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Media release

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Telemarketing: a waste of time and money

The value of time wasted on unsolicited telemarketing calls in Australia amounts to \$1.58 billion annually, according to a new paper published by The Australia Institute. Two in three Australians believe that telemarketing should be banned altogether.

‘There is a great deal of negative feeling in the community about direct marketing,’ said Josh Fear, Research Fellow and author of *Go Away, Please: The social and economic impact of intrusive marketing*. ‘This stems from the invasion of personal space, the use of personal details without permission, the waste of precious time, and the sheer absurdity and futility of much direct marketing.’

The report shows that some people go to great lengths to avoid intrusive marketing. They buy answering machines, disconnect their phone altogether, send junk mail back to its source, and cross the road when a marketer is in their path. ‘No Junk Mail’ signs are reported to be only partially effective, with real estate agents commonly disregarding them.

The government-backed Do Not Call Register has been operating for around 18 months, but a new survey by the Institute shows that Australians still receive an average of 8.5 telemarketing calls per month. People on the Register receive around seven calls per month, while those not on the Register receive around ten calls. By this measure, the Register appears to have reduced telemarketing call volumes by around 30 per cent.

‘The current exemptions from the rules mean that telemarketing continues to be big business’, Mr Fear said. ‘Companies with an ongoing relationship with customers, such as banks and telecommunications companies, can claim that they have “inferred consent” to make telemarketing calls.’

The paper proposes an opt-in telemarketing register, in contrast to the current opt-out approach. Under such a system, telemarketers would be allowed to call only those people who had expressed a desire to receive telemarketing calls. If they were to call other numbers, they would suffer strict penalties.

The paper also makes recommendations addressing junk mail, unwanted faxes and door-to-door sales visits.