

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## PHONE SCAMMERS USE BANK FEES CLASS ACTION TO RIP OFF CONSUMERS

Consumer Action is urging consumers to watch out for scammers who are swindling hundreds of dollars from unwitting consumers with bogus claims of being able to recover thousands of dollars in overcharged bank fees on their behalf.

Carolyn Bond, Consumer Action co-CEO, said consumers had contacted the Centre to say they had received an unsolicited telephone call from people claiming to be from Consumer Action or a variation of that name.

“It seems to be a fairly sophisticated operation as the scammers already appear to have some bank details for the people they are contacting. They usually claim to have investigated your bank account and say they can recoup thousands of dollars in overcharged bank fees – for a ‘small’ upfront fee of course.”

Ms Bond said Consumer Action was very concerned that the Centre’s name had been used in the scam and urged consumers to be vigilant in protecting their privacy.

“No matter who you’re speaking to, you should never give your banking or personal details to anyone over the phone. No reputable company would ever ask a customer to do this and alarm bells should start ringing the minute you hear the question,” she said.

Ms Bond says recent media coverage of the bank fees class action and Consumer Action’s previous bank fees campaign has helped the fraudsters to create an even more convincing scam.

“Like many of the best scams, this one is based loosely on fact. However, consumers should be instantly suspicious of any calls they receive about reclaiming bank fees or lost money, particularly if they are being asked to pay an upfront fee for the service.”

“Of course, victims of this scam will never see a penny of the money they were promised,” she said. “And because all the payments were sent to India via Western Union and the chances that money will ever be recovered is pretty much non-existent.”

“Consumers need to realise that sending money to strangers via Western Union offers no protection if something does go wrong because once your money leaves Australia even our regulators will struggle to trace it, let alone recover it.”

Ms Bond said anyone who is contacted out of the blue by someone claiming to be able to recover bank fees or unclaimed money for them should record the details and immediately contact Scamwatch on 1300 302 502 and report it to the police by calling Crimestoppers on 1800 333 000 or visiting their local station.

Consumers should also immediately contact their bank to report the matter.

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