



# Outcry over \$53k blogs

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IN CANBERRA

THE Gillard Government has spent \$53,000 on something thousands of Australians do for free – running a blog.

Taxpayers will foot the bill for two blogs for about three months, featuring little more than articles about Australia-Asia relations.

Just one reader has bothered to leave a comment on the blogs, despite the sites being designed to engage with the public and the Government describing them as an “online conversation”.

One of the two blogs doesn't even allow reader comment – a staple of online blogs.

It does, however, allow Facebook “likes”, with most posts garnering between just zero and five likes.

Taxpayers are forking out for a full-time “editor” and a part-time assistant to run one of the

websites.

The blogs, operating from March 19 to June 30, have been outsourced by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet to private think tanks the Lowy Institute and the Australia Institute of International Affairs.

Liberal Senator Scott Ryan described the blogs as “extraordinary expenditure with lacklustre results”, and criticised their lack of community engagement.

The Lowy Institute is being handed about \$500 per working day – a \$33,000 contract – to post short articles and links to other websites.

The Australian Institute of International Affairs has a \$20,000 contract and has so far published two competitions and posted 10 articles, including a speech by Kevin Rudd when he was foreign minister.

When Senator Ryan raised the contracts in Senate Estimates hearings, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet

deputy secretary Renee Leon defended the cost, describing the work as “analytical”.

Senator Ryan said the contractors were expected to moderate and provide input in the online conversation.

“It does require more than an ICT posting process . . . it does require a level of intellectual engagement with the issues,” Ms Leon said.

She said taxpayers were forking out for blog set-up, editorial oversight, commissioned writing, web hosting and subscriber services.

Senator Ryan said the cost was exorbitant.

“I would have thought that moving debate online would make it cheaper and more inclusive, but the PM has yet again taken charge of a project that defies logic,” he said.

“The blogs she has funded are costly and lacking in community engagement.”



**NO LIKES:** Prime Minister Gillard's department outsourced the blogs. **Picture:** Gary Ramage