

Teens stuck in custody

Bail denied for young people with nowhere to go.



ROUGH JUSTICE: Indigenous youths kept behind bars just for somewhere to stay. Photo: Thinkstock

Some courts are unable to grant Indigenous children bail because authorities are unable to find them a place to stay, a parliamentary inquiry has been told.

The problem was highlighted when police, magistrates and community leaders vented their frustration over the inability of governments to reduce the high number of Indigenous children and teens serving time behind bars.

At a recent roundtable discussion in the Sydney suburb of Redfern, the House of Representatives Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Committee was presented with a litany of complex and overlapping problems from those working at the coalface of the youth justice system.

Committee chair Shayne Neumann (Blair, Qld) said the rates of Indigenous youth in detention were “alarming” and conceded that Australia had gone backwards in its handling of the issue in the past 20 years.

According to witnesses, key factors contributing to the over-representation of Indigenous youths in custody include:

- accommodation shortages resulting in children languishing in detention;
- poor program and service coordination;
- inadequate help for those with drug, alcohol and mental health problems; and
- lack of support for parents dealing with troubled children.

Magistrate Joan Baptie of the Sydney Youth Drug and Alcohol Court told the committee courts are unable to release some young people because authorities have failed to find them somewhere to live.

“That often cannot be resolved and you have government departments that say, ‘that’s fine, just lock them up that will solve the problem of accommodation’,” she said.

“It sure does – but it’s not in this young person’s interest one would have thought because ultimately at some

LATEST

REVIEW TARGETS BARRIERS FACING MENTALLY ILL

Obstacles blocking access to education, training and employment opportunities for those with mental health issues will be the focus of a new parliamentary inquiry.

House of Representatives Education and Employment Committee Chair Amanda Rishworth (Kingston, SA) said the inquiry will also highlight the need to improve collaboration and coordination between government and service providers, as well as strategies to improve community, carer and employer capacity.

“The area of mental health is a particularly big issue for the federal government as is employment participation and education,” Ms Rishworth said.

“So we are bringing these two together to see what the barriers are that stop people with mental illness actually entering into the workforce,

staying in the workforce, and getting an education.

“Mental illness is a wide ranging issue, but we will be looking at everything from the chronic mental health issues, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, to the more prevalent issues such as depression and anxiety.”

The committee’s report and recommendations will aim to complement COAG’s National Action Plan on Mental Health and the Fourth National Mental Health Plan.

“We want to refine these strategies. It will be important for the inquiry to look at best practice and look at where things are going well, where the strategies are working, and where the strategies are not working, and come up with some recommendations for the government,” Ms Rishworth said. ●

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BUILDING A LIFE

When trying to explain to the young kids of Redfern why they don't want to end up in jail, Roy Smith is able to draw on his own experience.

"I've been in trouble with the police a fair bit," he said.

"I try to talk to them about when you're incarcerated, there's nothing for you. You can't get a job and there's no education. There's nothing there."

Like many Indigenous children, Roy's early life was marred with alcohol abuse and violence.

"My father was an alcoholic," he said. "I come from a family out west where you have to be hard. I was hit around a lot as a kid. I've seen my mum get bashed, a lot of confrontation between the families, my uncle and everyone like that."

Roy has been able to turn his life around with the help of Shane Phillips who is the chief executive of the Tribal Warrior Association.

Roy credits Shane with restoring his confidence and pride and for helping him realise life is about giving as well as taking.

Roy now works as a paid mentor along with a team of others at Tribal Warriors to help Indigenous teens in Redfern build a life from a tough childhood instead of turning to crime and substance abuse.

"We're trying to get them to see, even though you come from a place of hardship and breakdown – or somewhere that's not good, somewhere where violence, alcohol could be around them – that they don't have to turn to that path. They can go and be their own individual," he said.

Shane is keen to expand the association's mentor program.

He told the House of Representatives Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Committee at a recent hearing that having positive role models in Indigenous communities is invaluable.

"We've got young blokes like Roy who are responsible, who want to do something with their lives and they've actually made this much stronger than even we imagined," he said. •

stage they're going to be released back into the community and they're going to be angrier and less able to integrate."

Katherine McFarlane of the NSW Corrective Services Women's Advisory Council said the consequences for the children and their communities are far-reaching.

"In one instance I was looking at a file [and] a child had been in custody three weeks on what was an offensive language charge – a no jail offence – they were in jail for three weeks because no one could come up with anything," she said.

"You get this really bizarre situation where the child's being punished because no one can get organised enough to provide a safe environment for them.

"What that does to the child in terms of their belief and trust in the justice system is really questionable."

The committee was also told communities were in a "state of emergency" as witnesses urged immediate action from governments at all levels struggling to deal with the complexities of the problem.

Australian Institute of Criminology figures show Indigenous youths aged 10-17 are 24 times more likely to be jailed as non-Indigenous youths.

They are also 16 times more likely to be under supervision and 29 times more likely to be in detention on an average day as other young people.

