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**EDITORIAL: Big or little tobacco, the industry has a right to argue its case - even if we disagree**

<https://www.theadvocate.com.au/story/6497265/tobacco-lobby-can-speak-too/?cs=7650>

The reality of smoking has been known for decades and yet big tobacco is still fighting to make a buck from a product that kills.

It would be far from realistic to expect the industry to do otherwise; to sit by and watch its business steadily stubbed out.

Like a lung cancer sufferer it will go to its grave with a hacking cough, struggling with every breath to stay alive.

And it will do so by opposing any new measure, any initiative, that may prove effective in cutting smoking rates.

They will throw money at political parties to try to influence policy, they will appeal to their die-hard consumers - and many of them will die hard - to protect their "rights" and they will lobby politicians mercilessly.

It would be surprising if Tasmanian Upper House members were not being harangued by the tobacco industry as they consider a push to raise the smoking age.

The proposal sponsored by veteran independent Ivan Dean is to raise the legal smoking age from 18 to 21 over three years.

Public opposition has been led by the Tasmanian Small Business Council, who, as representatives of small retailers, might be dubbed little tobacco.

Their executive officer, Robert Mallett, has run with the self-defeating argument that such a law would not reduce smoking rates but might put small stores out of business.

Still, the industry - from the top to the bottom - has the right to state its case.

It is somewhat concerning then that an anti-smoking lobby would argue people like Mr Mallett shouldn't be able to meet privately with parliamentarians to discuss their opposition to the proposed law.

SmokeFree Tasmania says such meetings would be in breach of the World Health Organisation Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, but it is questionable the agreement was intended to reach so far.

Further, as Mr Mallett says, the group is undoubtedly having private meetings of its own with MPs, so what's good for one is surely good for another.

The bottom-line is public policy debates should be won on the merits of the relative arguments - not by denying one side or other its voice.

**What do you think? You can send us a Letter to the Editor using the form below.**