

INQUIRY INTO ILLEGAL TOBACCO TRADE

Name: Bronwyn Mandile

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Submission to the Parliament of Australia
Requesting an Inquiry into the Sale of Illegal Vapes and Cigarettes

To the Honourable Members of Parliament,

I write to you as a concerned citizen calling for an urgent inquiry into the sale, distribution and environmental impact of illegal vapes and cigarettes across Australia.

The proliferation of these harmful products in our communities is cause for serious alarm — particularly in relation to their accessibility to children and their growing environmental toll.

1. Protecting children from illegal tobacco and vaping products

There is growing evidence that illegal vapes and cigarettes are readily available to minors across the country. Despite national regulations prohibiting the sale of nicotine vapes and tobacco products to anyone under 18, these laws are being flouted openly — and too often, with impunity.

Children are accessing these products via unregulated convenience stores, “pop-up” retailers and an expanding network of vape shops that appear to operate without adequate scrutiny or enforcement. The bright packaging, sweet flavours, and targeted marketing of these products are clearly designed to appeal to young people, and schools and parents are reporting increasing rates of nicotine addiction among children as young as 12.

This is not merely a health issue. It is a matter of public safety, regulatory failure, and long-term social cost. Nicotine addiction in adolescence can have lasting effects on brain development, mental health, and learning outcomes. We cannot afford to let an illegal trade take root that targets the most vulnerable members of our community.

I respectfully urge Parliament to investigate the supply chains, retail practices and enforcement measures surrounding the illegal vape and cigarette market — with a particular emphasis on protecting children from harm.

2. Environmental damage from discarded vape and cigarette waste

Vapes and cigarettes are not only harming human health, they are also wreaking havoc on the environment.

Disposable vapes, now sold in ever-increasing numbers, are made of plastic, lithium batteries, heavy metals and toxic e-liquid residue. When discarded — often after a single use — they contribute to a dangerous waste stream that leaches into soil and waterways. They are nearly impossible to recycle and rarely disposed of responsibly.

Cigarette butts remain the most littered item in Australia, with more than 8 billion dumped annually. They contain plastic filters and toxic chemicals that poison marine life and soil ecosystems.

Yet, despite their prevalence and impact, there has been no meaningful national strategy to manage or regulate this hazardous waste.

An inquiry should urgently assess the environmental burden of these products and identify opportunities to regulate their production, packaging, disposal and post-consumer recovery.

3. The unchecked spread of vape shops in local communities

Finally, the rapid rise in the number of vape retailers — many of which operate with little oversight — is a serious concern. These outlets are appearing in close proximity to schools, shopping centres, youth hubs and residential neighbourhoods.

Their growing presence normalises vaping culture in everyday community spaces and undermines public health messaging around addiction, smoking cessation, and healthy lifestyles.

We need a clear understanding of how these businesses are being licensed, what compliance measures are in place, and whether there is adequate enforcement at the local and state levels.

A national inquiry should consider the regulatory gaps that have allowed these retailers to flourish, including the importation, sale and marketing of illicit products.

In conclusion, I respectfully call on Parliament to launch a formal inquiry into the illegal sale and environmental impact of vapes and cigarettes, with a focus on:

- Safeguarding children and young people from nicotine addiction
- Investigating the environmental harms associated with vape and cigarette waste
- Addressing the unchecked expansion of vape shops in our communities

Australia has long been a global leader in tobacco control. We must act decisively to protect our children, our communities, and our environment from the growing harms posed by these products.

Yours sincerely,
Bronwyn Mandile