




Speech By
Hon. Tim Nicholls

MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

Record of Proceedings, 3 April 2025

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Illicit Smoking Products

 **Hon. TJ NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—LNP) (Minister for Health and Ambulance Services) (9.45 am): The growth in the availability and use of illicit tobacco and vapes in recent years has become a substantial public health issue here in Queensland. Across the state in our major cities and in our rural towns traders of illicit tobacco, vapes and other smoking products are openly and recklessly flouting our laws. These illegal traders were allowed to run rampant under the watch of the former Labor government. Hundreds of these stores were operating in plain sight under Labor. In fact, under those opposite there were no fines for illegal traders found to be stocking or selling illicit vapes—none at all. That meant our hardworking public health enforcement teams have been working with one hand tied behind their back. The consequence of Labor's inaction is a tripling in vaping rates among Queensland high school students from 2017 to 2023—a shameful result laid bare in the most recent Chief Health Officer's report tabled only 10 days ago.

The Crisafulli LNP government is striking back. We will hit those illegal operators where it hurts to disrupt their activities and put an end to their lawlessness. Today I can announce that we are hitting back harder than ever before with the nation's toughest fines for the commercial possession and supply of illicit tobacco and vapes. Individuals now face on-the-spot fines of more than \$32,000 for the supply of illicit tobacco and vaping goods, and corporations can be slapped with a fine of more than \$161,000. The on-the-spot fine for the commercial possession of illicit tobacco or vaping goods will now be more than \$16,000 for individuals and more than \$80,000 for corporations. That is a tenfold increase in fines for the commercial supply of illicit tobacco and a fivefold increase for possession.

This is the first time that enforcement officers will be handed the power to issue on-the-spot fines for vaping goods. Given the increasing use of nicotine pouches, often referred to as zyns, they will also be subject to fines for the first time. These steep penalties can be issued as an alternative to court ordered penalties. This will reduce the burden on our court system and ensure that enforcement officers can act swiftly and effectively. However, where offences are still prosecuted through the courts, fines of up to \$1.6 million and up to two years imprisonment can be imposed on retailers found to be supplying or possessing illegal tobacco or vapes.

I thank and acknowledge my good friend the Attorney-General for her role in ensuring these nation-leading fines become a reality. It just goes to show what can be done when a health minister and Attorney-General work together. We come from one faction: the faction that supports Queenslanders. Not like those over there, who do not know which faction they are in from week to week. It makes a difference to the health of Queenslanders.

We are making sure Queensland's penalties correspond with the economic incentives of this illegal trade and provide an effective deterrent. These changes, which come into effect today, provide a clear warning to every retailer trading these products: if you think you can continue to illegally possess and sell illicit tobacco, vapes and nicotine pouches, think again. We are coming after you.