



Keep Me Posted calls on Australians to support the ban on paper fees

For immediate release

Are we finally heading towards the end of paper billing fees?

On Tuesday 21 November, Treasury launched the process that could see the end of paper billing fees for Australian consumers.

"There has been a significant shift away from paper billing in recent years," Mr McCormack, Minister for Consumer Affairs, said. "Yet not every Australian consumer has the means to access digital billing and it is unfair to punish them for being unable to do so. Better outcomes and protections are needed for those consumers who do not have the option to transition to digital bills and who can least afford to be penalised."

Keep Me Posted, which has been working tirelessly for the last 18 months to obtain legislative reform, worked with the Minister's office in the lead up to the consultation and met with Treasury's representatives on Thursday afternoon as part of the consultation process.

"We clearly stated Keep Me Posted's position to support a total ban on all billing fees, which is option 2 of the consultation paper," said Kellie Northwood, Executive Director, Keep Me Posted. "We call on all Australians, stakeholders, interested groups and consumers to have their say and support the ban."

Treasury's consultation paper (<https://consult.treasury.gov.au/small-business-and-consumer-division/fees-for-paper-bills>) explores the costs and benefits of five (5) options, including the prohibition of paper fees, option 2. Keep Me Posted says it is the only option that can guarantee consumer protection against unfair and discriminatory charges.

Treasury is seeking submissions from consumers and consumer advocates, businesses and environmental groups. Individuals can leave an informal comment on the website or post a simple letter to Treasury.

According to Treasury's estimates, the total annual cost of a ban would be between \$80 and \$93 million for the sixteen (16) Australian businesses with the largest customer base. As a comparison, it is expected that abolishing ATM fees, measure that was announced in September, will cost the big four banks \$500 million a year. The relative cost to businesses doesn't seem very high compared with the financial pressure that is put on vulnerable consumers.

Keep Me Posted doesn't accept the idea that electronic bills are a 'free' option for consumers to receive their bills and statements. "When you opt-in to electronic bills and statements it means you need to possess and keep an electronic device, pay for an internet subscription or for mobile data, and more often than not you pay to print the bill at home," commented Kellie Northwood.

According to the World Economic Forum's Global Information Technology Report 2016, with a rank of 100 out of 139 countries for fixed broadband internet tariffs, Australia lags way behind in terms of internet affordability. More, the latest Deloitte report into mobile usage shows that 43% of

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smartphone owners regularly exceed their data allowance with a collective cost of \$300 million a year in extra charges.

Further, the ACCC reported that Australians lost nearly \$300 million to scams in 2016, \$84 million in losses being reported to Scamwatch and nearly \$216 million to ACORN and other scam disruption programs. The majority of these scams, 43%, were delivered by electronic means while only 4.1% came in the mail. In October, ACCC revealed that False billing is one of the top three (3) scams that Australians are most likely to encounter online.

Tim Hammond, Shadow Minister for Consumer Affairs and vocal supporter of the ban welcomed Treasury's consultation paper and urged Australians who don't want to pay extra to receive a bill by post to make a submission. Tim Hammond also criticised the Government for not tackling the issue sooner. Back in June, Tim Hammond moved a motion in Parliament to ask the Government to restore consumer protection. "We've got to restore the playing field for those who don't have easy access online to make sure they are not getting stung for paper bills," Tim commented.

"For Australians consumers, we really want the issue to be solved as soon as possible," concluded Northwood. "It's time for Government to apply a bit of good old fashioned common sense and make it clear to super profit companies that hidden or added costs along the way are not acceptable."

Australians have until Friday 22nd December to make a submission.

Submission details:

On the website

www.treasury.gov.au/consultation or
<https://consult.treasury.gov.au/small-business-and-consumer-division/fees-for-paper-bills/>

By Mail to

Paper Billing Consultation Paper
Small Business and Consumer Policy Division
The Treasury
Langton Crescent
PARKES ACT 2600

Enquiries

Ms Peta Dixon, Consumer Policy Unit
consumerlaw@treasury.gov.au, 02 6263 2886

Closing date for submissions

Friday 22 December 2017

- ends -

Further information and Media enquiries: Lori Mitchell – 03 9421 2209 / lori@twosides.org.au
High-resolution Media Pack available here: http://www.keepmeposted.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/hr_media-pack-nov-17.zip

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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

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