

Customers told to vote with their wallets

IT giants defend higher prices for Australians.



PRICE ATTACK: Companies respond to criticisms over high IT costs

Apple, Adobe and Microsoft have defended the prices they charge for products sold in Australia, saying customers have the choice not to buy from them if they think they are being ripped off.

Australian representatives for the three IT giants made the comments at a recent public hearing for the inquiry into IT pricing in Australia being conducted by the House of Representatives Communications Committee.

The inquiry is questioning why identical IT hardware and digital products cost more in Australia compared to markets in the United States, United Kingdom and the Asia-Pacific and what can be done to address any disadvantage to Australian consumers.

Apple Australia vice president Tony King said Australian prices for Apple hardware products like the iPad were similar to those charged overseas, but blamed higher prices for digital downloads on music wholesalers.

“The pricing of this digital content is based on the wholesale prices which are set through negotiated contracts with the record labels, movie studios and TV networks,” Mr King said.

“In Australia, they have often set a higher wholesale price than the price of similar content in the United States.”

Adobe’s managing director Paul Robson named the higher cost of doing business in Australia as one reason for often large price discrepancies between regions for the company’s identical, digitally delivered products.

He also said Adobe geo-blocked Australian customers from accessing its US website, which offers much cheaper product prices, because the company wanted consumers to benefit from a local “personalised experience”.

“When customers access the Adobe.com website they can choose to see whichever website they wish to see,” Mr Robson said.

“We automatically try to get them to look at the Australian site, for a number of different reasons.

“There is information that is relevant to the local market in relation

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TAFE REVIEW LAUNCHED

The role of Australia’s Technical and Further Education (TAFE) system in developing skills for the Australian economy will be examined in a new parliamentary inquiry launched by the House of Representatives Education and Employment Committee.

The impact of recent funding cuts to TAFE by some states will also be reviewed, along with the ability of TAFE to create opportunities for Australians to better themselves and their life and employment prospects.

The committee will look at TAFE’s effectiveness in delivering employment opportunities to support regions, communities and disadvantaged individuals through its skills and training programs.

The inquiry will also investigate TAFE’s operation in a competitive training market.

The terms of reference for the inquiry say the TAFE system has played a crucial role in the training and development of thousands of Australians.

“TAFEs provide a critical pathway to training and skills which are increasingly needed to access employment,” the terms of reference state. “They also play a critical role in regions and in providing access for disadvantaged groups.” •

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to Australian based pricing and other content and information.

“That content is a richer and more personalised experience for an Australian consumer than they would get if they accessed a webpage that was in another language or for another country.”

But committee member Ed Husic (Chifley, NSW) challenged Adobe’s claims that Australians were charged thousands of dollars more for some download products because of personalisation for the Australian market.

“It is very hard for me to see how your programs are personalised or contextualised for the Australian market,” Mr Husic said.

“They are effectively the same product and they are not really much different. So I do not know why Australian consumers are charged over \$1,000 more for your product here when there does not seem to be much localisation.”

However managing director of Microsoft Australia Pip Marlow supported Adobe’s arguments, stating Microsoft operates differently to meet the varied needs and expectations of markets across the globe.

“At Microsoft, while we operate in over 100 countries around the world, we don’t operate on a single, global model,” Ms Marlow said.

“In fact the countries that we operate in are very different and therefore the way that we compete and the way we deliver products and services every day in those countries can be quite unique.”

Ms Marlow said Microsoft would continue to seek to provide value for money through innovation and ensuring their products meet the needs of their millions of customers in Australia.

“We’re going to continue to look at the competition we have, we’re going to continue to innovate our products because we hope that the 17 million Australians that use our products are getting value from them and are making the choice to purchase our products,” she said.

“Ultimately our customers have choice and, at the end of the day, if we price our products too high our consumers will vote with their wallets and we will see our sales decline.” ●

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ALL ABOARD: Cruise industry gets serious about safety

Cruise industry on board with safety

Brimble tragedy a wake-up call.

Safety standards on cruise ships in Australia have been lifted considerably since the 2002 death of Dianne Brimble on board a P&O ship, representatives of the industry have told a parliamentary inquiry into crimes at sea.

Chief executive of the Australian arm of global cruise giant Carnival Australia, Ann Sherry, said the Brimble tragedy was a wake-up call for the whole industry, welcoming the inquiry as an opportunity to spell out the safety improvements made for passengers since then.

