
— Opinion

Vapers' facelift: new pitch, same sponsors

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That didn't take long – six weeks into a new government and the tobacco and vaping lobby has rearranged the deck chairs, ready for a *completely* new approach.

Yes, they want a vaping inquiry. Another one. This time it's all about human rights. And they have high hopes for the new Labor government.



Unconventionally, Senator Hollie Hughes draws the line at calling British American Tobacco a tobacco company. That's demonising the industry. **Alex Ellinghausen**

Senator **Hollie Hughes** was totally on message with Monday's *Four Corners* program on vaping, saying it was all about "the personal choice aspect".

New Zealand's pro-vaping Labor government is seen as a model, conveniently disregarding youth surveys there that show vaping use has trebled and nearly one

in five students vape every day.

Vaping activist **Alex Wodak** has been telling supporters **Anthony Albanese** is “not a prohibitionist”, a rosy-eyed view shared by Victorian MP **Fiona Patten**, fresh from her industry-sponsored trip to the Global Forum on Nicotine in Warsaw.

It must be the time to travel. On June 16 **Colin Mendelsohn**, founder of Australia Tobacco Harm Reduction Association, was on a panel at the World Vape Show in Dubai, beside Philip Morris and British America Tobacco executives. The session, titled Vaping Research and Public Health, initially was to be sponsored by the UK’s Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, before it had a late change of heart.

“If you want to vape, if you want to smoke, if you want to have a nicotine tab or spray, you should be allowed to do that,” Hughes told *Four Corners*.

And right on cue a bevy of industry groups for grocers, newsagents and convenience stores on Monday spontaneously called for a national policy summit to end the current regulation of e-cigarettes.

Remarkably, when asked whether she had spoken about vaping with her close friend **Michael Kauter**, who heads BAT’s lobbying arm, Hollie said, “I have no problem talking to anyone about anything,” before going on to protest that calling British American Tobacco a tobacco company just demonises it. It’s so unfair.

Actually there’s a UN treaty Australia has signed that limits politicians’ contacts with tobacco industry spruikers. But there’s always a way.

From at least August 2019, tobacco giant Philip Morris had an arrangement to pay the Australian Retailers Association indirectly, via PR firm Burson Cohn & Wolfe. It was \$250,000 every six months to lobby for vaping deregulation.

New ARA chief **Paul Zahra** ended the contract

[<https://www.afr.com/companies/retail/australian-retailers-association-cancels-secret-tobacco-contract-20210219-p5740g>] in August 2020. The vaping lobby didn’t miss a beat.

In September National Retail Association chief **Dominique Lamb**, who had not spoken previously about e-cigarettes, overnight became a passionate advocate

[<https://www.afr.com/policy/health-and-education/senators-claim-retail-lobby-group-misled-e-cigarette-inquiry-20210303-p577e7>] for vaping.



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She wouldn't say whether the NRA had received funding from Philip Morris, but the June 2021 accounts did reveal a new benefactor. Policy services revenue jumped \$473,000—that's money contributed to promote a particular policy.

What did the NRA do with its money? In July 2020 it donated \$20,000 to the Liberal National Party in Queensland, around the time LNP Senator **Matt Canavan** was agitating for a vaping inquiry.

The new funding has helped the NRA employ no less than three lobbying firms—TG Public Affairs, Hawker Britten and JPG Advisory, run by former Canavan staffer **Jeremy Greenwood**.

Another inquiry? It's a long game. Give it 12 months.

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