



Media Release

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App traps: ACCAN calls on ACCC to take action on “free” games

Peak telecommunications consumer body ACCAN is calling on the ACCC to take action on apps that advertise as free but aggressively encourage or require in-app purchases to keep playing.

In its formal complaint to the ACCC, ACCAN has singled out three ‘freemium’ apps, largely targeted to kids, which appear to mislead or deceive users; *The Simpsons: Tapped Out*, *The Hobbit: Kingdoms*, and *Tap Paradise Cove*.

“It’s not OK to advertise a game as free, especially to a child, and then structure the game so the user must pay to keep playing,” said ACCAN Policy and Campaigns Officer Erin Turner. “When people download a game for free, they should be told if it will end up costing them money down the track. At the moment this is not happening and it needs to change,” said Ms Turner.

In *The Simpsons: Tapped Out*, ACCAN found a situation where the player is required to either wait 90 days for a crop of corn to grow, or purchase 1,060 doughnuts (\$48.58) to complete the task instantly.

“In-app purchases aren’t always problematic but companies should not be allowed to make these misleading claims. All consumers, but especially parents looking to purchase appropriate games for their children, should be able to trust information provided about an app. At the moment, they can’t,” said Ms Turner.

Tap Paradise Cove has players complete tasks on their island to proceed (or level up). To complete tasks a player must either wait, sometimes up to 24 hours, or spend rubies which cost real-world dollars.

“There’s no way someone could ‘play free forever’ like Paradise Cove claims. Without paying money you could play for only a few minutes before having to set the game aside for hours or even days. Parents beware; these kinds of games are encouraging your children to spend hundreds of dollars on digital content,” said Ms Turner.

In a submission to the Commonwealth Consumer Affairs Advisory Council’s inquiry, ACCAN has suggested that apps include a simple infographic informing the user of any potential costs involved in playing the game, and that the Apple and Google app stores take responsibility for accepting and resolving complaints about apps purchased through their Australian stores.

Ends

Read ACCAN’s submission to Commonwealth Consumer Affairs Advisory Council’s inquiry into ‘App purchases by Australian consumers’ <http://bit.ly/ZFOLgi>

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Additional information:

Screen shot from *The Simpsons: Tapped Out*