Governments were urged to fund more programs to keep children on track from an early age, with the

suggestion that money be diverted away from prisons and into community support.

Queensland Police Commissioner Bob Atkinson said while crime rates were generally going down, more Indigenous people were ending up in jail – a situation he described as "troubling".

He called for a bipartisan approach from all governments to address the issue.

"Without wanting to sound negative in any way I do not think there is a single or simple solution to any of this, or a silver bullet. It's a long-term thing," he said.

Several witnesses highlighted the problems arising from administrative complexities and a lack of coordination between various agencies, which can hamper those making decisions on how best to help a young person caught up in the system.

Sam Jeffries from the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples said those working on the ground need to be given more freedom on where to allocate money.

"There needs to be some untied money for groups, whether it is local governments or state governments, so they have complete flexibility to do things that are outside the normal scope of designing and delivering programs and services," he said.

Several witnesses also stressed the importance of having strong mentors available for young people to help them make better life choices.



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Shane Phillips, chief executive of the Tribal Warrior Association in Redfern, emphasised to the committee how much of a difference mentors can make.

“Generational change is what we need. We are in a state of emergency. We cannot afford any more experiments,” he said.

“It’s really simple. We want to help people. We want people who have got some influence, who are worthy of trying to be a good mentor, help other people engage.”

Roy Smith is now working as a paid mentor for Tribal Warriors after overcoming a difficult childhood marred by alcoholism and violence.

He said he tries to show kids their past does not need to dictate their future.

“I try and bring a bit of pride into them about being an Indigenous person,” he said.

Redfern Police Local Area Command Superintendent Luke Freudenstein works closely with Mr Phillips and other Indigenous community leaders. He told the inquiry he has had considerable success in reducing robbery rates through a number of sports programs run by police with the help of organisations such as Tribal Warriors.

“We’re obviously in t-shirts and shorts and we just box with them, and they see us as people who care for them,” he said.

“We’re not just there to arrest them, or to move them on or search them.”

Shayne Neumann said he hoped the committee would make some strong recommendations in its report to parliament.

“We’re tough on juvenile crime but unfortunately when we do that we have a situation where more and more Indigenous youth and young adults are actually caught up in the system,” he said.

“So we’ve got to be tough on the causes of crime and not just on the crime itself and that’s coming through in the evidence.” •

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GROWING DEMAND: Forestry’s future in the spotlight. Photo: Thinkstock

Forestry review welcomed

Australia’s peak forest industry body has welcomed a parliamentary inquiry into the long term options for the growth of and investment in Australian forestry.

Allan Hansard, CEO of the National Association of Forest Industries, said the inquiry provides an opportunity to refocus the industry.

“Australia’s forest policy framework is nearing the end of its shelf life,” Mr Hansard said.

“NAFI welcomes the terms of reference of the inquiry, including the analysis of the relationship between forestry and water resources and the industry’s ability to integrate with traditional agriculture in the landscape.

“Forests provide the essentials of life including renewable wood and paper products for shelter and other needs. On our current course, Australia will not have enough locally grown wood to meet our future needs. Australia’s growing population will require 7.1 million new dwellings and at least 64 million cubic metres of construction timber by 2050.”

The forestry review is being conducted by the House of Representatives Agriculture, Resources, Fisheries and Forestry Committee.

Committee chair Dick Adams (Lyons, Tas) said the inquiry will assist in the future viability of the Australian forestry industry in the face of heightened environmental concerns and international competition in woodchips and paper milling.

“The industry is going through major change and Australia needs to change with it,” Mr Adams said.

“We need to ensure that innovation is being identified and supported, that

new ideas are accessible, and that the implications of change to the forestry industry upon communities and the economy are fully considered. We must get this right if we are to maintain an internationally competitive forestry sector.”

The inquiry will explore the social and economic impacts of the forestry industry, as well as current and future opportunities for industry development, diversification and innovation.

There will be a particular focus on models of investment, environmental issues, plantations, energy production, land use and farm forestry.

The committee will also investigate improvements in productivity and possible strategies to address the \$2.2 billion forestry trade deficit.

“Australia imports \$4.5 billion of forest and forest products, which is a big drain on our trade figures. We could improve that a lot,” Mr Adams said.

“The Australian community has a large and growing demand for forest products. We need to ensure that demand is being met in ways that are environmentally and economically sustainable, and beneficial to Australia.”

Education and skill levels will also be considered to ensure they match the employment requirements of the industry.

“I’m very conscious of making sure that we have enough foresters, with the changes to forestry that we do not lose the professional foresters, and that our training and academic levels are maintained,” Mr Adams said. •

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Japan treaty boosts cooperation

Australia and Japan will be able to work together in military evacuations of foreign nationals under a new treaty examined by federal parliament's Treaties Committee.

The Japan-Australia Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement allows for closer logistical cooperation and sharing of resources such as fuel and transport when engaged in joint operations.