“I think they’re probably less vulnerable on the ships than they are anywhere else actually, because we’re monitoring what happens on the ships, we’re very focused on making sure that everyone has a great holiday and safety and security is our mantra on-board so I would say that you’re probably much

more secure on board a ship than you are anywhere else,” Ms Sherry said.

The head of security for the Royal Caribbean cruise line, Michael Giglia, told MPs recent changes to United States laws have also improved safety for passengers.

“The cruise vessel security and safety act – a federal law passed in the US, sometimes known as the Kerry act – requires that all of our ships have at least one person certified in a very specific course in crime reporting and evidence preservation,” Mr Giglia said.

“So every one of our chief security officers and deputy security officers must complete this government-mandated course and be certified in order for a vessel to be allowed into United States ports... it’s easier for us to train all of our security officers regardless of what port they are going to.”

Social Policy and Legal Affairs Committee deputy chair Dr Sharman

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Green light for nuclear medicine project

Stone (Murray, Vic) said she believed passenger safety had improved over the past 10 years, but work needs to be done to ensure standards are maintained as the sector grows.

The local cruise ship industry is booming, with numbers of passengers boarding at Australian ports approaching one million per year.

“We’ve just got to make sure that as an Australian citizen that even when you leave our waters and end up in the Mediterranean, you’re protected and our policing can reach you without any jurisdictional issues,” Dr Stone said.

Despite the cruise industry’s efforts to make their ships safer, NSW Police Force assistant commissioner Mark Hutchings told the inquiry there were still 27 serious incidents on board cruise ships leaving Sydney reported to NSW police in the past 19 months, including eight deaths from natural causes.

“Eleven of those were assaults, all of which were notified and two of these incidents resulted in police arresting the offender – one was a juvenile and the other was an adult,” Mr Hutchings said.

“There have been four sexual assaults notified to the marine area command, one resulted in a brief of evidence being compiled and referred to the AFP, as the incident occurred beyond NSW jurisdictions.”

However Ms Sherry said these figures should not be used to create a perception that cruise ships are dangerous places.

“One of the challenges when you come to an investigation like this parliamentary inquiry is it feels like it’s something that happens all the time – it’s extremely rare,” Ms Sherry said. ●

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The construction of a new \$168 million nuclear medicine facility at Lucas Heights in New South Wales has been supported by federal parliament’s Public Works Committee.

The new facility will produce Molybdenum-99 (Mo-99), a nuclear medicine product crucial to the detection of life threatening diseases.

Enough Mo-99 will be produced by the proposed new facility to guarantee Australia’s future supply and meet a significant proportion of the global demand for the medicine, which currently totals around 45 million doses a year.

A supporting facility is also planned to convert the nuclear waste by-products of Mo-99 production into a synthetic rock product called Synroc, allowing the waste to be stored and transported safely.

Concerns about the proposals were raised by the Sutherland Shire Council, which questioned whether they may lead to Lucas Heights becoming a long-term nuclear waste storage site and starting to process nuclear waste imported from other countries.

These concerns were magnified by what the council claimed was a lack of detail relating to the size and scale of the proposed Mo-99 operations in the original application by the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO).

“This lack of basic information on the size and capacity of these facilities

represents a major deficiency in the public consultation process.”

The chief executive of ANSTO Adi Paterson moved to address these fears at a public hearing of the inquiry, confirming Lucas Heights cannot be considered as a long-term waste storage site and saying ANSTO had no plans to begin processing foreign nuclear waste.

“I believe we have a duty and a burden to continue to communicate with stakeholders in the shire and in the broader region,” Dr Paterson said. “But I do not think there are any fundamental issues that would in any way compromise the quality of the thinking and the planning that has underpinned this application.”

