# Submission: Consumer representation: Review of section 593 of the *Telecommunications Act 1997* Issues paper

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Yes

## Date of submission

24/11/16

## Logo of organisation—if an organisation making this submission

## Name and contact details of person/organisation making submission

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## General comments

ACCAN performs an important role and has done it well.

## Response

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

Yes. It goes to a lot of trouble to both inform and listen to consumers.

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

Yes. This is one of its strengths – that is, that it works well with other people and groups.

## 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?

Yes. It is true that minority groups are served well by ACCAN but not, I think, to the detriment of the positions it adopts in consumer advocacy.

## 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?

Yes. To get the balance of resourcing and focus right, there needs to be a coordination point – like ACCAN.

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

### No. It is interesting to note that general consumer bodies like Choice defer to/work with ACCAN on telecommunications issues, which tend to be complex.

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

I doubt it. ACCAN has networks of contacts to tap and a solid reputation to draw upon.

## 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 and the Department are in a better position to comment. It is hard to pinpoint how and when advocacy and the provision of information make a difference.

## 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?

Again ACCAN is better placed to comment. There is a competitive tender for grants which are judged against ACCAN’s priorities which are set in concert with its stakeholders.

## 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?

Absolutely - yes. ACCAN’s governance assures us that it will undertake relevant research. While the carriers (like Telstra, Vodafone and Optus and others) publish research it will not be regarded as impartial as that undertaken by ACCAN.

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

No comment – happy with current arrangements.

## 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?

The ACT does provide for the Minister to make research grants if, say, the Department’s need for research is not covered among ACCAN’s current priorities.

John de Ridder