The treaty arrangements will be used primarily during exercises and training, humanitarian and peacekeeping missions and military-led evacuations.

Department of Defence assistant secretary Benjamin Burdon told a public hearing if the agreement had been in place last year it would have improved cooperation between the two countries working on the assistance mission in the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake.

Australia offered to provide uplift for Japanese disaster relief crews and materials, but was restricted by the

logistics of loading and carrying Japanese equipment on Australian aircraft.

"Certainly we were willing to do so, and there was will on both sides to do so," Mr Burdon said. "Unfortunately we were defeated by some of the technical considerations."

Air Vice Marshal Margaret Staib said the purpose of the agreement is to set in place a framework to facilitate such activities, rather than making ad hoc arrangements during operations.

"The agreement is significant as it is the only logistic support treaty that Japan has in place in addition to its current logistics agreement with the United States," she said. "In particular it will benefit Australia by formalising and enhancing the quality of and potential for defence cooperation with Japan."

The treaty does not apply to offensive operations and specifically excludes the exchange of military equipment such as weapons systems or explosives.



HEALTHY RELATIONS: Closer ties between Australia and Japan. Photo: Department of Defence

It will also not apply to evacuation operations using commercial rather than military aircraft, such as the recent evacuations of Australians from Egypt. •

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Prisoners in China may come home



HEIMCOMING: Jailed Australians could benefit from transfer treaty. Photo: photolibrary

Australians imprisoned in China could be able to come home under new treaty agreements before parliament.

If the new treaty is passed, Australia will become the first country to have a prisoner transfer arrangement with China.

Under the treaty Australian citizens imprisoned in China will be able to serve out their sentences in Australia, provided the two countries and the individual involved all agree to the transfer.

Chinese nationals imprisoned in Australia will also be able to be transferred back to China under the same terms.

The Attorney-General's Department told the Treaties Committee that bringing prisoners home allows them to be closer to family, overcomes language barriers and improves the chance of rehabilitation.

There is also a chance for prisoners to have their sentences adapted before transfer so that their sentence more closely

matches the punishment they would have received in their home country.

The department gave the example of several Australian women who were serving 35 year sentences in Thailand for various offences, well above the 'life' sentence of 25 years in Australia.

They were able to be transferred back to Australia under the existing prisoner transfer arrangement, and by agreement their sentences were lowered to a similar level they would have received under Australian law.

The treaty will only apply to people convicted of offences that are considered criminal in both Australia and China, and any Australian facing the death penalty in China would need to have that sentence commuted before being eligible for transfer. •

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Gambling industry fears commitment

Reforms aimed at limiting the money spent by gamblers are meeting resistance.

The Productivity Commission has defended its recommendation to require gamblers to set loss limits before playing gaming machines, in the face of fierce criticism from the gaming industry.

Productivity Commission Chair Gary Banks told the federal parliamentary committee on gambling reform that he is confident the benefits of the commission's proposals outweigh the costs to the industry.

"The potential gains from reform in relation to gambling policy and regulation are very large," Mr Banks said. "As we show in the report, the social costs amount to billions of dollars, especially related to poker machines, and those social costs have increased over time."

However the Australian Hotels Association claimed a mandatory pre-commitment scheme could cost up to \$4 billion to introduce and will drive many small pubs and clubs out of business.

"It also must be recognised the introduction of a full, mandatory pre-commitment scheme will lead to the immediate loss of many thousands of jobs and millions of dollars in community support," the AHA said in its submission to the inquiry.

The Productivity Commission's Robert Fitzgerald said some of the huge costs predicted by industry are based on false assumptions about the mandatory pre-commitment system.

"One of the things which has been wrongly reported is that every single gambler would need to register. That is not so," Mr Fitzgerald said.

"In our recommendations we have been very clear that irregular players – players who play only occasionally – who have a very low spend would be able to go to a venue and receive a cash card or a card which has a limit of, say, \$20, a low-value card.

"When that card is expended, that is the end of it. Most recreational gamblers will not even fall within the

pre-commitment system, unless they so choose or they want to spend a larger sum of money."

Despite this, various clubs and hotels have made individual submissions supporting the AHA's position, stating lower gaming revenues and upgrade costs will mean they have to cut staff, food and drink subsidies and community support.

Club Central Menai in the NSW Illawarra region said the changes would lead to a profit drop of more than 80 per cent, and the capital costs to upgrade its 155 gaming machines would make the club unviable.

"If the club was made to adhere to these extreme measures it would no longer be able to offer the benefits that it was designed to do," the club said in its submission. "The club would struggle to survive in its most basic form.

"The Menai district risks losing the only community based club of its type. This would be considered a tragedy amongst local residents."

However St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland Social Justice Committee Chair Stephen Doyle questioned whether gambling revenue is needed to support the community, saying only a small percentage of income derived from gambling is directed to community organisations.

