




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TOOHEY

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

Second Reading

 **Mr RUSSO** (Toohey—ALP) (8.54 pm): I rise to speak on the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products (Dismantling Illegal Trade) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025—legislation that is necessary, overdue and absolutely critical to protecting Queenslanders from an illegal trade that is spiralling out of control. Let me be clear from the outset: the Labor opposition supports expert-backed reforms that protect public health. We always have and we always will. For more than 25 years, Queensland has achieved a steady reduction in smoking rates because governments—Labor governments—listened to experts, acted early and acted decisively. It is why we are prepared to support the changes put forward in this bill today.

While the harms of tobacco have been known for decades, an emerging crisis in illicit tobacco and vaping products is growing faster, hitting harder and reaching younger Queenslanders than ever before. Unlike the government, Labor is not prepared to sit back and allow criminal syndicates, black market operators and opportunistic cowboys to destroy decades of progress in public health.

This is not a theoretical problem. This is not something happening on the margins. This is a real, dangerous and well-organised criminal industry operating openly in our communities. Illegal tobacco is now estimated to be a \$3.4 billion national market—billions siphoned out of public revenue and funnelled into the pockets of criminal networks; billions not supporting hospitals, not supporting schools and not supporting frontline services but instead fuelling intimidation, violence, firebombings and threats against legitimate small business owners. It is the innocent who suffer—parents, teachers and local shop owners.

Young people are being targeted with addictive, unregulated nicotine products and communities are left to deal with the disorder and danger that follow organised crime. When we talk about dismantling the illicit tobacco trade, let me be crystal clear: this is a health issue, a safety issue and a law and order issue. The days of treating illegal nicotine products as a nuisance or a side issue must be over. The scale of harm demands firm action and it demands it now.

The bill strengthens the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act 1998 by closing loopholes and tightening enforcement powers. It delivers: short-term closure orders extended from 72 hours to three months; long-term closure orders expanded from six months to 12 months; a clear, hard rule that closed means closed—no exceptions; stronger seizure and forfeiture powers; a new offence for lessors who knowingly allow their premises to be used for illegal tobacco activity; personal liability for executive officers who allow corporate offending; expanded enforcement tools, including controlled operations; and additional data collection to support better oversight and compliance. These are meaningful changes and they are needed because Queensland's current framework has been exploited aggressively by organised crime.

Health organisations told the committee that children as young as 12 are now accessing illegal nicotine vapes. Schools are installing vape detectors. Doctors are reporting a spike in youth nicotine dependency—something we worked for decades to eliminate. These are the consequences of a government that has been too slow, too complacent and at times too distracted by its own political mess to take this seriously.

The illegal tobacco market has become so lucrative that criminals are now openly threatening retailers who refuse to break the law. Some have been assaulted, some have had their stores firebombed, and the government cannot pretend it did not see this coming. Labor warned years ago that without strong regulation and enforcement the market would explode, and it has. The illegal trade does not just hurt public health, it punishes law-abiding businesses. Legitimate retailers are losing customers and revenue because illegal operators are allowed to undercut them without consequence. Landlords have been left to carry the burden when their premises are locked up under closure orders due to a tenant's criminal activity. Labor supports giving lessors the right to terminate leases where illegal tobacco activity has triggered a closure order. It is entirely unreasonable for a landlord to lose income or be prevented from reletting a property because a tenant chose to engage in criminal activity. The government should have acted sooner, but Labor will support these protections now. The Opposition supports strong enforcement powers.