



Speech By  
**Jennifer Howard**


**MEMBER FOR IPSWICH**

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**TOBACCO AND OTHER SMOKING PRODUCTS (DISMANTLING ILLEGAL  
TRADE) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Second Reading**

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (5.17 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products (Dismantling Illegal Trade) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. This bill will strengthen enforcement measures under the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act 1998 to help reduce the impacts on public health from the sale of illicit tobacco and nicotine products. It will also boost efforts to dismantle organised crime networks selling illegal tobacco and enhance public safety.

Unlike the member for McConnel, I did smoke myself. I was probably born addicted. My mother was a chain-smoker all of her life and as soon as I was 15 or 16 I was smoking as well. I am pleased to say I did learn the error of my ways at an early age. My mum, sadly, died of lung cancer and she was just a few years older than I am now when she died. It is a horrible disease. I have seen what it does to people. My sister is a social worker in a respiratory ward at the Sunshine Coast hospital. She deals with the effects of these types of things every day. It is really alarming.

We did a lot of work to reduce smoking federally and in the state over many years and it was really quite successful. It has just been horrific to see children walking around taking up vaping. The Labor opposition will always support expert backed measures that improve Queenslanders' health and reduce smoking rates. As I have said, we have made considerable gains over the last few decades to reduce the rates of cigarette smoking, but it is being undermined by the sale of illicit tobacco and vaping products.

Over the last five years, illicit tobacco and vaping products have caused the loss of \$6.7 billion in national excise revenue and generated about \$10 billion in revenue for organised crime networks. Consumption of illicit tobacco now represents over 50 per cent of total consumption in Australia. A significant proportion of that consumption is made up of young people taking up vaping. The *Medical Journal of Australia* has shown that the decline in youth smoking rates across Australia has slowed since the widespread uptake of vaping. If the pre-vaping trend continued, only 5.8 per cent of students would have tried smoking by 2022-23 but, unfortunately, that figure has more than doubled, to 13 per cent. A 2025 report by the Chief Health Officer in Queensland found that vaping rates amongst Queensland high-schoolers tripled between 2017 and 2023. We need to do everything we can to disrupt the uptake of smoking or vaping in young people to protect their long-term health.

The dangerous role organised crime plays in the sale of illicit tobacco and vaping products is a major public safety concern for Queensland communities. Almost every other week we hear in the news about a tobacco shop being firebombed or ramraided. The profits that criminals make from the sale of illicit tobacco and vaping products often outweigh the risks of them being caught. They are also using sophisticated tactics to avoid detection and shield owners from financial and legal accountability. The number of arson attacks on tobacco shops over the past several years, alongside the violence associated with the illicit tobacco trade, presents a serious threat to public safety. Adjoining businesses

are being impacted as well. The *Australian* reported last month that small businesses located near tobacconists are facing insurance premium hikes of more than 50 per cent due to the increased risk of firebombings, ramraids and other gang related violence.

The Labor opposition is pleased to see that the work we commenced while we were in government is continuing. We laid a foundation of strong measures that disrupted the illicit tobacco trade and prioritised the health of Queenslanders. Queensland's laws on illicit tobacco and vaping products are the toughest in the nation thanks to Labor's reforms. We introduced the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Amendment Act 2023, which commenced a licensing scheme for wholesale and retail sellers of smoking products. We introduced tougher penalties for the supply of illicit smoking products. I want to give a shout-out to the committee that travelled—the member for Lytton spoke on that earlier. They did some fantastic work and heard some pretty alarming stories. We expanded smoke-free public spaces; we banned children from supplying smoking products to others; we held the parliamentary inquiry that I just mentioned into vaping; and we introduced school-based programs and social media campaigns to educate young people about the harms of vaping. A lot of my principals and teachers have reported that that has made a huge difference already. We increased investment of \$22 million over five years to enhance enforcement activities to crack down on the sale of illicit smoking products.

In 2024, Queensland Health's flying squad of enforcement officers seized 17 million illicit cigarettes, 5.4 tonnes of loose tobacco and 117,500 vaping products, worth more than \$22 million. Those 17 million illicit cigarettes lined up end to end would stretch from Brisbane to Airlie Beach. This pales in comparison to the more than 32 million illicit cigarettes and around 201,000 vaping products which were seized between January and May this year. While it is great that these products are not ending up in the hands of Queenslanders, the significant increase in the amount of goods seized by Queensland Health in the last two years shows the vast scale of what we are dealing with.

I commend Queensland Health's enforcement officers for the important and sometimes dangerous work they do disrupting the sale of illicit tobacco and nicotine products, but they have a daunting task ahead of them. The growth in the tobacco and vape black market shows that these amendments are desperately needed to support their compliance and enforcement activities. The organised crime gangs that have created the vast network of illicit trade do not care about the health of Queenslanders, they do not care about the impact their trade is having on legitimate businesses operating nearby and they certainly do not care about the thousands of young people who are getting hooked on illegal vaping products. The University of Sydney and Cancer Council NSW, together with the Daffodil Centre, led a national study earlier this year that showed two-thirds of Queenslanders aged between 14 and 17 said it was easy or very easy to buy vapes. These laws are urgently needed to make it a lot harder for young Queenslanders to purchase vaping products.

Australians' addiction to smoking and vaping costs our nation more than \$136 billion annually in medical treatment and lost productivity. It is still the leading cause of preventable death in Australia and claims the lives of 66 Australians daily. We cannot sit back and do nothing. We welcome the amendments outlined in this bill. Labor always prioritises doing what is best for Queensland's health and safety. We listen to the health experts. I, for one, commend the LNP government for listening to the health experts when it comes to this bill. It is so incredibly important that all governments do so. Thankfully, the LNP had the sense to not get ideological about this drug that harms people's health and leads to addiction. Nicotine is one of the most dangerous drugs out there. I am pleased that this bill will reduce harm and save lives by stamping out the illicit tobacco and vape trade. Organised crime networks should not be profiting off the harm they are doing to Queenslanders and they should not be making our suburbs less safe through violence, ramraids and firebombings. I commend the bill to the House.