

## **Standing Advisory Committee on Consumer Affairs**

### **9 November 2010 Meeting Report**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the sixth meeting of the Standing Advisory Committee on Consumer Affairs (SACCA). One apology was noted.

#### **Customer Charters**

It was noted that in other industries customer charters are seen as a useful marketing exercise and a point of differentiation. Charters would sit outside regulation so that there is public awareness that people should expect good service when locked into their contracts for extensive periods of time. It was agreed to collate examples of customer service charters in other industries for discussion at the next SACCA meeting.

#### **Telecommunications Consumer Protection Code**

The meeting heard from Fay Holthuyzen, Chair of the TCP Review Steering Committee. It was noted that the steering group wants to be informed by the outcome of the ACMA's 'Reconnecting the customer' inquiry which will conclude in February 2011. There will be a summary document of rights and obligations at the front of the code. It is hoped that this document is not too prescriptive and can allow for change in the future. There will be outcome based objectives and then steps that the industry needs to take will sit under that. The meeting noted that the code is yet to be drafted. The revised code will be sent to the ACMA for approval in April 2011. It is hoped that the code will come into effect in June 2011.

The meeting then heard from Gordon Renouf, ACCAN Code Review Co-ordinator. The meeting heard a key aspiration of ACCAN is a code that is well monitored and consumer friendly. Consumer representatives want a code which has principle statements and outcome statements that really communicate what needs to be achieved. This will mean less wording in the code and the ability to deal better with future situations. These rules are easier to apply because it tells the industry why they must follow these rules.

The meeting noted that a drawback of the review process is that there is not a clear structure for all working groups to follow and that the consumer representatives are doing the work.

SACCA members expressed an urgent need for customer service rules to be enshrined in the code. The meeting noted that the culture of the telecommunications industry is to waive a problem and not actually fix the issue. This results in systemic issues not being addressed. It was noted that guidelines in addition to the Code add to complexity and should be avoided.

## **CEO Address**

ACCAN's newly appointed CEO, Teresa Corbin, addressed the meeting. The meeting heard an update on the CEO meeting with the Minister for Communications, Broadband and the Digital Economy, which was positive. Discussion covered a variety of issues, including the need to address bill shock in the NBN environment.

## **ACCAN draft submission to the DBCDE consultation on Universal Service in the NBN**

The meeting heard an outline of ACCAN's submission to the Department. There was discussion of the future of the USO, including specifically payphones and disability equipment. The meeting then discussed the general relationship between the DEP and the USO, which are linked due to Telstra's obligations to provide equipment under the USO. The meeting discussed the fact that other industry members cannot be universal service providers as Telstra's obligation is locked for 10 years.

## **Briefing on the first tranche of NBN legislation**

The meeting heard that the Telecommunications Amendment (Competition and Consumer Safeguards) Bill 2010 is a potential win for consumers. It was noted that ACCAN is interested to see how seriously the ACMA will take its new powers which include issuing infringement notices. There is also a lot of discretion in the new bill but the dynamic will certainly change if the will is there.

## **Thanks**

The SACCA members noted that Nan Bosler's term as SACCA chair was concluding and thanked her for her dedication to the committee.