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Blanket ban: Consumer advocates push to scrap paper billing fees

KAREN COLLIER, CONSUMER REPORTER, Herald Sun

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COMPANIES should be banned from charging customers to receive paper bills, leading consumer advocates say.

The fees can punish disadvantaged customers, or those who simply prefer posted bills, the federal government has been told.

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 There are calls for a blanket ban on paper bill fees. Picture: iStock

While waivers for certain people such as those on concessions, in hardship, or with no home internet often apply, concerns have been raised about public awareness of such exemptions.

“Consumers should be able to manage their finances in a way that best suits their needs, rather than being pushed towards an inconvenient or unsuitable option simply to boost company profits,” Consumer Action chief Gerard Brody said.

“Businesses are clearly able to save money by sending electronic bills, but savings from electronic bills are rarely passed on to consumers.”

Energy retailers were recently prohibited from charging NSW customers fees for paper billing.

Major provider [EnergyAustralia](#) confirmed it is now reviewing its approach in other states, including Victoria.

Businesses have denied profiteering from paper billing fees.

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 Gerard Brody from the Consumer Action Law Centre. Picture: Supplied

Treasury’s consultation paper canvasses several potential options to protect disadvantaged consumers who are unable to access digital bills.

These include banning all or essential services paper billing fees, limiting fees to cost recovery or keeping the status quo and promoting exemptions.

An estimated 1.2 million Australians do not have home internet access because they either can’t afford it or don’t believe they have the necessary technical skills.

Treasury’s paper notes that scrapping paper billing fees could mean: “Consumers who elect to receive digital bills would effectively subsidise those who do not — meaning they could pay marginally higher monthly bills.”

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