



Fees for bills under scrutiny.

Minister McCormack backs consumers: Disadvantaged should not be penalised.

For release Friday 1st September

Federal Minister McCormack, following the Consumer Affairs Forum in Melbourne yesterday, has confirmed that consumers shouldn't be penalised for choosing paper bills: "Consumers – including the elderly and disadvantaged – who do not have access to technology to receive digital bills should not be penalised and asked to pay exorbitant fees for each bill they receive."

Keep Me Posted, the group advocating for a ban on all billing fees, welcomes the outcomes of the Consumer Affairs Forum and urges Minister McCormack to act quickly to enhance consumer protection in the matter.

"This is a step forward for consumers," commented Kellie Northwood, Executive Director, Keep Me Posted. "Minister McCormack has recognised that disadvantaged groups are the most impacted and we urge him to use all the power available to his office to take decisive action in the matter and not delay a process which is impacting millions of Australians."

The Keep Me Posted campaign has announced that they will keep on the fight as they seek quick resolution for consumers. Highlighting that prolonged conversations and review impacts our most vulnerable as the fees keep adding up for Australians.

On Thursday 31st August, at the Consumer Affairs Forum (CAF) held in Melbourne, the Commonwealth, State, Territory and New Zealand Ministers in charge of Consumer Affairs announced that "Commonwealth Treasury will undertake regulatory assessment of fees for paper billing with the assistance of CAANZ members."

As an interim measure, the Ministers have announced consumer education on exemptions from fees for paper bills. Keep Me Posted has provided information to the Ministers explaining that those exemptions vary immensely across providers and requires greater rigor. Keep Me Posted's supporters report enormous difficulty to obtain such exemptions and the campaign has been providing letter templates to help consumers send their message direct to banks, telcos and service providers who are implementing billing fees.

"Australians are confused and frustrated as to their rights and what steps they should take, we consistently hear, when people try to move from a service provider the only other options that operate in the area are also charging fees. Utilities in particular need to review their practice, it is appalling the way Australians paying for essential services are being treated," commented Northwood.

"Raising awareness about exemptions will not be enough," furthered Northwood. "We believe it is not up to the private sector to assess people's vulnerabilities. We see great discrepancies between providers, some granting exemptions for people over 60, others for people over 80. People feel that they are discriminated against because of their age or their personal situation. We will be working

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with Minister McCormack on how we can build best practice guidelines and legislative reform to truly protect consumers.”

Keep Me Posted calls on companies to do the right thing and stop alienating and penalising their most vulnerable consumers for choosing to receive what CAF qualified as “vital communications”.

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High-resolution Media Pack available here: http://www.keepmeposted.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/hr_media-pack-sept-17.zip

Keep Me Posted:

The Keep Me Posted (KMP) campaign represents advocate groups, charities, consumer groups, employer and employee representatives, industry and political representatives who believe in the right to choose the way companies communicate with them. KMP believes every consumer should be able to choose, without penalty, how they prefer to be communicated to via banks, utility companies and other services providers. www.keepmeposted.org.au