




Speech By
Tony Perrett

MEMBER FOR GYMPIE

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HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr PERRETT** (Gympie—LNP) (2.52 pm): I rise to speak on the Health and Environment Committee's report No. 38 titled *Vaping: An inquiry into reducing rates of e-cigarette use in Queensland*. The committee conducted a broad review of the current situation regarding e-cigarettes, especially their use by young people, and how vaping is managed in Queensland schools. It looked at how to increase awareness of its effects and improve education programs as well as the management of e-cigarette waste. The committee also investigated how the issue of vaping has been addressed in other states through inquiries, legislation, policies and preventive activities. The wide range of issues that vaping creates is demonstrated by the fact that the committee made 14 recommendations to deal with the issue.

I have had numerous conversations with constituents and read reports about under-age users, the use of vaping in our schools, the proliferation of vaping shops, online access and activities that go on outside and near the shops. There are also concerns about the black market in products and its potential to attract criminal activities. Recommendation 1 advises establishing a taskforce to end illegal retail and online supply, especially to those aged under 18.

Last year, a tobacco and vaping shop in Mary Street, Gympie, was firebombed. The *Gympie Times* reported that almost a dozen firefighting crews attended the fire, which rapidly spread to a nearby chiropractor's office and fast-food restaurant. The newspaper reported that police said it caused a series of explosions inside the building and cut power to the area. Residents heard the explosions up to one kilometre away. The tobacco shop and chiropractor's office were gutted. It was not an accident. The *Gympie Times* reported that Gympie CIB officer in charge Detective Sergeant Rob Lowry said the offenders went to the shop shortly after midnight 'armed with some jemmy bars and a jerry can full of fuel'.

This is not insignificant and represents an escalation in the type of criminal activity that is going on across Queensland in our crime crisis. This is not what anyone would want in our main street. It is not what you want in any shopping precinct. The Gympie Chamber of Commerce and the CBD Action Alliance have raised with me concerns about the type of activity that is going on, the adequacy of regulations and the improved monitoring of illegal activities. As the LNP statement of reservation notes—

Illegal & illicit e-cigarette sales in Queensland and Australia are out of control. Millions and millions of unchecked, unsafe and unregulated e-cigarettes are finding their way across our borders and into our homes and schools each and every month.

In 2022, 15.5 per cent of those aged 18 to 29 were regular or intermittent vapers. In 2017, 15.6 per cent of Queensland secondary school students aged 12 to 17 had tried vaping. Seven years later, anecdotal evidence suggests that it has not lost its attractiveness and that that figure would be much higher. Controlling vaping in schools, managing detentions and suspensions and other processes

to deal with its rising popularity stretch staff resources and time and impact teaching outcomes. The committee heard that some schools are able to manage the problem effectively and others are struggling.

Committee recommendations 6 and 7 propose devising guidelines for schools, but it is not that simple. Managing vaping in schools is complex. A one-size-fits-all approach is not the best way to deal with this issue. In addition to guidelines and educational courses, the LNP statement of reservation said 'there is also a need to engage parents and the broader school community'. Some schools may need additional resources or specialist intervention and training.

Of course, a cornerstone of policy development and community responsibility is to protect our youth from potential harm. As the statement of reservation states—

It is not just about setting up barriers, but about instilling knowledge, values, and resilience in young people to ensure they make informed choices. With the increasing popularity of vaping, especially among younger demographics, it is paramount that our policies mirror this understanding.