



Standing Advisory Committee on Consumer Affairs

November 2009 Meeting Report

The SACCA Chair welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Standing Advisory Committee on Consumer Affairs (SACCA) and acknowledged the traditional owners of the land.

Apologies were noted, and present committee members introduced themselves and noted their areas of expertise, professional interest and consumer representation.

ACCAN staff led the meeting through an induction presentation including an overview about consumer representation in communications in Australia; consultative processes; ACCAN's funding contract with DBCDE and SACCA's terms of reference and the role of members.

The meeting discussed which committees ACCAN would have a representational role, noting that there are currently no ACCAN positions on Communications Alliance committees.

The meeting confirmed that it is essential that confidentiality of individual members be maintained, including in the meeting report posted on the ACCAN website. Contact details of SACCA members should not be distributed to any third parties.

ACCAN Strategic Plan

The meeting discussed ACCAN's strategic plan, including the Vision, Mission and Goals. An 18 month work plan was currently being developed by the staff team which will outline how the Strategic Plan will be implemented. ACCAN will be adopting a campaigning model, working with partners and an engaged and active membership. Priority concerns are the telecommunications self-regulatory model, the TIO governance model and inactive regulators.

Feedback to ACCAN from SACCA members

Members noted the work already undertaken by ACCAN in its short period of operation and offered praise for the work done on the Telstra \$2.20 fee.

SACCA members welcomed the basic, forthright language and style of the ACCAN WebNews and encouraged ACCAN to maintain this style, particularly in any future redesign of the website.

SACCA members commented that the Informed Consent research project didn't reach its potential because of narrow terms of reference. Members noted dissatisfaction with the timeframe for the project and questioned the value of the work. It was also noted that the issue requires perseverance and is worth using the research as a platform for further work.

Members challenged ACCAN to reconsider how future research projects would be undertaken.

SACCA members congratulated ACCAN on the Responsive Regulation Seminar held the previous day, and noted opportunities to identify a template for case studies to bring to the regulator's attention.

Members encouraged ACCAN to adopt best practice principles in SACCA, including requesting members to provide a short list of issues in advance of future meetings.

SACCA members encouraged ACCAN to hold the forum as a regular event and continue to identify opportunities for interdisciplinary engagement.

Issues raised by members for ACCAN's attention

NBN – The issue of back-up power in the NBN was discussed, noting that legislation will shortly require cabling to new developments. Members were concerned at the lack of clarity about how emergency electricity will be supplied under a fibre cabling system.

SMS emergency access – Members expressed a desire to support SMS access to emergency services for speech and hearing impaired people. Members noted that it was essential that this issue receive attention in the coming budget cycle.

Customer service – Members noted ongoing issues regarding poor customer service from telco call centres. Particular concerns related to waiting times of up to 1 ½ hours and telcos not coming good on settlements. Members noted a desire to provide useful case studies for ACCAN.

Broadband switching – Members noted that switching between providers remains a major concern requiring the regulators attention. The Australian Telecommunications Users Group and Australian Competition and Consumer Commission have apparently undertaken work in this area.

Complaint fatigue – Members raised concerns with the telco model that overwhelmingly relies on consumer complaints to drive regulatory action and ensure a fair service. It was noted that consumers often simply give up in the face of the dispute resolution process and that a better way needs to be identified to support consumer champions.

The committee also identified e-waste and the TIO governance model as potential work areas for ACCAN.

Future meetings

Members expressed various views on the best number of Face to face and teleconference meetings, ultimately agreeing that there should be a good mix of the two, with the next face to face meeting in Feb/March 2010. Members requested a teleconference to discuss ACCAN's workplan. Members offered to speak at future meetings about their areas of expertise.