

ACCAN media release

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Record levels of customer complaints spark ACMA inquiry

The Australian Communication Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) welcomes [today's announcement of an inquiry into customer service](#) by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) at the CommsDay Summit in Sydney. Commenting on the delayed debate of the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Competition and Consumer Safeguards) Bill 2009, Allan Asher, ACCAN Chief Executive said "With some of the highest prices in the OECD and worst customer service, it is time to reform both competition and consumer protection provisions."

"Consumers have been suffering from shoddy customer service for too long" according to Allan Asher, CEO of ACCAN. "We are pleased that finally the regulator is getting serious about telcos abusing their customers".

Last year's "connect.resolve" campaign by the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) focussed attention on complaint handling and customer service. Despite intensive scrutiny, the industry still recorded a 130 per cent increase in complaints related to complaint handling, and a 118 per cent increase in complaints about customer service to the TIO.

According to ACCAN, "these aren't complex issues, they are simple and should be easy to fix. The only conclusion that can be drawn is that telecommunications companies just do not care about consumers".

Earlier today, [Minister Stephen Conroy also announced plans to strengthen consumer protection in self-regulation](#). The Minister will amend the Telecommunications Act (1997), giving the Minister authority to direct the ACMA to develop an Industry Standard that would be directly enforceable by the ACMA.

"Industry Standards provide much greater protection and could revolutionise the effectiveness of consumer regulation in this industry. This is another step forward in fixing up the telecommunications industry".

"ACCAN will work with the ACMA and other stakeholders who want to make sure consumers get a better deal".

Media enquiries can be made to the ACCAN Director of Policies & Campaigns

Elissa Freeman

Email: elissa.freeman@accan.org.au

[Tel:02 9288 4000](tel:0292884000) (bh) or Mobile: 0428 512 020

ACCAN background

In April 2008 the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy Senator Stephen Conroy announced a Forum to identify ways to make consumer representation in telecommunications more powerful and more effective. Invitations to the Forum were sent to consumer, government and industry representatives.

The Forum was held on 1 May 2008 and resulted in agreement among the many consumer groups in attendance that work should begin to explore the formation of a new model for consumer representation in telecommunications – a single peak body representing the diversity of views among consumers of telecommunications services.

A Consumer Representation Working Group was established and, with significant secretariat and funding support from the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, the Group completed the many tasks for the establishment of ACCAN, including significant financial and organisational planning, finalisation of a constitution and selection of an initial Board that has strong sectoral representation, and important competencies in corporate governance.

The Working Group was also charged with the task of reporting to the Minister by the end of July of this year with proposals for consumer representation arrangements going forward.

The report which was delivered to the Minister on 1 August 2008 outlined a number of funding proposals for consumer representation arrangements from 1 July 2009, including a proposal for ACCAN to take over the task of administering that grant funding, within Departmental guidelines.

While the Minister considers the report, the Founding Board has many tasks to complete in the mean time including establishing its own policies and strategies, and cementing relationships with its constituencies, government and industry.

The ACCAN Founding Board members are **Nan Bosler**, President, Australian Seniors Computer Clubs Association, and current Director of Consumers' Telecommunications Network (CTN). **Len Bytheway**, Chief Executive Officer ACT for Kids and Director (Deputy Chair) of CTN. **Aaron Davis**, Chief Executive Officer, Indigenous Consumer Assistance Network. **Gerard Goggin**, Professor of Digital Communication, and Deputy Director Journalism and Media Research Centre, University of New South Wales. **Catriona Lowe**, Co-Chief Executive Officer, Consumer Action Law Centre and Chair of Consumers Federation of Australia. **Kyle Miers**, Manager, of National Information and Projects with Deaf Children Australia, President of Deaf Australia, and Founding member of Australian Federation of Disability Organisations. **Holly Raiche**, Executive Director, Internet Society of Australia, Director of CTN. **Alex Varley**, Chief Executive Officer, Media Access Australia. **Sue Salthouse**, Director, Didactic Enterprise, Chair of the Communications Alliance Disability Council.