

Media Release



Government of South Australia

Office of Consumer and
Business Affairs

Reference:
Contact: **Daniel Feher**
Phone: 8204 9512

**Education and
Information Services**

Ground Floor
Chesser House
91-97 Grenfell Street
Adelaide SA 5000

GPO Box 1719
Adelaide SA 5001
DX 225

Tel 08 8204 9516
Fax 08 8204 9509

www.ocba.sa.gov.au

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WOMAN PROSECUTED FOR FALSE BILLING SCAM

A woman who targeted a South Australian business with a false billing scam was found guilty in the Magistrates Court.

June Ratcliffe of Summerland Point, New South Wales, failed to appear to defend the charges and was convicted in her absence of misrepresentations and asserting a right to payments she was not entitled to under the *Fair Trading Act 1987*. Ratcliffe was fined \$5000 plus prosecution costs.

His Honour Mr Millard S.M. remarked that the seriousness of the offence warranted a significant penalty. He noted the ease with which offences of this nature could be committed and the difficulty in detecting them.

Acting Commissioner for Consumer Affairs, Anne Gale, agreed with the Magistrate's remarks, adding that businesses need to keep a close eye on their books to ensure they don't fall for deceptive practices such as false billing.

"If you run a business, make sure you are on top of your bookwork to avoid falling victim to this sort of scam."

The South Australian business raised the alarm in 2007 after being targeted by Ratcliffe through her New South Wales registered business, Insight Marketing.

The SA business received phone calls and letters from agents of Ratcliffe, demanding payment for advertising that they had not commissioned in a publication produced by Insight Marketing called 'Nationwide Firefighter News'.

Investigations by the Office of Consumer and Business Affairs (OCBA) uncovered the scam and took court action against Ratcliffe, resulting in the conviction.

"I urge businesses to contact OCBA if they are contacted with requests for payment for unauthorised services. Refuse payment and report the details to OCBA for further investigation."

False billing is an offence under the Fair Trading Act 1987 carrying a maximum penalty of \$20,000.

To report concerns about false billing consumers can contact OCBA on 8204 9777 or 131 882 for regional callers, or visit the website at www.ocba.sa.gov.au.