"It is also argued that it will cause a loss of revenue and employment opportunities if these measures are brought in," Mr Doyle said. "Our position is that those employment and revenue opportunities will be created somewhere else, probably in more socially desirable areas such as housing and retail."

Gambling Reform Committee Chair Andrew Wilkie (Denison, Tas) said he understands that smaller clubs and pubs have special needs during and after a transition to mandatory pre-commitment.



BEST BET: Debate rages over loss limits for gamblers. Photo: Newspix

"The weight of evidence though is clearly behind the need for reform and in support of mandatory pre-commitment," Mr Wilkie said. "There is no doubt that the majority of witnesses and the majority of what people have had to say is behind me on this."

The next step is to enlist the support of the state governments, who have been invited to respond to the scheme by the end of May.

Mr Wilkie said he is confident that mandatory pre-commitment will be rolled out nationwide by 2014, with or without the support of the states.

"I have an agreement with the Prime Minister and all the evidence is that the government is determined to honour that agreement. If it comes to the crunch, if we have to vote on it in the parliament I believe I'll get the numbers, I believe I've got the numbers now." •

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DEEPER UNDERSTANDING: Agreement sought on what multiculturalism means. Photo: photolibary

Missing link in multicultural debate

Ethnic communities see benefit in substantial debate on multiculturalism.

A parliamentary inquiry into multiculturalism will play a key role in shifting debate away from political point-scoring so parliament can take a bipartisan approach to future policy directions, according to a leading advocate for ethnic communities.

Parliament's Migration Committee recently announced it would conduct the inquiry in a move which coincided with the federal government's decision to establish an independent body to help advise it on a new policy.

The inquiry will investigate the contribution migrants have made to the economy and society, the adequacy of settlement programs on offer, and how to better harness the skills immigrants bring to Australia.

Despite the government's recent re-commitment to a multicultural policy, the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia said there is still a need for the inquiry.

FECCA chair Pino Migliorino said an agreed definition of what multiculturalism should be is missing.

"At the moment the problem is that people say, 'multiculturalism is X and therefore we don't like it', and other people say the opposite and say, 'we like

it' so there's not a common definition and without a common definition I think we'll continue to have these debates," he said.

"Once it establishes what it is then we can actually put some meat around that structure and actually start speaking about the same things."

With the multiculturalism debate often becoming tangled in political arguments over immigration, refugees and population policy – especially around election time – Mr Migliorino believes the inquiry can strengthen a united approach to the issue by parliament.

"A bipartisan approach means you take it away from the emotive issues and we can discuss it in a far more substantial way," he said.

"The parliamentary committee's inquiry will have an important aspect to this because that committee involves people from right across the political spectrum and they'll be working with people who give evidence to actually come to terms with what it means in an Australian context."

Committee chair Maria Vamvakinou, (Calwell, Vic) was quick to emphasise that multiculturalism in Australia has been a success but insisted this does not render the inquiry redundant.

"New and different communities arrive, economic and social conditions change and government programs must therefore be reviewed to ensure relevance, value for money and effectiveness," she said.

"There is a lot of debate at the moment about multiculturalism as a policy and we think it's a good time to have a look at what the Australian people think of multiculturalism.

"But more importantly we thought it was time to have a look at the skills capacity of our new migrants and how we can best utilise the skills that many migrants have when they are coming to this country."

Critics of multiculturalism often complain that some ethnic groups are deliberately excluding themselves from the wider community.

While Mr Migliorino disagrees with that argument, he said integration of support services and programs for new migrants is a key to helping people fit in to their community. He wants the inquiry to examine ways to do this.

"Successful migration is actually having people here who can facilitate that migration process.

"So if we have government funding for that purpose it's not to keep groups different it's to facilitate their insertion into our community to make sure that they know how to get a bus, how to go to the doctor, how to basically utilise all the goods and services which are available to all communities in Australia."

Muslim immigrants have been singled out by some as a group who have failed to integrate into society and Ms Vamvakinou said that's an area the inquiry will be looking at closely.

"The attempt to try and single them out as a group that fails to integrate is dangerous and it's dangerous for our progress as a society.

"We haven't had that problem in the past, we shouldn't invite it now and we certainly shouldn't cultivate it."

Almost 45 per cent of people now living in Australia were born overseas or have a parent who was born overseas.

The committee is urging anyone with a migrant story to tell to share it with the new inquiry. •

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Judgment call for online safety

Prohibition is not the best way to keep young people safe online, academics say.



LAPTOP LIMITS: Filters may not keep children safe online. Photo: iStockphoto

Young people need to be taught how to make good decisions and be given opportunities to develop their own judgment in the cyber world, according to academics appearing before parliament's Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety.

Professor Karen Vered from Flinders University told the inquiry children will not learn from mistakes if filtering and blocking software prevent them from ever having to exercise judgment.

"If we place children inside a walled garden, we deny them the opportunity to practise the self-management and self-regulation skills that we want them to have," she said.

