the side of the road in our local community. This is problematic on many levels. I commend the recommendations to the House.