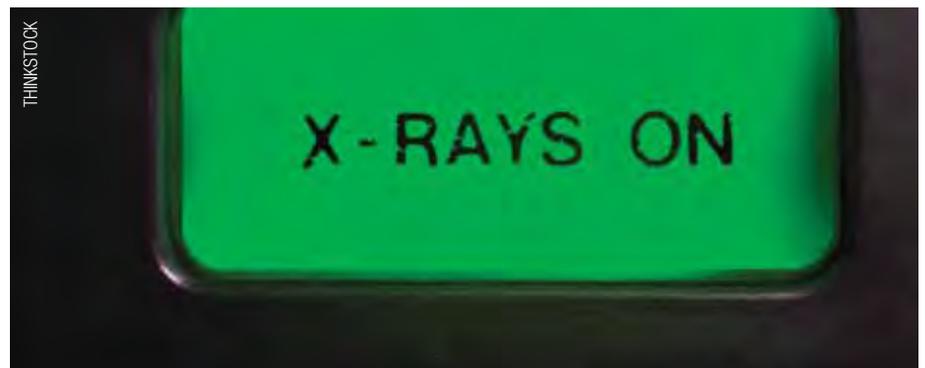
In its report the committee said it was satisfied there was a need for the works, which will replace existing facilities that will reach the end of their useful life in 2017.

However it acknowledged concerns about a lack of detail and consultation, requesting ANSTO continue to engage with the local council and the community on the project and deal with issues directly as they arise.

“In future, ANSTO should endeavour to provide more comprehensive detail in its initial submissions wherever possible,” the report stated. ●

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GLOWING ENDORSEMENT: Support for nuclear medicine production

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ALL TOGETHER NOW: Migrant contribution recognised

Understanding a key to our future together

Research boost would help guide multicultural policy.

Multiculturalism has enriched and enhanced Australian society over many years, but better research is needed to fully understand its effects and guide the policy into the future.

Those are the findings of a two year inquiry into multiculturalism in Australia by the Joint Standing Committee on Migration.

Committee chair Maria Vamvakinou (Calwell, Vic) said the broad-ranging inquiry clearly showed that despite the vocal opposition of some sections of the community, multiculturalism in Australia has been and continues to be enormously successful.

“Australia, like all societies, is dynamic and can adapt over time to the pressures of changing conditions and differing influences,” Ms Vamvakinou said.

“The positive contribution of migrants, including refugees, to the social, economic and cultural richness of our nation is indisputable.”

The committee made 32 recommendations, centred on improving the research base to inform migration, settlement and support services, and reconfirming social inclusion, anti-racism and intercultural and interfaith understanding as the pillars of Australia’s multiculturalism policy.

The report also confirmed the opposition of the major parties to legal pluralism, addressing the many submissions to the committee concerned about a potential introduction of faith-based legal systems such as Sha’ria law.

Key among the recommendations were calls for a government funded research institute for excellence in research on multicultural affairs and an expansion of the Australian Migrant English Program to provide extra vocational specific English training.

Ms Vamvakinou said better outcomes are likely if the efforts of Australia’s three tiers of government are coordinated and based on good quality information and research.

“The reduction in national research capacity has had a significant impact on the ability of agencies to deliver, monitor and evaluate their efforts,” Ms Vamvakinou said.

“As such, rebuilding research capacity is a priority to ensure policies and programs are well informed, tailored and effective.”

Ms Vamvakinou said settlement and integration services also need to be supported to ensure people and communities do not become isolated from the mainstream and Australia takes best advantage of the skills and abilities of new migrants.

“There are many highly educated and skilled people who come to Australia via the humanitarian program,” she said. “The well-known syndrome of the over-qualified taxi driver needs to be better researched and addressed.

“No-one should be left behind, and Australia can ill afford to waste such expertise.”

Deputy chair Louise Markus (Macquarie, NSW) said the committee welcomed the opportunity to meet people at the grassroots where businesses and local communities were collaborating to improve relationships and build skills and opportunities for people from different backgrounds.

Mrs Markus said there was no doubt immigration has enriched the social, economic and cultural life of our country.

“In Dandenong, the South East Melbourne Manufacturers Alliance is bringing employers and young refugees together; the National Australia Bank’s African Inclusion Program is exemplary; and social enterprises, like The Studio, are inspirational,” Mrs Markus said.

“These initiatives deserve special mention and prove that cooperation, cross-cultural awareness, and commitment provide tangible results.”

Coalition members of the committee supported all recommendations of the report in whole or in principle, qualifying their support for recommendations involving significant new expenditure to only be undertaken within current budgetary parameters. •

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Soldiers struggling with silent war

Commander reveals toll of combat.

The Australian Defence Force has a range of services to help personnel suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) but is finding it hard to identify all those who need them.

Chief of the ADF, General David Hurley, told a parliamentary inquiry into the care of ADF personnel wounded and injured on operations the challenge was being aware of when personnel are struggling with stress disorders.