"Studies show that the more authoritative parents are the less likely children are to share with them and

discuss their online activities. In schools, rather than negotiate an understanding with students, filtering and blocking software prevent a range of activities. As a consequence, children pursue the prohibited activities elsewhere, in the private spaces that young people can secure for themselves," she said.

Echoing these concerns, Dr Barbara Spears from the Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance gave the analogy of a backyard swimming pool.

"How dangerous is a swimming pool in your backyard? If you don't have a fence or you do have a fence, if you don't teach your children how to swim or you do teach your children how to swim...it's as dangerous as we want it to be if we don't do anything, but as safe

as we can make it if we adopt multiple approaches," Dr Spears said.

"We need to be growing ethical, digital citizens in our young people, who make good decisions about their behaviour in an online environment, in the same way they do in normal citizenship. We want to have the best citizens we can for the future of our country and they need to be able to operate in this environment. The technology is powerful and empowering, and we need to help them navigate their way through that."

Professor Vered told the inquiry the young people most at risk online are the same ones most at risk off-line and include those with low self-esteem or self image problems as well as those seeking comfort and companionship, and the socially excluded.

"Those problems are not technological problems. What makes them vulnerable is not the technology, so technological solutions are not going to address that. We need to be more aware of those children as individuals. Those young people are vulnerable to their peers and to adults, but no more so than they are in the face-to-face world," she said.

Commenting on the serious nature of crimes by cyber 'predators', Professor Vered said online molesters are not seeking unsuspecting victims but rather youths susceptible to seduction.

Citing research, she said developmentally appropriate prevention strategies that target youths directly and acknowledge normal adolescent interests in romance and sex are needed. These should provide younger adolescents with awareness and avoidance skills while educating older youths about the pitfalls of sexual relationships with adults and their criminal nature.

"The current prevention messages emphasising parental control and the dangers of divulging personal information are inappropriate to the task. Again we must ask: how will children learn to be self-monitoring, self-regulating and independent online if we contain their explorations to a walled garden scenario?" •

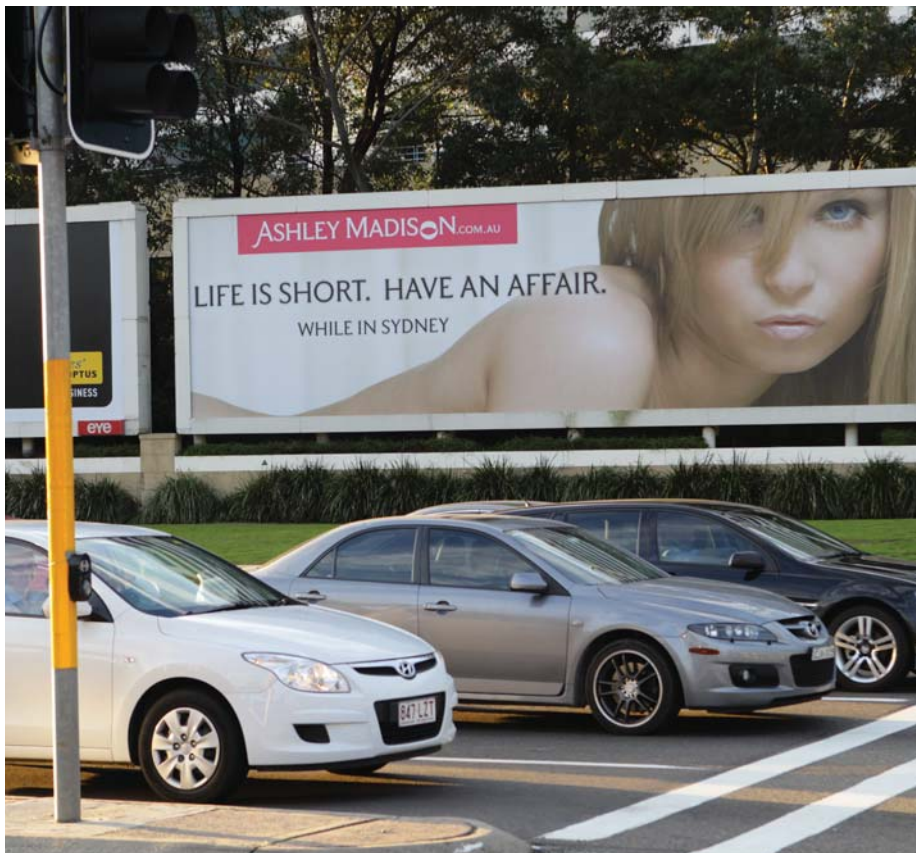
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Who's watching this space

Community concerns about billboards have led to a parliamentary inquiry.



PROVOCATIVE: Controversial billboards have sparked community complaints. Photo: Newspix

The body responsible for keeping advertisers in check disputes claims that complaints about billboard ads are on the rise.

Attorney-General Robert McClelland has asked the House of Representatives Social Policy and Legal Affairs Committee to establish an inquiry into the rules which govern outdoor advertising, following what he described as a steady increase in complaints in recent years.

