

President's chat: Feb – Mar 2009



It's hard to believe that the Consumer World and National Congresses were such a short time ago. We were inspired by the notion that consumers were really getting together and able to make a difference. Since then in WA that situation seems to have taken several steps backward. We've seen the new government tell us they'll make their own decisions on trading hours, proposals to do away with DOCEP and incorporate consumer affairs into a new department called Commerce – doesn't that sound consumer oriented?

When trying to find appropriate assistance with a consumer problem, we've all had the run around from DOCEP to the ACCC to some other states consumer agency or Ombudsman. The Productivity Commission's Draft Report on the Review of Australia's Consumer Policy Framework suggests an amalgamation of State (Fair Trading) and Federal (Trade Practices) legislation and consumer agencies to provide consistent protection across all states. Although I suspect WA's interests would be somewhat overlooked in such a process, perhaps consumers would benefit from having a one stop shop for all consumer issues. If the new WA government is going to start shuffling departments with an emphasis on commerce rather than consumers then perhaps it's worth consideration.

With the referendum approaching, we're enduring daylight saving again. For me this means going to bed not much before I get up - so yes, I'm crankier than usual. I'll be really surprised if we have to suffer this again. Businesses wanting to trade an hour earlier during summer should be able to do so without the whole community being affected! We still can't do our banking after 4 pm or go to the Post Office after 5pm – the rationale for that is completely beyond me – why can't these agencies do paper work after hours like the rest of us? A taxi driver recently told me that although he was vaguely in favour of daylight saving, he'd vote against it for the sake of families with children. It is inspiring to know that there are still some unselfish individuals out there prepared to consider others in their choice.

After all the work we did on the review of building legislation and the time we put into the Building Commission proposal, we are back in the dark as to what direction the new government might take.

So recession eh! Financial crisis! Certainly not a lot of consumer confidence anyway. Although we may yet tough out the financial crisis,

many consumers have nevertheless seen their investments diminish, including our mandatory superannuation. I'm so pleased however that we're hearing less about trading hours and the stadium and it will be most interesting to see what improvements regional consumers may enjoy.

I mentioned the litter problem last newsletter. As a botanist and consumer member of the Keep Australia Beautiful Council, I have a big interest in environmental issues and you'll find my whinge later in the newsletter. Every year hundreds of thousands of Australians help clean up their environment on Clean Up Australia Day. The next Clean Up Australia Day event will be held on 1st March 2009. More information is available at cleanup.org.au.

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