



**Australian
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Media Release

The petrol crisis – fuel for future privacy violations?

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Premier Anna Bligh has announced that, Queensland motorists will be required to swipe a bar code on their drivers licence at the point of sale to receive a petrol subsidy. To a degree, this will enable the Government to track persons' movements and spending habits. Personal data that enables tracking of movements is attractive to both governments and marketing companies, and the substantial privacy risks must be understood and addressed at the outset. Further, if this data can be combined with other data sources, it represents a significant privacy threat.

The Premier's announcement is also worrying in that it seems like an attempt to use the petrol crisis to gain support for the highly controversial new drivers licence.

In addition, it is unclear how the Government intends to ensure that the data is securely collected and stored. This is particularly concerning in light of the fact that the data collection will be carried out by private companies (i.e. the petrol stations).

The new Queensland drivers licence will be a smartcard carrying highly sensitive personal information. While the scheme is to be introduced during 2009, no serious consultation has taken place with the community since 2003. In fact, precious little is disclosed about the new licence. For example, it is not clear what information will be stored on the smartcard. Queensland Transport states that:

"The new smartcard driver licence will contain the same information as the existing laminated licence, but will also include a digital photograph and a smartchip to store licensing and other information." (emphasis added)

The Government clearly has the option to choose not to engage with the community in this type of situations. However, it seems irresponsible to embark on a costly reform such as this, without utilizing the "early warning system" that stake holder consultation provides. Should it turn out that the new smartcard drivers licence is associated with privacy concerns, it may be very costly to fix them at this advanced stage of the process.