“If we’re aware that a person is suffering from PTSD, and they had not completed a regime of treatment to the point where we were prepared to give them responsibility back in the field, they wouldn’t go into the field,” General Hurley said.

“If we don’t know that a person has PTSD we have no way of making the decision whether they should go into the field or not.”

The mental battles faced by many former and current servicemen and women were highlighted through evidence given to the inquiry by the former commander of Australian forces in Afghanistan, Major General John Cantwell.

“Occasionally, I made decisions that resulted directly in the death of other servicemen. I made a decision; it was a bad decision, and they died as a result. I do not forget about that very easily,” Major General Cantwell said.

“Regrettably, on another occasion in Baghdad I was witness to a mass murder in a market square populated by several hundred women and children who were exchanging their gas bottles when a very large car bomb detonated in the middle of them.

“Those matters have accumulated in my mind to the extent that last year I became extremely unwell.

“Last year I could not have sat here before you. I could not have strung a sentence together. I could not have given you a coherent answer to any question you cared to ask, and indeed, I would have to have been helped into the room.



A DARK PLACE: Soldiers battling after combat

“As an entity the Defence organisation has not yet made the transition to deal with emotional wounds in the same way that it does physical wounds.”

However General Hurley said Major General Cantwell’s case was an example of where the ADF had not been able to help due to not being made aware there was a problem.

“Because General Cantwell didn’t make that known, and if you’d run into him at any time since the early eighties or watched him do his work and so forth, I don’t think he gave anyone the impression that there was anything wrong with him, in fact he was nationally lauded for many of his roles, including the Victorian bushfire rehabilitation,” General Hurley said.

“So he like many PTSD sufferers managed to live two lives, one in hell, and one publicly.

“And if we can’t detect that and we don’t see that and it’s not declared, I don’t think we can make a decision not to send him because we don’t know.”

Private sector professionals working with returned defence personnel also appeared at a public hearing and called for the defence force to outsource mental health care.

Toowong Private Hospital Director Dr Andrew Khoo said defence force personnel are discouraged from accessing internal support programs because coming forward could limit their career.

“You have to remember that a lot of the defence force are very young, with young families,” Dr Khoo said.

“They are not skilled in anything else because they have gone straight into the army, navy or air force fairly young.

“There is a lot riding on their ongoing employability. So this does not necessarily encourage them to put their hand up and say they are struggling.”

Dr Khoo said their reluctance to seek treatment is exacerbated by the lower level of confidentiality offered by in-house mental health services compared with private treatment.

“I can understand where that comes from because obviously these men and women carry firearms around and Defence would like to know if they are on medication or if they are struggling psychologically or something like that, but my feeling is that it needs to be moved more off base, or there needs to be a sense of greater separation between the treatment and the employer,” he said.

Brian Freeman, director of specialist rehabilitation organisation Centori, made similar recommendations to the committee.

“A lot of wounded, of course, are from the lower ranks of Army in particular, so they do think that there is something that might affect their career if they are seen to seek some

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sort of treatment for mental illness,” Mr Freeman said.

But ADF professor of military medicine and surgery Lieutenant Colonel Michael Reade said there were problems with sending personnel to external specialists.

“I have heard of a particular soldier going to a private psychiatrist, saying he was having flashbacks to when the IED (improvised explosive device) went off and having the chap say to him, ‘What’s an IED,’ which of course destroyed their therapeutic relationship,” Lieutenant Reade said.

However he admitted a different level of confidentiality does apply when an ADF member is being treated internally.

“We are often required to make it explicitly clear to the patients we treat that we are treating them not only as a patient but also as an agent of the organisation in which we both serve – in the same way that an occupational physician for a mining company might treat someone but have a dual loyalty,” he said.

“I do not think it is as problematic as it might seem to be. It is certainly not the case that the chain of command – that is, the soldier’s boss – has full access to the medical chart; it is all medical-in-confidence.

“But you are correct in saying that the commander has the ability to ask the psychiatrist, or whoever the doctor is treating the patient, ‘What’s going on?’ And he or she may feel entitled to a more detailed answer than they would get from a private health professional.

“Therefore I think the answer is probably to have a mix of both systems.” •

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AGAINST THEIR WILL: Slavery a shocking reality in Australia

Slavery begins at home

Public awareness campaign proposed on trafficking.

