

President's chat Feb-March 2011



Welcome to the first issue of Consumer Comment for 2011. Since the last edition, CAWA's been busy with submissions to the Minister for Agriculture, Terry Redman on *Genetically Modified Crops in WA* and to the Minister for Commerce, Simon O'Brien on the *Building Services (Complaint Resolution and Administration) Bill 2010* and to Max Trenorden MLC, Chairman of Parliament's Public Administration Committee on *Strata Title Managers*. Two of our members are having ongoing issues with the retirement villages they call home. You will find more on these in Consumer Comment Feb-Mar 2011. Also in this issue, thanks go to Anne Driscoll, the Commissioner for Consumer Protection for providing her profile.

As usual the newsletter contains a couple of my *rants*. I think I'm a fairly astute consumer, so why do I always have glitches with simple things with which I don't expect to have glitches?

Earlier this month I rang the Department of Transport wondering about the whereabouts of my car rego renewal invoice, only to be told I'd been driving an unlicensed vehicle for more than a year. This resulted when, having purchased my car in mid December 2009 with the licence about to expire, I paid the transfer fees (Transfer Fee and Vehicle Licence Duty of \$659.50) thinking this included the Licence fee. There was nothing to alert me that the Licence fee was not included because I wasn't expecting a window sticker and no further correspondence was received from the DOT, for example an invoice for the Licence or a request to hand in the plates.

I was very lucky that I didn't receive a speeding infringement during that time (unlike the former Minister for Commerce and now Minister for Transport, Mr Buswell) and particularly lucky that no one driving my car was involved in an accident. The Third Party implications could have been horrendous. Anyway the fullstory is later in the newsletter but please check your car's registration paperwork (if you can find it), particularly if you have moved house.

I've noticed that the DOT appears to be offering a 3 month grace period on licence renewals, probably as a result of the withdrawal of window stickers but currently there could be any number of unlicensed vehicles currently on our roads. I've driven 20,000 kms in the last year and seen many police cars but apparently never had my plates checked.

I have also been suffering this month from the results of a computer virus involving unauthorised access to my internet banking and the subsequent

loss of over \$2000. While I am confident (for now) that the bank will eventually restore the money to my account, the process of dealing with the bank's fraud department has been time consuming and tedious to say the least. The message here is to remain vigilant, make sure antivirus and firewall programmes are up to date and don't trust that little padlock icon at the bottom of the screen to protect you.

CAWA is dismayed at the ERA's decision not to reappoint our organisation to the ERA (Consumer) Consultative Committee. The ERA is responsible for the regulations associated with our power, water and gas utilities and the country rail network. We have been represented on the ERACCC since 2005 with two yearly reappointments since then. Our nomination for 2011-14 has been declined due to the "absence of a sufficiently broad membership base". Given the forecast massive increase in energy costs which are "set to rise at above inflation levels for at least a decade if the State Budget is to avoid a multi-billion-dollar black hole" (The Weekend West, February 19-20, 2011), together with the recent oversight with concessions not being paid together with CAWA's "membership base" being essentially unchanged, we question the motives for CAWA's non reappointment.

No other member of the ERACCC represents the interests of ordinary, everyday consumers, the vast majority. Although CAWA supports the reappointment of WACOSS and Consumer Credit Legal Service, both represent a very small proportion of disadvantaged or struggling WA consumers, as does the Financial Counsellors Association of WA. All other currently appointed ERACCC members represent small business or Government. We have requested the ERA reconsider. Our letter to Mr Lyndon Rowe, Chairman of the ERA Consumer Consultative Committee can be found on page 14 of our Feb-March 2011 newsletter.

If anyone wants to add to the issues mentioned in this Newsletter please email me at info@consumers.asn.au

Genette Keating