

## Launch of ShopSmart at Nundah Shopping Village July 13, 2008

Welcome everyone to the launch of my ShopSmart website with-----*Calcu-Kate* & friends.

The idea for the ShopSmart website started more than six months ago when I spoke in the Senate about the desperate need for greater financial literacy in Australia—especially among the young adults and families of Australia.

Now “financial literacy” can sound like a very daunting concept, but it’s pretty simple.

For most families, it means having a good enough idea of where your money is going, to ensure that there is a bit left at the end of each week or month.

For people who rely entirely on fixed incomes, such as those on pensions and other Centrelink payments, it’s a real struggle to ensure that “money out” is at least no more than “money in”.

And rising petrol and diesel prices, rising bank interest and the rising cost of food make it even harder.

In my personal view, the single pension rate, at the very least, should be increased to about 70% of the couple rate.

When my Senate committee, the Community Affairs committee, inquired into the *Cost of Living Pressures on Older Australians*, the evidence made it very clear that it was mostly single older Australians, especially elderly women, who were doing it tough.

There are many major living costs that you can’t cut whether you’re single or part of a couple—you can’t rent a half-bedroom unit, you can’t drive and maintain half a car and so on.

But for most of Australia’s workers and their families, we should generally have had a bit left over after all the bills were paid.

Now for some people that’s been a real problem for years—a lot of young adults get into financial trouble with mobile phone bills and some families couldn’t afford their mortgage repayments when interest rates went up even by just one-quarter of a per cent.

Now with the price of petrol and diesel ballooning, the cost of groceries going up and interest rates going up, it’s getting tougher for everyone.

And the Federal Labor Government is forecasting that unemployment will rise by another 134,000 this year.

So, in my office, we started to wonder what we could do about helping Queenslanders to learn how to budget and how best to make ends meet.

We looked for the website that the Treasurer, Wayne Swan, used to have that monitored grocery prices when he was just the member for Lilley—and discovered it hadn't been updated since well before the election.

So we thought we'd give him a hand... and the result is the ShopSmart website with *Calcu-Kate*!

ShopSmart will bring you a monthly survey of grocery prices in four Queensland centres. Our basket of 13 identical items is based as closely as possible on Wayne Swan's old list—his website was pretty short on detail.

The 13 items we've chosen are either a well-known national brand that's available at all supermarkets or the house brand and each of our volunteer shoppers—in Cairns, Gladstone, Nundah and Logan—prices the same items in the same survey period each month.

As more volunteer shoppers join the survey we'll include prices from other Queensland areas.

Now Wayne Swan has announced that he'll spend \$13 million to set up a national website to watch grocery prices, but he hasn't said when it will be up and running.

And, as the Opposition leader Dr Nelson has said, **watching** prices won't **change** prices.

So we've added a number of other features to the ShopSmart website to help Queenslanders manage their money better and to save money where possible.

The website includes the *Calcu-kator*—a downloadable unit price matrix which allows you to compare the cost of two different size items—either of the same brand or of different brands. So no more standing in the supermarket wondering if the 1.25 litre on special is cheaper than the 2 litre that isn't. Just use the *Calcu-kator*!

We've also included downloadable budget spreadsheets, tips on interest rates, and links to other websites that can help with money management.

We'll add more over the coming months whilst we wait for Wayne Swan's website.

So thank you very much to everyone for coming along today—especially to the fruit and vegetable and to *Calcu-Kate*.