Representatives of the Australian Federal Police have told a parliamentary inquiry that slavery and human trafficking are serious problems in Australia, despite only a handful of people being convicted of slavery related offences over the past decade.

AFP manager of crime operations Commander Jennifer Hurst told the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee the AFP has 25 specialist staff working on human trafficking.

“From an AFP perspective, we do see it as quite a serious problem,” Commander Hurst said.

Human Rights Sub-Committee deputy chair Philip Ruddock (Berowra, NSW) questioned whether too many resources were being dedicated to the area, citing figures showing only 33 matters were referred for investigation in 2011–12.

However AFP legislation program coordinator Elsa Sengstock said regardless of the number, the AFP considers every referral of slavery a high priority because it is a crime against humanity.

“It is not getting a high priority because of the perceived number ... it is

because of the nature of the offending,” Ms Sengstock said.

Meanwhile, the Law Council of Australia has urged the federal government to fund a comprehensive public awareness campaign in the area.

Council president Joseph Catanzariti said the average Australian does not realise people in Australia can find themselves coerced into a situation where they are being denied their rights or proper wages and conditions.

Mr Catanzariti said a Crime Stoppers style campaign is needed to educate people to be on the lookout for unusual situations.

“It would be great to see the government initiate a campaign that said, ‘right next to you your neighbour could be in fact subjected to these sorts of things’,” Mr Catanzariti said.

“There are support groups for these people where they’re able to identify themselves but we need a lot more education, a public awareness campaign, and we’d be very keen to see a lot of media done in relation to human trafficking.”

The Australian Institute of Criminology has just finished a four-year research program into slavery and human trafficking.

Research program manager Laura Beacroft said a study conducted by the AIC found that 60 per cent of those surveyed confused human trafficking with the smuggling of asylum seekers.

“If people in the community don’t recognise something then that limits the detection,” Ms Beacroft said.

“What we’ve been doing is exploring with service providers and community people what their understanding of slavery is, making sure that they understand what it is and then asking them whether they’ve seen anything like that.”

Getting an accurate picture of the prevalence of the problem has proven difficult, with evidence and data hard to gather.

Mr Ruddock said the committee will consider the evidence it has been presented.

“What I’ve tried to do is to look behind that data to see whether or not there is evidence that we can obtain that there are people that are not coming forward that have not been identified,” Mr Ruddock said.

The federal government recently passed legislation which broadened the definition of slavery offences, increased penalties, and boosted support and care for victims.

Prime Minister Julia Gillard has also announced safeguards for government procurement policies to ensure slavery has not been used in the supply chain.

Anti-slavery group Walk Free’s Fiona David believes business must also step up to help reduce slavery worldwide.

“Business is clearly not doing enough on this issue, it’s as simple as that,” Ms David said.

“Business has remarkable power in its purchasing decisions and has the capacity to say to their business partners ‘we won’t buy from you unless you can verify for us that these are produced in a slavery-free way’.

“Walk Free believes companies should be more transparent about where they get their products so they can provide a slave free guarantee to consumers.” •

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Federal police shut down cyber scammers

Australia’s law enforcement agencies are closing the net on cyber criminals but internet users need to remain vigilant, the Australian Federal Police has told a parliamentary inquiry into cybersafety for seniors.

The AFP’s cyber crime operations manager Glen McEwen said the recent success of an international investigation codenamed Operation Lino shows progress is being made.

Commander McEwen said Operation Lino uncovered and shut down a sophisticated criminal network based in Romania that was targeting the computer networks of Australian businesses and hacking into their point of sale systems.

“That resulted over a period of time in dismantling an organised crime syndicate that was allegedly responsible for the compromise of more than 500,000 credit cards and exposing the Australian financial sector in the vicinity of \$750 million,” he said.

In its most recent report, federal parliament’s Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety said a one stop cybercrime awareness and reporting portal is needed to help seniors get online and stay safe once they do.

The committee found while many seniors are embracing communications technology, others are being held back by lack of skills and fear of cyber-scams.

Committee chair Senator Catryna Bilyk (Tas) said governments need to help more seniors get online to avoid leaving a large part of the population on the wrong side of the ‘digital divide’.

“The internet has become an essential tool for participation in many aspects of modern life and today Australians, including many seniors, are online for business and pleasure, for social networking, accessing government information or education, for shopping and other financial transactions,” Senator Bilyk said.