Several controversial ads have also prompted public debate over the issue, including a billboard at Sydney Airport last year which urged visitors to the city to “have an affair”.

The industry is self-regulated by the Advertising Standards Bureau (ASB) which is responsible for investigating consumer complaints and ensuring

that advertisers stick to industry codes of practice.

Figures from the ASB show that while ads broadcast on TV make up the most complaints, those shown on billboards come in second.

In 2009 almost 24 per cent of complaints about ads were about those shown outdoors, compared to 16.48 per cent in 2008, 12.8 per cent in 2007 and 3.67 per cent in 2006.

But ASB chief executive Fiona Jolly said those figures do not necessarily show a solid trend.

“Our statistics over the 12 years of operation have shown that outdoor pretty much is the second most complained about medium generally,” she said.

“The percentage of complaints will go from anywhere from 10 to 20 per cent based quite often on whether, for example, there may have been one

particular advertisement campaign that caused a lot of complaints.

“A lot of complaints about one or two ads can skew the percentage of complaints about a particular medium.”

The inquiry is investigating whether the system of self-regulation used by the advertising industry is a rigorous enough safeguard against campaigns which have the potential to offend, such as those using sexually suggestive phrases and images.

It is also exploring whether there are any levers available to the federal government under fair trading laws which could be used to keep the industry in check.

And it is considering the implications of future technological developments such as digital billboards which can switch between several ads or show different ads at various times of the day.

The ASB opposes any move towards government intervention in the regulation of advertisements.

Ms Jolly said the system is arguably more successful than many government mechanisms.

“We have a success rate of 99.03 per cent compliance from advertisers,” she said.

“We have an unbelievable record in advertisers voluntarily removing their ads from whatever medium that the board has decided it can no longer be shown in.”

Ms Jolly pointed out that government regulation would mean a cost to the taxpayer, in contrast to the ASB which is industry funded.

Committee chair Graham Perrett (Moreton, Qld) said he has received a lot of complaints from both his constituents and people Australia-wide about some billboards.

“I’ve had not just from my electorate, but from all over Australia people making contact once I went public on the call for this, saying how upset they were,” he said.

“Maybe there’s a whole untapped sea of discontent out there that doesn’t actually make its way through to a real written complaint.”

Mr Perrett said extra scrutiny of outdoor advertising is needed because unlike other mediums, such as television, families with children do not have the choice to avoid billboard signs they are travelling past.

“I think the fact there has only been 180 complaints over the last three years isn’t necessarily indicative of the community concerns over some of these outdoor spaces and how they’re being a bit too confronting on occasion,” he said.

Ms Jolly said while there are no specific rules applied to outdoor advertising, the ASB board when considering complaints takes into account the fact that billboards are hard to avoid.

“Over the past three years to be honest the board has become more strict with outdoor ads,” she said.

Four billboard ads made it into the top 10 most complained about in 2010 and 2009, with two in 2008.

The most complained about billboard ad last year was a promotion for the “Sexpo” convention held in Brisbane.

It received about 75 complaints but they were not upheld by the ASB.

Hot on its heels was an ad shown at Sydney Airport by a dating agency which encouraged visitors to Sydney to “have an affair” because “life is short”.

It received about 60 complaints and also attracted the attention of the NSW government which voiced its displeasure to the ASB.

The complaints were upheld and the ad was taken down in July last year.

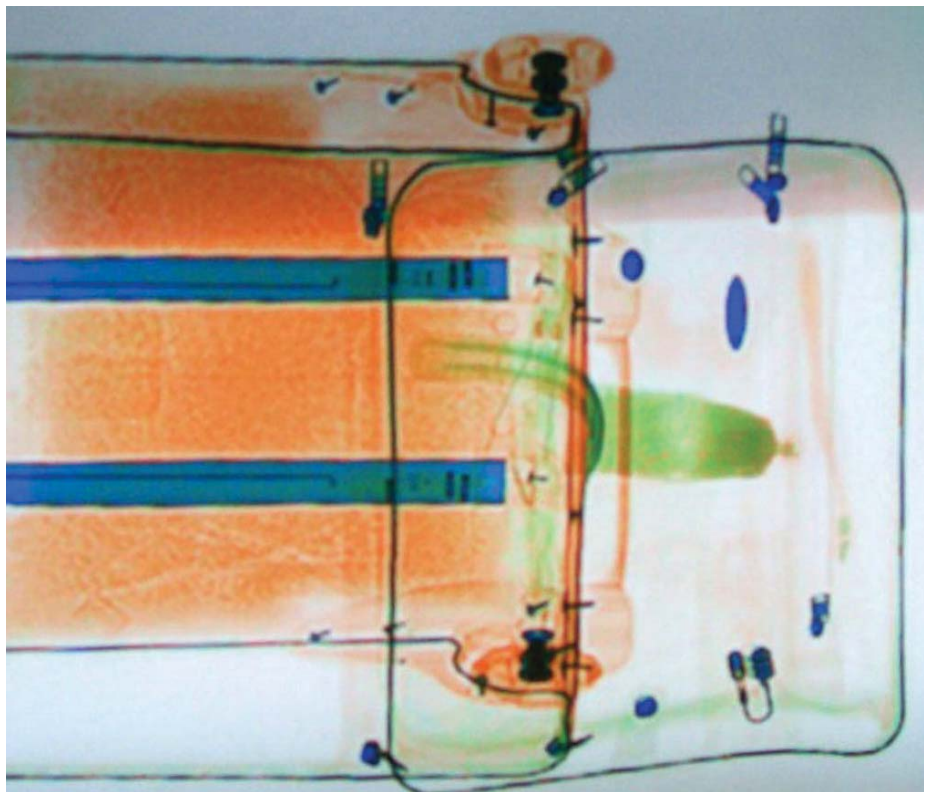
Other ads attracting criticism include those for sex performance products, Calvin Klein clothes, and an ad which urged customers to join the Fernwood Fitness Club “Now for Fox Sake”.

