



**Australian
Privacy
Foundation**

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MEDIA RELEASE

Access Card: What's the rush?

28 February 2007

"It is outrageous to expect the Parliament to accept half-written legislation, before the Government has finished working out all the details of the so-called Access Card scheme" – that is the verdict of the Australian Privacy Foundation, on a Bill debated in Parliament this week.

The Human Services (Enhanced Service Delivery) Bill 2007 seeks to establish the legal framework for the Access Card, even though the Government admits that more legislation will be necessary soon, to plug up the holes.

The Australian Privacy Foundation, the leading non-government organisation dedicated to protecting the privacy rights of Australians, will appear before a Senate Committee this Friday, to outline their concerns about the Bill.

"On Friday we will be calling upon the Senate Committee to reject the Access Card proposal as unjustified, unworkable, inadequate, and a potentially costly and stupid mistake", said the Foundation's 'No ID Card' Campaign Director, Anna Johnston, today.

"We will be asking some key questions about the project:

- First, where is the benefit to the majority of Australians who only hold a Medicare card?
- Second, is the cost going to be worth it?
- Third, why is the Government rushing to sign contracts and pass legislation before public consultation is complete?
- And finally, why doesn't the Bill match the Government's rhetoric?"

"All major political parties, including the Government, have stated their opposition to a national ID card, and public opinion polls suggest Australians' opposition to ID cards remains high", noted Ms Johnston.

"Yet the Access Card will be a national ID card – by design and effect, if not by intention. The safeguards in the Bill are woefully inadequate, with six loopholes already evident", she said.

"The Government promised the chance for public consultation through a Senate committee review of the legislation, but then brought on debate in the lower house before the Senate Committee has even held its hearings," said Ms Johnston. "This demonstrates yet again that the public consultation process is just a token gesture".

The Government is also preparing to accept tenders from companies wishing to supply the smartcards as soon as 15 March – the same day the Senate committee is due to report.

"How can the Government be tendering for the biggest IT project ever, before even knowing the authorising legislation will get through Parliament? This could expose the Government to millions of dollars in liabilities. It is contemptuous of the Government to start wasting \$1.1 billion in taxpayers' money like this - it's like asking for a blank cheque from taxpayers", she said.

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