

# Bhisho calls for total smoking ban

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THE Eastern Cape government is to recommend to Parliament that smoking be banned outright across the country.

The move, which follows calls from people at public hearings, emerged last week when members of the joint committee on health and social development considered the Tobacco Products Control Amendment Bill.

The Bill does not deal with the issue of banning smoking, but Bhisho decided to make a submission to that effect based on "public sentiment".

The members held public hearings across the province last month on the Bill, which makes provision for the following, among other things:

The prohibition of tobacco sales to children younger than 18;

A ban on toys resembling tobacco products;

A ban on selling, supplying, distributing and buying tobacco products through postal services, the Internet or any electronic media;

The restriction of vending machines to places where children have no access ; and

An increase in fines to R100000 for contravening the law, once the Bill has been passed.

Chairperson Mike Basopu said the banning of tobacco came up at the public hearings. "People are saying smoking must be banned and selling loose cigarettes should be stopped," said Basopu.

Comments of residents in the Eastern Cape included one from Port St Johns, which said: "The production and selling of tobacco products should be totally stopped."

Mqanduli residents shared similar sentiments and called for the speedy implementation of the Bill into law. "The tobacco products should be banned altogether, failing which chemical or nicotine presence in the tobacco be reduced," said one resident in Mqanduli.

People in such towns as Mount Fletcher and Matatiele felt smokers should be encouraged to quit. But those in Tsolo raised the issue of possible job losses.

A mini-debate followed in the Legislature last week when legal adviser Innocent Netshitumbu said it was not the intention of the Health Department to completely ban tobacco. "If you look at the spirit of the Bill in its totality you don't see the intention of the department to completely ban tobacco ... their intention is to regulate," he said.

But Xoliswa Tom, chairperson of the Social Development committee, said: "We are supposed to say what the people are saying." She was supported by other MPLs.

Committee member Athol Trollip said there was no overwhelming consensus at public hearings he attended that tobacco should be banned. "I can support it if we say in our mandate that there is a strong movement among the community to have tobacco products banned."

MPL Alfred Mtsi said despite the general feeling for a total ban, there were socio-economic implications to consider.

After the debate it was resolved that the public's call to ban all tobacco products be conveyed to Parliament.