“Unfortunately, however, there are also many seniors who are not taking part in the digital revolution. The reasons for non-participation are various, but fear of becoming a victim of cybercrime is a real deterrent to many seniors.”

To help overcome these fears, the committee called for governments to give support to libraries and other organisations to provide cybersafety training, and create a centralised point for cybersafety information and assistance.

Overall the committee made 13 recommendations based on 12 public hearings, a number of submissions and an online survey for seniors that received 536 responses. •

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LOCKED OUT: Scamming networks targeted

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First bite for universal dental care

Decay rates at bottom third of OECD countries.



STOP THE ROT: Support for better public dental services

Health industry groups want billions of dollars already committed to the reform of adult public dental services to be treated as a stepping stone to universal dental care.

The federal government plans to provide \$1.3 billion to the states and territories from July 2014 to expand adult public dental services, as part of an overall \$4.1 billion dental care reform package.

Executive director of the Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association Prue Power told a parliamentary inquiry into dental health the funding should be used to pave the way for all Australians to have universal access to preventative and restorative oral health care, regardless of their ability to pay.

“The commitment of additional funds from 1 July 2014 provides the opportunity to make progress

towards universal access for adults,” Ms Power said.

“The long-term trends suggest that the degree of inequality in dental care access has increased over the last 30 years and these inequalities appear to have been influenced by government policies.

“The community’s lack of access to affordable dental health services means that Australia ranks among the bottom third of OECD countries for rates of dental decay among adults.”

Similar comments were made by the Association for the Promotion of Oral Health (APOH), which stated that Australian adult dental service needs cannot be met without the inclusion of dentistry in Medicare.

APOH said the high demand for public dental services is overwhelming current resources, with only 10 per cent of the nation’s available dental

workforce publicly employed despite almost half the population needing public care.

“Inclusion of dental services under Medicare would provide service to people otherwise unable to afford dental treatment, and unable to receive appropriate care in the overwhelmed public dental system,” APOH said.

However the significant financial burden to the government of delivering a universal dental scheme was also acknowledged by health experts.

Chief executive officer of Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health, Rod Wellington, said Australia is in an interesting situation where access to a health care card, and therefore public dental care, is decided by federal government, while the brunt of dental care funding is borne by the states and territories.

“Political pressure is on the government to increase the number of eligible people, whilst funding limitations suggest state and territory governments would like to reduce the number of people eligible for public dental care,” Mr Wellington said.

“Some argue that a universal dental scheme would be beyond the financial capabilities of the Australian government. If so, this suggests, at least in the shorter term, that governments need to decide who is eligible for public dental care and who is not.

“The longer term goal should be for a universal dental scheme, but in the interim governments should plan for a coordinated dental scheme that utilises both the private and public dental sectors.”

The House of Representatives Health Committee inquiry will cover the funding plans, as well as waiting list times, the mix and coverage of dental services supported by both state and federal governments, and the coordination of dental services between the two tiers of government and with privately funded dental services.

The availability and affordability of dental services for people with special needs, and those living in metropolitan, regional, rural and remote locations will also be examined. •

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Regional infrastructure plans needed

Battle for balance in communities with fly-in workers.



JET LAG: Concern for wellbeing of fly-in workers and their families

Governments of all levels have been urged to provide strong policy responses to the myriad issues raised by a parliamentary inquiry into fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) workers.

The House of Representatives Regional Australia Committee released its report *Cancer of the bush or salvation of our cities?* after a year-long investigation into the impacts of FIFO operations in remote and regional communities across Australia.

The committee has recommended the Commonwealth undertake research in several areas, including the impact of a transient workforce on local services, infrastructure and medical services.

Its report has called for a more thorough examination of the health effects of FIFO and drive-in drive-out (DIDO) practices on workers and the wellbeing of their families, as well as the economic and social impacts on local communities.

It has also recommended a dedicated secretariat be established which would consult with states and industry to develop regional infrastructure plans.

And it wants the National Housing Supply Council to urgently develop a strategy to address the supply of

affordable housing in regional communities.

Queensland's Isaac Regional Council in the Bowen Basin is at the epicentre of the state's coal boom with almost 30 active mines operating in the region. Within this basin the town of Moranbah has been grappling with housing shortages and an increased burden on local infrastructure and services due to the high level of transient workers.

Mayor Anne Baker said her council is dealing with a population increase 30 years ahead of its time.