The inquiry is likely to report in the middle of this year after a series of public hearings. •

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SCREEN SAVER: Security screening at airports not enough to stop criminals. Photo: aapone

Liquid could have brought down plane

Threat revealed at air safety hearing.

A parliamentary review of aviation and maritime security has heard that a chemical being carried by a passenger arrested at Perth Airport in 2007 could have resulted in the crash of a passenger jet if the liquid had been opened on board the aircraft.

Maggie Plumb, senior research coordinator with Western Australia Police, told federal parliament’s Law Enforcement Committee: “That liquid would have been toxic at one part per million of oxygen, so we are talking here about a whole plane crashing. If the seal had broken or he had decided to empty it into the toilet, everyone would have died.”

Ms Plumb said Australia was “way behind other countries” in domestic aviation security, particularly when it comes to checking of passenger identification for domestic flights.

She suggested Commonwealth legislation should be introduced that requires domestic airline passengers to authenticate their identity before they can fly.

“Domestic passenger identity legislation would assist in disrupting anonymous travel and disrupting organised crime and other criminal activity,” Ms Plumb said.

She indicated domestic passenger identification was standard international practice, and introducing it into Australia would simply bring us up to the standard that is accepted overseas.

But Qantas argued that identity fraud and tracking of individuals were neither a priority nor appropriate functions for airlines to implement, and that the financial burden of a change in procedures would be unjustifiable.

“Verification of identity documents by commercial entities should not be

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contemplated as they do not have the requisite expertise in the detection of fraudulent documentation,” Qantas Head of Security and Facilitation Steve Jackson said.

“The cost of system changes is estimated to be many millions of dollars, not including ongoing data storage and transmission costs and would be detrimental to passenger facility, contingency and system redundancy requirements.

“These anticipated costs cannot be justified based on identity verification or against the perceived benefit especially when considering that the domestic aviation industry is only seven percent of the size of the Australian domestic rail industry.”

A former aviation security specialist with the Federal Airports Corporation, Michael Carmody is calling for greater use of passenger profiling by airlines to help identify criminals and terrorists before they even reach airports or security screening gates. He said

passenger profiling software used by Israel’s El Al airline works in a similar fashion to how credit card databases can alert banks to unusual card use in an overseas country and stop the card until the card user verifies their location or purpose.

“At the point when you buy a ticket to fly on the Israeli airline the software kicks in,” Mr Carmody said. “Straight away, the software looks at you, who you are, where you are flying from, where you are flying to, the class of ticket, whether you are carrying baggage, how you have paid for the ticket, point of origin, nationality et cetera. If you happen to be a Qantas Platinum Frequent Flyer, moving throughout the Middle East continually, flying business class, invariably boarding here and disembarking there, have a profile that has been consistent over the years, have a ticket that is paid for by a company cheque et cetera, then obviously, in terms of risk based profiling, you would be shunted into a low-risk gate.

“If you happen to be a young fellow of 19 years of age flying first class with no baggage, paying cash and turning up in a pair of baggy jeans and a T-shirt, I suggest the software would trip you into another area.”

A passenger deemed risky will be questioned further when they check-in at El Al.

“The point of the exercise in profiling is, in a risk management sense, to highlight and identify your most serious risk before they hit the screening point, let alone the aircraft. We tend to engineer it in reverse; we tend to hope that at the eleventh hour we catch someone walking through a screening point or, better still, stumble across something as they mount the aircraft and sit in a seat. That, to me, is crazy.” •

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A GOOD DROP: Wine labelling changes expected to save millions. Photo: Newspix

Savings for wine exporters

Proposed labelling changes could save Australian wine exporters up to \$25 million a year and help expand their key export markets.

The Agreement on Requirements for Wine Labelling between Australia and the other members of the World Wine Trade Group (WWTG) standardises wine labelling requirements across the member countries.

