

# Smoking business owner hurt by policies

IT'S tough to keep a shop open when the government wants to put you out of business.

But as a tobacconist Prakash Balia understands why the government and health organisations would dearly love him and his fellow shop owners to shut up for good.

What the owner of Tobacco Station Burpengary doesn't understand is the "ad-hoc" policies bandied about by politicians to do so.

Mr Balia said Family First Senator Steve Fielding's proposal to take all promotional packaging off cigarettes won't stop people smoking but will run tobacconists out of business.

Mr Fielding introduced the Plain Tobacco Packaging Bill earlier this year.

He wants tobacco giants to pack all their cigarettes in the same plain cardboard packets.

"The way I look at it they won't stop people smoking they will just squeeze out the retailers," he said.

Mr Balia said his retail margin on cigarettes sales was only between 2% and 5%.

He said he makes most of his money on other pro-

ducts sold in his shop.

"Plain cigarette packaging will force legal manufacturers to compete by lowering prices and not by branding anymore, therefore cheaper cigarettes give smokers a stronger incentive to smoke even more," he said.

"Manufacturers competing on price alone will ultimately lower retail margins in what is a critical category for retailers' business."

As a tobacconist Mr Balia is used to walking a moral tightrope.

But to his critics he says he is just selling a legal product.

"If there is a problem with the product then the government should ban it," he said.

"It is just like selling booze that can also kill people."

The World Health Organisation put the number of deaths world-wide from smoking at five million a year.

While second-hand smoke is estimated to kill 600,000.



**NEW OFFICE:** Workers Malcolm Thomson and Leanne Bell are shown the work that the new office of Interlock does by manager Debbie Kimber.

*Photo: Vicki Wood/c15285*