



THE PUNT

Touchy topic of tobacco law

A LITTLE-KNOWN lobby group of vending machine operators was in Dublin yesterday. Members of the Irish Cigarette Machine Operators met for an Extraordinary General Meeting, amid reports that the licence fee for parties who sell cigarettes could be bumped up from €50 to €1,000. This would include pubs and other outlets that only sell the product through vending machines. The measures "have the potential to decimate our industry in a very short space of time", spokesperson Cormac Dunne said.

The Punt is boggled by just how many lobbyists have come out of the woodwork in the tobacco legislation debate. Even something as simple as packaging has caused consternation and widespread wrangling - tobacco companies, retailers, publicans, the Government, health spokespeople, average Joes; everyone has something to say.

We're agog to see what the reaction will be if moves are ever made to follow up on a motion passed at the last Fine Gael ard fheis. It called for Health Minister James Reilly to investigate the possibility of separating the sale of tobacco and alcohol - meaning pubs, bars and off-licences could be completely prohibited from selling cigarettes, while shops would have to choose between selling booze or fags.