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Michael Hawatt.

NSW

Whopping \$17,000 iPad internet bill dumped on ratepayers

Exclusive, State Political Reporter, The Daily Telegraph

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RATEPAYERS have been forced to stump up \$17,000 after a Liberal state election candidate's family took his work iPad to Morocco and ran up a whopping bill.

The Marrakesh mobile meltdown happened last year as Canterbury City councillor Michael Hawatt's wife Najat flew to North Africa with her husband's council-issued tablet in her bags.

The data roaming button was on and Ms Hawatt and her daughter churned through thousands at ratepayer expense.

The council received, and has paid, two bills since Ms Hawatt's trip totalling \$16,958.56.

The local authority is now trying to reclaim the cash from Mr Hawatt, the Liberal candidate for Lakemba in the March election.

Mr Hawatt described the charges as "unfair" and has urged the council to challenge the bill.

He insists the data roaming button was only on for a very short period and has so far not reimbursed the local authority.

"As an individual, I've made a complaint before about my other phone, because it happened when I was overseas and all this data came down — and they cancelled it," Mr Hawatt said.

“I told the (council) director that they did it with me and so they should also cancel it for us, a corporate company.”

Council documents show the council recently checked with the telecommunications company involved and it confirmed the charges were not a mistake and needed no adjustment.

DATA ROAMING BILL-SHOCK:

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Running up massive bills from data roaming has been a major problem for Aussies heading overseas and major telcos have taken action by introducing new plans with data, call and text allowances for use in different countries.

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network also recommends travellers consider buying and using local SIM cards when abroad. Pre-paid roaming SIM cards are also available in Australia. ACCAN also recommends using local wi-fi spots as a way to avoid running up huge charges.



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