



Standing Advisory Committee on Consumer Affairs

September 2011 Meeting Report

CEO welcome

ACCAN's CEO welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the 2011 to 2013 Standing Advisory Committee on Consumer Affairs (SACCA). The CEO explained that ACCAN was established in May 2009 and has over 100 organisational and 75 individual members who represent a diverse range of people, all with different communication needs. SACCA's purpose is to advise ACCAN on its current advocacy work and raise emerging issues.

SACCA members unanimously voted in the new Deputy Chair of the committee.

Discussion of Member Issues

Members then raised communications-related issues that their constituents were facing.

Is the privacy of authorised representatives protected when they contact telcos?

A member questioned the privacy of authorised representatives who contact telcos to advocate on behalf of consumers. The meeting heard financial counsellors being asked for their date of birth (DOB) by telcos and questioned why this personal means of identification was necessary. Members noted that there are standard forms of authorisation which respect the privacy of authorised representatives in other sectors such as in banking and energy. The meeting then flagged the possibility of authorised persons to prove who they are through non-personal means such as a reference number or the date of a complaint letter that was sent.

How accessible is NBN equipment?

Members discussed the fact that the National Broadband Network (NBN) equipment that will sit inside the home, such as back-up battery and NBN boxes, are not fully accessible. A member suggested that the NBN box should ensure that there is adequate spacing between the connectors so that a consumer with larger fingers can easily connect & disconnect a cable. The meeting also noted that a battery backup that is low should have an audible alarm for those with low vision as well as a clear indication for those with vision but a hearing impairment. ACCAN had raised this with the NBN equipment designers and would provide an update at the following meeting.

Are irregular phone credit roll-over times costing consumers more?

A member discussed the irregular times that mobile phone credit rolls over and how credit can be lost. Some telcos activate the roll-over credit at anytime during the day. This means that if a consumer does not pay that bit extra for another term before the end of their paid time/contract, they lose their remaining credit, causing the consumer to pay extra the day before the roll-over. The meeting agreed that carriers should have a standard roll-over time and ACCAN flagged that it would investigate this further.

Opportunities to be involved in ACCAN research

The meeting noted that SACCA members had been involved with the development of ACCAN research ethics guidelines. SACCA members were then encouraged to be liaisons for the current Grants Scheme projects. This would entail providing expertise and keeping up-to-date with project progress.



More consumer protection needed in Codes

The meeting then began a discussion on the consumer protections in place for people who use telecommunications services. The Telecommunications Consumer Protection (TCP) Code, a voluntary piece of regulation under review, was discussed. The meeting noted that content-wise, the code was going to fall short for consumers. The compliance monitoring in the code was moving away from the signatory process. The meeting noted that if providers did not comply with the code, they would be referred to the regulator. The meeting then noted that the revised Mobile Premium Services (MPS) Code was released for public comment. The new code requires carriage service providers to report monitoring data to the regulator.

Changes to pre-paid phone identity checking regime

The meeting discussed proposed government changes to the pre-paid phone identity verification process. Currently, identity verification for pre-paid services is required at both the point of sale and upon activation. Identity verification at point of sale has not always been effective or necessarily undertaken; privacy concerns have been raised that evidence of proof of identity might not be adequately stored and/or it is difficult, costly and time-consuming to retrieve such evidence from storage. The government is now proposing identity verification take place at the point of activation only and has created a list of ways people will be able to do this. SACCA members were asked to provide advice on this issue and identify possible case study areas.

The future of telecommunications for people with a disability

ACCAN informed the meeting that it submitted comments to the Government's 'Review of access to telecommunications for people with disability, older Australians and people experiencing illness'. ACCAN put forward 50 recommendations to the review as a result of reaching out to its members, disability groups and the Standing Advisory Committee on Disability Issues. ACCAN also added that it had received 15 endorsements of its submission in just a few days.

Latest news from the ACCAN office

The meeting ended with an update of ACCAN's latest activities and plans for the coming months. September and October will see ACCAN expand awareness-raising about its most successful campaign to date, *Fair Calls for All*, towards politicians. ACCAN explained it is looking to gain more support for the campaign to make 13/1800 numbers free from mobile phones. ACCAN is also working with the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) to organise a financial hardship roundtable in November.

ACCAN flagged that it would be making a submission to the Draft Human Rights Baseline Study. While social inclusion is mentioned, ACCAN did not believe it adequately addresses social inclusion in the context of Information and Communications Technology (ICT). ACCAN's submission seeks to address this issue and recommends the collection of data on specific ICT issues.

ACCAN concluded the update with a win on the committee investigating television captioning standards. The win meant tighter rules around the quality of captioning, which has deteriorated in recent months.