

national snapshot

# ACCC in power prices review

MATTHEW KILLORAN

ELECTRICITY retailers will be forced to hand over detailed, commercial-in-confidence information on power prices and profits as the competition watchdog is ordered to launch an investigation.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull will today announce the power price probe, which will specifically look at electricity retailers and seek out anti-competitive behaviour.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission will also dig into whether the power retailers' profits are appropriate, whether contracts are confusing as well as investigating if residential and business users get a fair deal.

Wholesale power prices will also come under scrutiny.

Queensland residents and commercial power users have endured repeated high cost surges during the first two months of the year.

But consumers should not expect a quick result, with a report not due until July 1, 2018.

Mr Turnbull's push to have the ACCC investigate electricity prices follows his promise in his first speech of the year to make power more affordable for Australians.

It was seen as a way to bring disenfranchised voters back.

Mr Turnbull said competition in retail electricity markets did not appear to be operating as efficiently as it should.

"A better deal in electricity is vital to keeping the lights on, delivering cheaper prices to families and businesses and sustaining jobs, particularly the thousands of jobs in our



Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull.

energy intensive industries," he said.

The terms of reference will include the ACCC looking at what drives the costs of electricity, impediments to consumers switching companies, whether there exists anti-competitive behaviour, whether profit levels are appropriate and wholesale pricing.

Queensland Competition Authority figures show the average user in regional Queensland on tariff 11 was facing annual power bills of \$1498 - up \$42 from the previous year.

By June last year, 18,423 residential customers in Queensland were on hardship programs run by electricity companies, double what it was two years ago, according to the Australian Energy Regulator.

Australian Energy Market Operator figures showed the average wholesale price for electricity in Queensland for January was \$198 a megawatt hour, compared to South Australia's average of \$84 a megawatt hour and Victoria's \$62.

Queensland also led the nation in average wholesale prices in February when it hit \$335 a megawatt hour.

## NADIA'S CHOICE GETS STAMP OF DISAPPROVAL

THE only person in the whole of Australia who appears to like Nadia Stamp's husband appears to be Stamp herself.

The *Married At First Sight* bride has defended her decision to stay with TV's biggest villain Anthony Manton, who has been universally panned for the way he treats Stamp.

His antics on the show have included belittling his TV wife as "figg'd" and flat-chested, causing some to express concerns his actions border on emotional abuse.

"I decided to stay because I didn't want to give up and I didn't want to have a regret and ask myself what if," Stamp said. "I don't think he is abusive, I just think he doesn't have a filter, so the way it comes across and the way he expresses himself can come across as quite abrupt."

The flight attendant has her head in the clouds, because not even her mum understands why she would want to stay with him.

"I don't know that Mum is totally accepting of my decision to stay with Anthony, to be honest," she said.

"I guess the good outweighs the bad. I feel like Anthony really did grow a lot. He is a very stubborn person who is very inflexible and to be able to even bend him as far as I was able to is quite remarkable."

JONATHAN MORAN



Married At First Sight's Nadia Stamp, and (right) with her husband Anthony Manton. Picture: Jamie Hainson.



## Alzheimer's drug hope

A NEW drug to beat Australia's second biggest killer, Alzheimer's disease, will be trialled on Australian patients within months.

The medicine Xanamem blocks the stress hormone cortisol to improve mental function and is being billed as the world's next blockbuster drug after it improved the mental function of mice.

Australian company Actinogen Medical will begin trials of its new Alzheimer's disease drug Xanamem on the Central Coast of NSW, as well as Sydney and Melbourne. More than 170 patients with mild dementia in Australia, the UK and the US will take part in the 12-week trial.

University of Newcastle's Professor Jonathan Sturm whose patients will take part in the trial said there was great need for an effective Alzheimer's treatment.

## Need for boost in vaccinations

MORE than four million Australians are missing out on lifesaving vaccines every year, with coverage dangerously low among older adults, teenagers and the chronically ill.

University of NSW lecturer Robert Menzies said crack-downs had boosted coverage among children to above 90 per cent, but about 150,000 remained undervaccinated. Dr Menzies led research published in the *Medical Journal of Australia* today.

Just 73 per cent of adolescent girls are fully vaccinated against human papillomavirus, which can cause cervical cancer.

Only 51 per cent of the 3.5 million Australians aged over 65 who are eligible for a free pneumococcal and annual influenza vaccination receive it.

About 3000 people die from influenza every year, most of whom are elderly.

## Nations unite to combat ice

DRUGS worth \$2 billion have been stopped from hitting Australia's streets as part of an international police operation.

Australian and Chinese police have stopped the smuggling of deadly drugs, such as ice, with almost 7.5 tonnes of illicit substances seized.

Taskforce Blaze, based in Guangzhou province, China, targets the epicentre of an evil international trade that accounts for about 70 per cent of ice imported into Australia.

New statistics show that to February 18, 7356kg of drugs and precursors had been seized as a result of the taskforce.

In China, police have seized 4942kg, worth \$1.1 billion. That includes 935.12kg of crystal methamphetamine, or ice, 15.9kg of liquid methamphetamine, 680kg of ecstasy and 3311.8kg of precursor material. Australian police seized 2414kg of drugs and precursors.

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## Denyer in lucky escape from race crash

GOLD Logie nominee Grant Denyer has suffered a broken tailbone and finger but was lucky to walk away from a serious rally car crash in his silver Lotus yesterday.

The *Family Feud* presenter and motorsport enthusiast was airlifted to hospital, along with his co-driver Dale Moscatt, who had to be cut out of the

wreckage, after their car "left the road at speed" near Maryville, Victoria. The crash happened during the Lake Mountain sprint stage of the Australian Tarmac Rally Championships.

Denyer, who was driving at the time of the accident, was stabilised by medical and race safety officials before being

airlifted to The Alfred Hospital in Melbourne where he was recovering. Moscatt was taken to the Royal Melbourne Hospital where he was expected to be operated on for a suspected broken leg.

Witnesses claim 39-year-old Denyer and his racing partner's car "left the road at speed", with reports the high-

performance vehicle hit a tree and "crumpled around them".

Organisers suspended that stage of the event to allow for medical team access.

Denyer's wife Cherie was at home in Bathurst with the couple's two young daughters when the crash occurred but arranged for his father Craig to fly to Denyer's bedside.

## Denyer



RECOVERING: Grant Denyer in his Lotus before the crash.