"One thing is clear to every sensible Australian who supports the expansion of the mining industry and the spreading of prosperity; the time for strong policy action through federal, state and local governments is now," she said.

"This report is just the start of a process to address the population imbalances and policy-funding challenges required, to ensure individuals, families, communities and the nation get the best outcomes from our mining resources."

Ms Baker said she looked forward to detailed discussions with ministers and industry players about future action.

The Australian Medical Association of Western Australia also welcomed the report but said governments were too slow to act.

"Since we first proposed many of these recommendations in mid-2011, the impact of FIFO on health issues has become even more serious," AMA WA president Dr Richard Choong said.

"Cost cutting steps taken recently by some mining companies are also having an impact on the provision of health services.

"The federal government has to act immediately on the recommendations and not allow them to be lost in the smoke of the federal election campaign."

Mining Family Matters is a support website for FIFO workers and their families. It has welcomed the report but said it is keen to ensure workers are not vilified in the ongoing debate.

"The report does talk about the need for companies to work with regional communities to break down the divide between locals and FIFO workers and we think that's a great idea," the website said in a statement.

Committee chair Tony Windsor (New England, NSW) said while there were many benefits to FIFO work practices, it is also clear they are eroding the liveability of some regional communities.

"There are great concerns to what the practice means long-term and, if it's transported into areas where there are existing communities based on existing economies, what that does to the price of housing for instance," Mr Windsor said.

"There are circumstances where people feel as though they're the site of the activity but not a major beneficiary."

The committee also recommended various fringe benefits tax breaks should be scrapped but the Minerals Council of Australia said it was opposed to any changes.

"FIFO is a key mechanism for spreading the benefits of the mining boom across Australia," chief executive Mitch Hooke said.

"That is why the federal government is currently funding FIFO coordinators in non-mining regional Australia to facilitate the practice." •

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Live odds booted out

Sports restrict gambling promotion.



PUNTING AWAY: Sports take a step back on gambling promotions

Australia's major sporting codes have moved to restrict the display of live odds during games in response to criticism of the level of gambling advertising in sport.

Live odds will no longer be displayed at sporting venues and will be restricted during broadcasts of major sporting events.

The Australian Football League's integrity manager Brett Clothier said legitimate concerns have been raised by fans and the general public about the extent of gambling advertising in sportsgrounds and during broadcasts.

"The live odds that have appeared on the scoreboard from time to time which have updated odds as the game is being played, giving the odds for the two teams to win, will no longer be permitted on the scoreboard during the game," Mr Clothier told a parliamentary committee inquiring into gambling advertising in sport.

"There will be no promotion of live odds by commentators in a sports broadcast at any time – so that is by the commentators. There will be no promotion of live odds during play in a sports broadcast or live stream of a sports event. That will be in place for the 2013 season."

However members of the committee and critics questioned whether the moves go far enough, given other forms of gambling advertising will not be restricted and live odds will still be delivered through paid sponsorship segments.

A sponsorship arrangement between bookmaker Tom Waterhouse and Channel 9 to promote live odds during National Rugby League broadcasts sparked particular concern, after the bookmaker joined the commentary panel during the opening games of the season.

Shane Matiske, the NRL's general manager for strategic projects, admitted there were issues with Mr Waterhouse's initial role and that changes had been made.

"I think it's plain that in the first round of the competition, the line was a bit blurred," Mr Matiske told the committee.

"What you'll see in the most recent round, and moving forward, is a clear separation when someone is talking about sports odds and when the commentary team is talking about the match itself."

However committee member Josh Frydenberg (Kooyong, Vic) said gambling advertising in sport has become "invidious" and is normalising gambling behaviour, particularly for younger fans.

"Children, obviously, are going to be a large number of the people who turn up to a game and they see the sporting advertising on the back of the football jumpers of the St Kilda players or they see it on the fencing signage, they are going to be exposed to it," Mr Frydenberg said. "They turn on the Brownlow, and every ad break is a lady coming on and telling you, 'Go and take a bet on the Brownlow'."

Gambling expert Dr Charles Livingstone said gambling in sport has become so pervasive that it often supersedes the actual sporting event as the main story.

"Gambling organisations are extremely good at generating free publicity and, unfortunately, the media have, like sports, become somewhat dependent on this stuff for some of their stories," Dr Livingstone said.

