



Media Release

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ACCAN calls for ban on Telstra charging for privacy

Peak telecommunications consumer body ACCAN is calling on the federal government to ban Telstra's \$36 a year Silent Line fee, which landline customers currently have to pay if they want to keep their phone number private.

In February, ACCAN welcomed Telstra's move to waive the fee for people who are under a protection order or at risk of violence. However, ACCAN argued in its submission to a recent Senate Committee inquiry that this exemption is not enough and a Silent Line should be free for all consumers.

"Under Telstra's policy, many people who rightly need a Silent Line will still be forced to pay the fee," said ACCAN CEO Teresa Corbin. "It's clear Telstra aren't going to remove this fee for all consumers, which is why we're calling on the government to act. We want to make sure all Australians do not have to pay for this privacy protection," said Ms Corbin.

In the Senate Committee's report, Labor and Greens Senators recommended the fee be banned, however a majority of Coalition Senators recommended against banning the fee.

"We're extremely disappointed in the Committee's recommendations. They have effectively ignored the 18 submissions from consumer and privacy advocates, community legal centres and telecommunications providers. They instead followed the one submission – from Telstra – that argued Telstra's commercial interests were more important than people's right to privacy," said Ms Corbin.

Telstra has not said publicly how much revenue is collected from the Silent Line fee, however in 2007 a Fairfax newspaper estimated that the fee generates as much as \$30 million annually. This conservative estimate is a small fraction – around 1/1000th – of Telstra's annual sales revenue (over \$25 billion FY 2011-2012).

Other providers like Internode, iPrimus and iiNet all charge their customers a Silent Line fee due to the costs passed on from Telstra. Optus charges a Silent Line fee when it resells a Telstra landline service, although it doesn't charge a fee on its own service.

In 2008 the Australian Law Reform Commission recommended the fee be abolished.

Ends

To see ACCAN's submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications, visit <http://bit.ly/17uaN9v>

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