

ACCAN media release

For immediate release: 11 March 2010

Parliament must prioritise telco customers

“Australia's 22 million consumers and 2 million businesses are not receiving adequate attention in the current debate about telecommunications reform” according to consumer advocacy group ACCAN.

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.”

Asher went on to say “Australia should follow the example of the UK and European governments by requiring the separation of Telstra's wholesale and retail businesses. Key results of functional separation in the UK have been the promotion of competition in the access and backhaul markets, driving down the price of fixed line services, encouragement of innovation and driving up investment.”

In ACCAN's view, “Competitive reform is an essential prerequisite to consumer welfare, however the important consumer protection measures contained in the Bill should not be ignored. Last year, the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO), Australia's dispute resolution body, dealt with half a million complaint issues, measures in this Bill will force the industry to pay attention to the interests of consumers.”

Although not contained in the current bill, ACCAN expressed strong reservations about provisions in the National Broadband Network Regulatory Framework Bills which appear to permit delivery of retail or content services. According to ACCAN “If Telstra is to be the subject of structural or functional separation, so should the National Broadband Network Company”

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.