

Telco complaints falling, but serious issues remain

The Australian Media and Communication Authority's reported drop in telco complaints shows that consumers are starting to benefit from increased industry regulation and new complaint handling rules, according to the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN).

In a [report released today](#), the ACMA revealed that complaint levels over the year have fallen to 97 per 10,000 services in operation. Complaints escalated to the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) also fell over this period, suggesting that telcos are getting better at solving consumer complaints.

"We're pleased to see that introduction of the ACMA's new complaint handling rules seem to be making a tangible difference to the experience of Australian telco consumers," said ACCAN CEO, Teresa Corbin. "However, this is not a comprehensive solution to the issue of telco industry and there is still further work needed."

Despite the positive downward trend of complaints as reported by the ACMA, it is still worrisome that Australians made 1.4 million complaints to their telco over the year.

"We're particularly concerned about the high level of complaints about NBN voice-only services," said Ms Corbin. "We know that there is still a considerable proportion of the population who rely upon these services, especially older Australians and those without adequate mobile coverage. We'll be engaging further with the industry and NBN Co to find out what is causing these complaints and what action may be needed to fix them."

While the decrease in complaints about broadband services delivered over the NBN is welcomed, issues facing complex connections, such as apartments, continue to present challenges that need to be addressed. The ACMA's data shows that Australians who are connected to the NBN through HFC, FTTC and FTTB have higher levels of complaints than other technology types.

ACCAN would like to see the introduction of greater reliability consumer protections that include fixed-line broadband services from all telcos.

"The reality is that broadband is now an essential service," said Ms Corbin. "Unless we have communications safeguards that cover both phone and internet services, there is little incentive for telcos to act when broadband services are down."

ACCAN believes that connection and repair times for fixed-line services should be at least the same as the existing Customer Service Guarantee and should be defined in terms of days, rather than working days.

The ACMA collection of complaints data plays a pivotal role in identifying issues within the telco industry. The absence of Optus from this report is disappointing, as it does not allow for a full examination of the industry and the complaints received.