"So it is not uncommon now to see a story, particularly in the sporting pages, which consists entirely of a report about the odds of such and such an event occurring. And that is the whole story."

Mr Clothier said the AFL regards gambling as a legitimate activity, but is "acutely aware" of the need to ensure responsible gambling messages are seen and understood in the community.

However he said blanket prohibition of gambling advertising and sports gambling would lead to bigger problems, pushing gamblers into unregulated markets overseas.

"As an integrity manager my biggest fear is gambling that occurs offshore," Mr Clothier said. "I would prefer for us to have a healthy and vibrant wagering industry that can advertise responsibly and ethically, with the right balance."

But Dr Livingstone said more needs to be done on gambling now to prevent the sort of severe public health consequences caused by alcohol and tobacco.

"The reality is that, unfortunately, we knew for 50 years that tobacco was harmful. But it took us an awfully long time to act on that," he said. "We have the opportunity with gambling in sport to act in a precautionary way."

"I agree that there is little evidence at the moment about the relationship between sports promotion and gambling activities amongst young people, but we know enough to know that there is a very strong indication that saturation advertising, which is occurring at the moment, is likely to have an impact on people's subsequent behaviour."

"I think it would be fair, in summing up the evidence, to say that there are a lot of alarm bells ringing around that." •

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National centre could boost disease control

Coordinated response critical for emergencies.

Health experts and a parliamentary committee are urging the federal government to investigate the development of a new national Centre for Disease Control (CDC) to protect the population from infectious diseases.

A range of health experts made the recommendation in submissions to the House of Representatives Health Committee's inquiry into health issues across international borders.

While there are a number of state and federal agencies tasked with infectious disease response and prevention, the push to establish a CDC comes from concerns that Australia is missing an overarching body to coordinate and lead a national health emergency response.

"Australia has very strong capacity in lots of areas but there tends to be fragmentation both at the national level and in our capacity to respond regionally and more broadly, because we lack the sort of coordination that would achieve that," said Professor Peter McIntyre from the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance of Vaccine-Preventable Diseases.

Professor Geoffrey Shellam of the University of Western Australia echoed his colleague's concerns, saying the current model was confusing.

"At the moment a lot of the national policy around communicable disease control is put together by these networks and committees from around the country," Professor Shellam said.

"It is a slow, cumbersome, inefficient process compared to if you have a dedicated unit at the national level to say why we need to have a national policy on this and the expertise is there to do it. That does not happen at the moment. We muddle along."

But Megan Morris of the Department of Health and Ageing's Office of Health Protection disagreed,

telling the committee coordination worked well within the current system of communicable disease control.

"If there is a health emergency at any time, the Australian Health Protection Committee is convened," Ms Morris said.

"I have seen it convened with half an hour's notice. It comprises of the chief health officers from each jurisdiction, the Department of Defence and also the Attorney-General's Emergency Management Australia.

"They get together at the drop of a hat and people phone in from wherever they are. Things happen very quickly to address whatever the health emergency is.

"In a pandemic you have to bring in other parts of jurisdictional governance to make things work."

In its report *Diseases have no borders* the House Health Committee has recommended the federal government join forces with the states and territories to undertake a comprehensive national audit and mapping exercise to identify all agencies, expert committees and working groups involved in managing infectious disease risks.

Once completed, the information would be used to identify any policy or response gaps that need to be addressed,

as a basis for an independent review of whether to establish a national centre for infectious disease control.

However some experts questioned the value of creating a CDC in Australia, saying such a highly centralised model may have more benefits for countries with larger populations such as the United States.

Department of Health and Ageing medical adviser Dr Jennifer Firman said Canada provided a more relevant disease control model for Australia.

"If you look at that [US] CDC model, the CDC has 15,000 employees in 50 states and does chronic health as well as communicable disease," Dr Firman said.

"If you are looking for a government system that is similar to Australia, Canada has provinces akin to our states and territories. Canada has a CDC with 2,000 to 3,000 employees, and they also do some aspects of chronic health."

Dr Firman said all of these systems are a hub-and-spoke network of communicable disease control.

"Some people have an enormous hub and do everything in it, and that is the [US] CDC model," she said.

"Is that the best model? Their public health and health outcomes are not as good as Australia's, by a long shot.

"That is a model, but does it deliver you exactly what you want in terms of outcomes? Perhaps not. The country's system suits that country really." •

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