

# Background and General Comments

I have been a Telecommunications Planner with Telstra, Optus and Hutchison Telecommunications, a member of ACIF Network Reference Panel, and ACIF's nominated representative on the ACA Emergency Services Advisory Committee. I am an honorary life member of Communications Alliance and an individual member of ACCAN.

Over the years I had worked with CTN and TEDICORE representatives on a number of working groups and advisory committees. I was impressed by the expertise and level of involvement of CTN, and after my retirement joined CTN, and later ACCAN to contribute to their work.

## Consumer representation

### **1. Has ACCAN effectively performed the role of representing the interests of consumers in relation to telecommunications?**

ACCAN has actively participated in industry working groups and committees, often promoting areas of consumer concern not being adequately covered. It is particularly important to have a body such as ACCAN, because of its special expertise, through its own staff, and the ability to call on the expertise of its members, ACCAN is able to meet the often considerable resources deployed by the Telecommunications industry.

### **2. Does ACCAN effectively engage with a broad range of stakeholders, including industry, government agencies and other consumer groups?**

ACCAN is engaged with most, if not all, bodies working in the Telecommunications Sector. It is actively involved with the ACMA, ACCC and regularly made submissions on consumers interests. ACCAN has a wide representation of other consumer and interest groups, and this role has expanded since its formation.

### **3. Considering the consumer representation role performed by ACCAN, has ACCAN adopted an appropriate balance between representation of general consumers and representation of those with particular needs?**

ACCAN devotes a significant effort on behalf of those with particular needs, whether due to disability, remoteness or financial hardship. This seems appropriate, but issues of general consumers are appropriately represented.

### **4. Is a telecommunications specific consumer representative body funded by Government required or:**

#### **a) Should Government fund representation only for a body or bodies representing consumers with particular needs?**

All consumers need representation because of the disparity of power between industry and the individual consumer, and a body such as ACCAN can perform this role. The synergies between the needs of disparate telecommunications consumers with particular needs enables ACCAN to represent all efficiently.

#### **b) Could a telecommunications representation function be carried out by a general consumer body?**

ACCAN has a special telecommunications expertise, which a general consumer body would struggle to match.

#### **c) Could Government more directly measure consumer views by undertaking its own consumer research?**

While Government could directly measure consumer views, the large and diverse membership of ACCAN seems to offer a benefit, and a perception of independence.

## Independent Grants Program and research

5. **Have you seen any examples of how research funded through the Independent Grants Program (IGP) has influenced Government policy or the behaviour of industry? Could changes be made to the IGP to make the funded research projects more influential?**

ACCAN is aware of the telecommunications environment, and much of the research funded anticipates changes. This is valuable to regulatory bodies in formulating policy.

Reports often highlight consumer impacts, not obvious to some in the Telecommunications industry, which have favourably influenced industry practices.

The outcomes of the Grants Program are one of the success stories of the formation of ACCAN, from a number of bodies which preceded it.

6. **Do you believe research funded through the IGP is useful to consumers? Could changes be made to the IGP to make the funded research projects more useful to consumers?**

Research into emerging issues which directly affect consumers is high quality and informative. Two reports, of particular value are *Death and the Internet* and *Improving the Communication of Privacy Information for Consumers*.

7. **Is it appropriate for the Government to continue to provide grants to a consumer representative group (or any other non-government body) to undertake research into telecommunications issues?**

The ACCAN team brings a professional expertise to the selection of research programs, and ongoing review and feedback ensure these are relevant. ACCAN administers the Grants Program in a manner which ensures research is relevant, timely and cost effective. The Grants Program enables research which is valuable to consumers and industry, which may not have been undertaken if funded through normal academic practices.

8. **If this is appropriate, what changes (if any) would you recommend to how the funding is provided and who it is provided to?**

### Should other activities be funded?

9. **Should any other activities, other than consumer representation and research, be considered for funding under section 593 of the Telco Act? If so, what should these be and what would be the rationale for funding such activities be?**