Australian wine producers will be able to place all key product information including net volume, product name, country of origin and alcohol content in a ‘single field of vision’ located anywhere on the main body of the bottle.

Currently wines sold in Australia must include net volume on the front label. The changes mean exporters will be able to produce wine with one label that meets both Australian domestic and international labelling requirements for WWTG and European Union countries.

The WWTG includes major markets such as the USA, Canada and Mexico, and along with the European Union constitutes 80 per cent of Australia’s export market.

Hamish McCormick from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade told federal parliament’s Treaties Committee the voluntary changes

would significantly reduce production, distribution and marketing expenditure for Australian wine producers.

“The industry expect cost savings of \$25 million each year as well as benefits for marketing and supply,” Mr McCormick said.

While the potential savings are significant, some Queensland and South Australian consumer groups are concerned consumers might be confused by the changes.

However Mr McCormick said the changes could actually make it easier for consumers to locate product information on wine labels.

“Four key pieces of information will be available at the same time, in the same field of vision.

“You could argue there are benefits for consumers by providing all this information in the one field of vision.”

The Winemakers Federation of Australia has agreed to a request from peak consumer body Choice to combat any confusion through an education campaign explaining the changes to consumers. •

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NBN could help stem rural exodus

Community hopes and concerns raised at hearings.

The National Broadband Network could be a key to reversing depopulation of rural communities, a parliamentary inquiry into the NBN has heard.

General Manager of the Gloucester Shire Council, Allan Young, told the House of Representatives Infrastructure and Communications Committee the council sees the NBN rollout as providing economic opportunities for business growth “with the ultimate possibility of increasing the population of the shire”.

But with a population of 5,000 spread out over a semi-rural area of the Upper Hunter in NSW, the council is concerned about the time it may take to get connected.

“It is possible that NBN Co will push to have major towns and cities connected first so as to generate greater income earlier in the rollout cycle with towns such as Gloucester being left until the last years of the project.

“If this is the process, other larger population centres will benefit at the cost of smaller population centres and may in fact contribute to the economic demise of these rural towns.”

The Wheatbelt East Regional Organisation of Councils told the inquiry most of the wheatbelt area of Western Australia will receive little or no access to the NBN under current plans, deepening the digital divide between remote areas and regional and metropolitan centres.

“This lack of access will penalise the residents within these communities,” the group said. “This lack of access will adversely impact upon each of the criteria the committee has been requested to investigate.”

But network owner NBN Co said it plans to provide broadband speeds of 12 megabits per second to 100 per cent of Australian premises through a combination of fibre, next generation wireless and satellite networks.

Over 93 per cent of premises will be connected by fibre optic cable offering speeds of 100 megabits per second.

The multi-billion dollar cost of delivering fibre based connections to most Australian households is continuing to generate heated debate in parliament.

Shadow Minister for Communications and Broadband Malcolm Turnbull described the NBN as the “most extravagant and reckless undertaking of the most reckless and extravagant government we have known in our lifetimes”.

“When it comes to the biggest infrastructure project in our nation’s history, the National Broadband Network – \$50 billion of investment overall – there is no scrutiny, no accountability and no competition.”

Mr Turnbull said favouring fibre technology over wireless methods is a fatal flaw to the NBN plan.

“We are seeing right around the world the explosion of wireless broadband. This is a genuine telecommunications revolution,” Mr Turnbull said.

“This is not to say that wireless is the complete solution, but, equally, it is naive to imagine that the explosion of wireless services is not going to have an enormous impact on the broadband experience and the broadband future of Australia.”

But Infrastructure Minister Anthony Albanese said Mr Turnbull’s promotion of wireless solutions shows he doesn’t understand how broadband works.

“Experts agree that, while wireless is one part of the picture, it is not a substitute for fibre,” Mr Albanese said. “If you are going to rely on wireless broadband, you need a fibre network to support it and you need mobile phone towers on every street connected up to each other in a system through the fibre network.”



SIGN OF THE TIMES: NBN review considers costs and benefits. Photo: Thinkstock

“That is something that the Member for Wentworth might have an interesting time explaining to his electorate when those towers go up on every corner of every street.”

In a white paper report on the impact of broadband in Australia, UK social regeneration expert Dr Tim Williams said the focus should be on the potential of high speed broadband to link and develop Australia, rather than arguments over cost.

Based on the UK experience, the report shows high speed broadband allows major advances in e-health, online education, access to government and the revitalisation of regional communities.

However Dr Williams said these benefits can only be realised if all Australians have both the opportunity and ability to connect equally to the network.

“Digital inclusion is absolutely essential, and one of the findings of the report is that communities and citizens that are left unconnected will be at a deficit with their peers,” Dr Williams said. “So you’ve got to be in this thing otherwise all the benefits we talk about do not accrue to you.”

Public hearings of the NBN inquiry are scheduled until May and the construction of the network is set to continue over the next eight years. •

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