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Media Release

31 October 2024

Disgraceful Optus conduct must spur fundamental change in telco sector

The peak body for communications consumers, the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) today described the alleged actions of Optus in mis selling products to vulnerable consumers as ‘unconscionable’ and called on the Federal Minister for Communications Michelle Rowland to directly regulate the industry to end this pattern of behaviour by telcos.

The ACCC has today alleged disgraceful conduct by Optus – Australia’s second largest telco. Court action has been launched which accuses Optus of taking advantage of consumers, predominately First Nations, regional consumers, consumers with a disability, and low-income consumers.

The alleged conduct reflects a pattern of behavior in the telco sector with respect to sales and credit assessment processes. Telstra was previously levied a record \$50 million fine in 2021. This conduct by Optus appears to be even more egregious. The Communications Minister can and should act to introduce binding, direct regulation of the telco sector to protect vulnerable consumers from this sort of conduct.

ACCAN CEO Carol Bennett said that the behaviour, if proven correct, is ‘unconscionable and appalling,’ preying upon some of the most vulnerable members of our community for commercial gain.

“It is a sad day for the telco industry when profits come at the expense of supporting our most vulnerable, and sales incentives drive the exploitation of people who rely on these essential services for their wellbeing and quality of life.”

“The ACCC has alleged grave abuses of Australian consumers by Optus, and intense scrutiny and reform is necessary.”

“The ACCC has today painted a sordid picture of alleged exploitative corporate conduct at its very worst. What is alleged simply cannot be allowed to occur in this country and requires decisive action from government.”

“The lack of action from the regulator ACMA in this instance once again demonstrates that there is a need for significant reforms to strengthen the enforcement powers and penalties at its disposal.”

“The current communications consumer protections regime enables the ACMA to act where deficiencies exist in the voluntary industry codes. Given the conduct alleged by the ACCC today, consumers expect clear reasons why the ACMA believes this Code is not deficient.”

“ACCAN and Australian consumers expect that, if proven, Optus should be prosecuted and penalised to the fullest extent of the law for any misconduct which is found.”

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) is Australia’s peak communication consumer organisation. The operation of ACCAN is made possible by funding provided by the Commonwealth of Australia under section 593 of the Telecommunications Act 1997. This funding is recovered from charges on telecommunications carriers.

ACCAN is committed to reconciliation that acknowledges Australia’s past and values the unique culture and heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. [Read our RAP](#)
