

The Use and Marketing of Electronic Cigarettes and Personal Vaporisers in Australia

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Brisbane

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The Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport has been asked to inquire into and report on the use and marketing of electronic cigarettes (E-cigarettes) and personal vaporisers in Australia.

I would like to address terms 2 and 4 of the Inquiry.

1. The use and marketing of E-cigarettes and personal vaporisers to assist people to quit smoking.

A very recent paper, by Neil McKeganey and Tiffany Dickson, 'Why Don't More Smokers Switch to Using E-Cigarettes: The Views of Confirmed Smokers', concludes, on the basis of a survey of UK smokers, that E-cigarettes may assist some, but no means all, smokers to quit.¹

The paper draws an important conclusion. The committee should not have to argue that E-cigarettes in Australia could only be legitimate if they wipe out smoking. They will not. It is unlikely that anything will: whether gouging taxation by the government or stern warnings by public health officials. Nevertheless, if E-cigarettes are to play some part in the diminution of tobacco smoking the market should be allowed to flourish.

The paper argues that "whilst much of the current public health information around e-cigarettes has focussed on their lower level of harm (compared to combustible tobacco products) it was notable that the relative harm of these products was not a prominent feature in our smokers' reasons for why they had used these devices, nor in their reasons for continuing to smoke. If e-cigarettes are going to appeal to a much wider range of smokers, it will be necessary for the vaping experience to be at least as enjoyable as smoking (in terms of smokers' perceptions) and very probably more enjoyable than smoking."

What is refreshing about the paper is that the researchers bothered to ask smokers their views. It also opens the challenge to manufacturers to develop products that appeal to smokers. To develop a market in these products, the committee must make it possible for manufacturers to do so, which brings us to the fourth term of reference.

¹ *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 2017, 14(6), 647.

4. The appropriate regulatory framework for E-cigarettes and personal vaporisers in Australia.

At present, E-cigarettes are illegal because the sale and distribution of nicotine is prohibited. However, there is an express exemption for tobacco containing nicotine if it is “prepared and packed for smoking”.

This is weird. The government makes legitimate the sale and distribution of a poison only if it is combined with a far greater poison! How embarrassing.

This embarrassment should be undone.

The fear is that revoking the ban on E-cigarettes would legitimise a somewhat harmful product and may induce some to smoke an even more harmful product: tobacco.

There could be a concern in liberalisation if non-smokers, who would not otherwise take up tobacco, were induced to take up E-cigarettes, and then to smoking tobacco.

Is there any proof that would happen?

There could be a celebration if tobacco smokers switched to E-cigarettes, for which there is proof.

It could be argued that if one more smoker were to switch from tobacco to E-cigarettes, than non-smokers induced to take up E-cigarettes, who would not otherwise do so, the exercise of liberalising access to E-cigarettes would be worthwhile.

A better way to conceive the issue, however, is for the committee to regard these two groups of people as part of a whole, even if they are not. E-cigarettes would carry an appropriate health warning for the level of risk but would be subject to the same age, public space, and advertising restrictions, and taxation regime as tobacco.

In this way fears of an escalator effect would be overcome.

Not opening the E-cigarette market would be an act of spite on the part of those who believe that they should control any harm that consumers may choose. In this regard, I refer Members to my recent book, “Your Body Belongs to the Nation: and other public health lobby errors.”

The present legislation should be liberalised to allow for E-cigarettes and allied products to meet the varied needs of consumers, including tobacco smokers, who have shown that they may not move to less harmful alternatives, in the numbers hoped for, unless they are more pleasurable than tobacco.