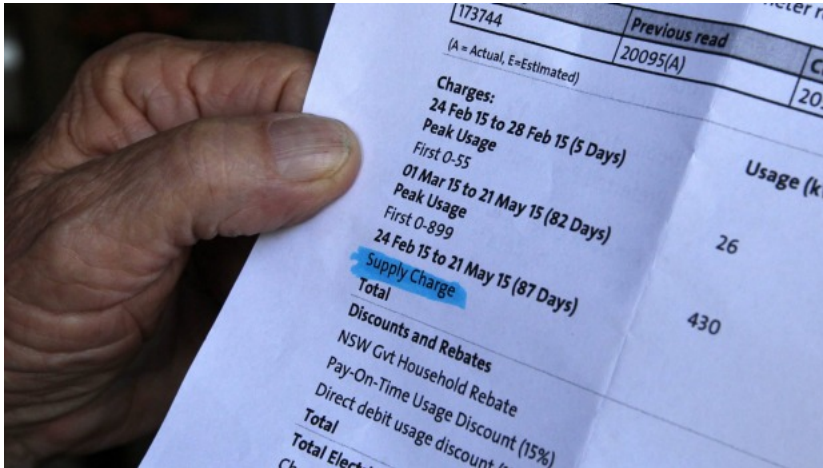


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Treasury considers a ban on all fees for paper bills



Big businesses including banks, telcos and energy providers are increasingly charging customers "paper billing fees" between \$1.50 to \$2.75 per bill. Darren Pateman



by Misa Han

Banks, telcos and energy providers could be banned from charging fees to provide customers with paper bills, under a Treasury plan to protect vulnerable consumers.

These companies charge customers fees between \$1.50 to \$2.75 per bill, as a way to encourage consumers to move to digital bills. The Commonwealth Bank charges \$2.50 per paper bill, Telstra charges \$2.20 and AGL \$1.75.

In a [consultation paper released on Tuesday](#), Treasury put forward five options to protect consumers who may pay paper billings fees out of necessity because they cannot access digital bills.

The options include banning all paper billing fees and banning essential service providers such as energy, telco and banks from charging paper billing fees.

According to the Keep Me Posted campaign, a paper bill costs businesses between \$0.88 and \$1.02 to produce.

The Treasury estimates if 16 businesses with the largest customer base were banned from charging paper billing fees, it would cost them between \$80 and \$93 million a year.

The Treasury says banning fees would mean "customers who elect to receive digital bills would effectively subsidise those who do not - meaning they could pay marginally higher monthly bills".

It would also mean businesses have to come up with alternative incentives to get customers to switch, for example by developing more secure and user friendly platforms to remove barriers to individuals from accessing digital bills.



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However, this could also result in increased paper waste, the Treasury said.

Treasury said while many consumers may choose paper bills due to personal preference, disadvantaged customers may be receiving paper bills out of necessity.

They included a sizeable minority, 1.5 million households as of 2015, who do not have access to the internet, and those who lack the technical skills or technology to pay the bills online, the Treasury said.

This was particularly a problem for consumers with low income and low education levels, older Australians and individuals with disability, according to the consultation paper.

Large companies often provide exemptions for various disadvantaged consumers including pensioners and people with disabilities. In addition at CBA customers are not charged for paper bills on their transaction accounts and at Telstra customers with no registered email are automatically exempt from paying the fee.

AGL does not charge the fee to various groups including customers who are registered for a concession and customers without internet access.

"We recommend customers choose to receive their bills by email, for which there is no charge," AGL spokesman said.

Other options put forward by the Treasury include only allowing businesses to charge the cost of producing the paper bill, and "nudging" businesses to promote their exemption programs for certain disadvantaged groups.

The consultation comes after the big four banks [abolished \\$2 ATM fees in September](#) after facing pressure from customers and the government. This measure is expected to cost the banks about \$500 million a year.

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