Tobacco and Other Smoking Products (Vaping) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 – Sandy Bolton, MP for Noosa

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

This bill targets the vaping industry in Queensland − banning the supply or possession of vaping products as part of a nation-wide crack-down.

As the Committee’s report states, vaping has become a significant public health concern, particularly with a rapid uptake of vaping by young Queenslanders. We see this in our own community teenagers hanging around vape shops in the hope of securing an adult to purchase for them.

These reforms are coordinated nationally, so amendments to the Commonwealth Therapeutic Goods Act provide a national framework to ban the importation, domestic manufacture, supply, commercial possession and advertisement of all vapes, irrespective of nicotine content or therapeutic claims.

States and Territories are then responsible for enforcement on supply and possession, hence the Bill before us, which provides that after 1 October 2024 vapes can only be dispensed at pharmacies, either with a prescription or when clinically appropriate, and are banned at all retailers including tobacco and convenience stores.

A majority of submitters supported the Bill, however a key issue, was the issue of how effective this approach will be for harm reduction.

We have varying approaches to harm reduction for different types of drugs in Queensland: alcohol is deregulation, marijuana is quasi-deregulated through the medicinal use pathway, other drugs are still prohibited; although harm reduction approaches are sometimes used, such as injecting rooms.

The Queensland Network of Alcohol and Drug Agencies did not support this bill as the focus on probation closes off other avenues for harm reduction, and they point out that banning drugs doesn’t seem to stop a lot of people using them.

Another argument is that vaping actually has a positive as a pathway to reducing tobacco use, a drug we have not banned.

However, the Alcohol and Drug Foundation supported the ban because they are concerned with the prevalence of sales of vapes to young people.

The Department’s argument was that there is still a sales route through pharmacies, and that there is no clear evidence that vaping reduces tobacco consumption.

The reality is that we didn’t have young people vaping five years ago − and without data showing whether they were smoking prior makes it difficult to assess, nor whether they would have ended up smoking if vaping had not been available.

What is clear is that when vaping first arrived, there was considerable calls to nip it in the bud immediately and have it as a prescription only product for those endeavouring to stop smoking.

Again, our response time is too slow, and we could have prevented many youngsters taking up a habit that could see a greater emergence of ‘black market’ products to meet their demand. Governments need to be proactive and respond to the early indicators, hence why we continue to call for greater capabilities in our public sector to have the ‘channels’ needed to effect to be predictive, and not wait until it has become a headline.

(460 words)