



Speech By  
**Ros Bates**


**MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA**

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Record of Proceedings, 20 March 2024

## **HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

### **Report, Motion to Take Note**

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (2.56 pm): I rise to speak as the shadow health minister in response to the health committee's report into reducing rates of e-cigarette use in Queensland. There is no doubt that the tide has turned on smoking in our great state, whether it is cigarettes or e-cigarettes, but vaping remains a dangerous pastime. Unfortunately, it is attracting young people who believe it is not as bad as smoking. It is: make no mistake. It has led to a proliferation of illegal operators who are capitalising on this new wave of customers.

We know that the Labor government's modus operandi is to create a distraction to avoid attention on their own actions or inactions. We need to investigate the Labor government's role in the proliferation of these illegal shops selling nicotine products, which is their job to police. Labor passed new laws last year to give the state the power it needs to prosecute these shops, so where is the evidence that they are using them? In Mudgeeraba I have spoken to many tobacconists, small businessmen and women, who face an uphill battle in getting any action on regulation and policing of local illegal chop-chop shops. They are confronted with operators who often have connections to organised crime and undercut them at every opportunity. They breach advertising rules and they deny government the taxes and duties other legal operators have to pay. Labor strikes again at the heart of small business by imposing regulation and then doing nothing to support or police it. Together with local police and public health units, we have worked to get this Labor Party government to enforce the laws it has introduced and put a stop to the sale of cheap illegal tobacco through these storefronts. Once again, Labor is leaving it to the already stretched thin blue line. There does not appear to have been any increase in public health officers available to help crack down on this burgeoning black market.

I have been writing to the Attorney-General, who was the health minister, since 2021 about a range of these chop-chop shops in my electorate. The response was underwhelming. All the current Attorney-General could say was, 'Talk to the feds.' That is right: she blamed the federal government for the illicit tobacco supply and hid behind the Australian illicit tobacco taskforce. When you introduce regulation, it is up to you to enforce it. I note that the committee made 14 recommendations, and I call on the minister to advise the House when she will be reporting back to this House on how these recommendations will be implemented. Otherwise, this is just another report that will sit on the shelf gathering dust, ignored by those opposite.

Queenslanders will not be surprised by that because that is the Labor way. I spoke on 24 May about my Mudgeeraba community and these illegal tobacco shops—the chop-chop shops as they are commonly called—which have been operational for years. I wrote to the previous health minister about this issue, and that was three years ago now. That email cited 85 illegal chop-chop shops in 15 electorates in Queensland, and nothing changed. I wrote that these illegal chop-chop shops—there was one in Mudgeeraba, one in Worongary and one in Burleigh Waters that I knew about—all have illegal signage. Now I have another one that is only five shops away from the Mudgeeraba electorate office.

Those illegal signs have cigarettes on the front of them. They have tobacco on the front of them. They have smokes on the front of them. They are illegal chop-chop shops. They are not hard to recognise. When my licensed Cignall tobacconists—the one from Mudgeeraba, the one from Worongary and the one from Burleigh Waters—came to see me and made a complaint, I made a complaint to Queensland Health on their behalf and they had Queensland Health come down on them like a tonne of bricks. Queensland Health visited their shops and did not even visit the illegal chop-chop shops. Those local businesses are losing up to \$30,000 a week. This is revenue which is taxable—it goes to the Commonwealth—but the only place it is going at the moment is into the pockets of the owners of these illegal shops. They will keep doing it until there are laws that can be enforced to stop them from doing it and when Queensland Health have enough staff to actually work with our thin blue line to do something about it.

Both of these shops—the one just up the road from me and the one down near Wallaby Bob's—were raided about a week after the legislation came in. That was nearly eight months ago. Both of them were back up and running the next week. My poor small businesses are all having trouble. The Coles supermarket told me that they ran out of cash on a Friday afternoon because people were actually going in and withdrawing cash from Coles because they had to pay cash at the illegal chop-chop shop. Now I notice that, like the one at Yamanto, they have an ATM in the illegal chop-chop shop, and nothing is being done to fix it.