

Media release Friday 3rd December

TIO report reveals another dreadful year for Aussie telco customers

ACMA urged to act on smartphone bill shock and complaint handling

Annual complaints data released by the Telecommunication Industry Ombudsman (TIO) reveals telco complaints remain at unacceptably high levels, according to peak communications consumer body, the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN).

The TIO annual report, released today, says 167,955 new complaints were made regarding internet and phone services in 2009-2010 – almost 650 per day.

But ACCAN says these complaints represent just the tip of the iceberg, with recent Galaxy research finding just 7% of people who are dissatisfied with their telco's response to a complaint go to the Ombudsman for help, with around a third unaware that the TIO exists.

ACCAN is calling for information about the TIO to be made mandatory on all telecommunications bills and for a complaint-handling standard to be introduced.

"These figures tell us that people are not happy with telcos' customer service and complaint handling processes," said ACCAN Chief Executive Teresa Corbin.

"We need to make people aware that the TIO is there to help and has a good track record in resolving disputes between telcos and customers."

The consumer group says a 70.5% drop in TIO complaints about mobile premium services (MPS) is evidence that the decisive regulatory action taken by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 12 months ago has worked.

But ACCAN says the next challenges for the regulator and the industry are bill shock and credit management issues, which are rapidly increasing according to the TIO report.

"Right now the fastest-growing problem area is bill shock from smart phones, in particular excess data and global roaming charges. Regulation has to keep pace with technological developments."

"Consumers need the ACMA to act now to curb bill shock and credit management issues before they end up spiralling out of control in the same way mobile premium services did five years ago," said Ms Corbin.

ACCAN says while there has been a small decrease in complaints, it will be a long road back to the 2005 benchmark of under 100,000 complaints.

Media contact: Elise Davidson 0409 966 931

About ACCAN

ACCAN (Australian Communications Consumer Action Network) is Australia's new peak communications consumer organisation. ACCAN's goal is available, accessible and affordable communications that enhances the lives of consumers. The operation of ACCAN is made possible by funding provided by the Australian government.