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# Response

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

ACCAN has been an effective voice for consumers. Consumers are even more dependent now on telecommunications on every aspect of their everyday lives

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

The telecommunications industry has a range of providers (some very big) and without a peak body the necessary research and coordinated voice of the consumer would be lost.

This is particularly important in an environment as complex as now. Telecommunications are an essential part of everyday life but the responsibility chain and options very confusing. The contracts are developed by the large companies and individual consumers have neither the expertise nor power to negotiate their position effectively.

## 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?

It is not possible to have a seat at the Board table for each and every group, although the ACCAN constitution requires it to be broadly representative of its membership. Adequate resources are also required to allow ACCAN to consult with particular groupings at a meaningful level and /or develop advisory groups and research projects covering issues relevant to specific groups

## 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?

The peak bodies needs to cover all categories of consumer membership who do not have the power/resources to represent themselves individually. Specific disadvantaged groups are likely to include the disabled (Physical, intellectual, sight, hearing), remote areas, indigenous, low income, non-English speaking.

I believe the peak body /ACCAN model allows for the most efficient and coordinated way of bringing the consumer voice to the table. A plethora of funding to small groups detracts from this. More funding may be required to allow outreach and research on different topics

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

A specialist voice on telecommunications is critical. As noted above the contracts, policy issues can be complex and in depth knowledge and research is required. The specialised regulators and self-regulatory/industry forums require involvement at a specialised level and on the details of a range of codes of practice and industry specific legislation.

The general consumer groups may work in a complementary way but it is doubtful that they have the specialist knowledge required and resources will often have to be diverted to other issues and priorities. To my knowledge none of the general consumer bodies would cover small businesses.

Specific activities demonstrating the value of ACCAN include: the development of codes, industry specific legislation and policy and education campaigns for consumers. Specific topics include the emergency calls SMS (and specific needs of low income and disabled), 1800 calls from mobiles, international roaming, do not call register, awareness re TIO.

The advantage of a peak (specialist group) is that it allows for a coordinated voice …while allowing the deep dive on issues that specifically effect some groups within the membership.

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

I would be cautious about government “directing” what research should be done …in that the voice from consumers needs to be independent and the priorities chosen should be ones selected by the membership. That said the government may talk to ACCAN re particular partnership programs where specific outreach/insight is needed.

## 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?

## 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?

I see the research and independent grants program as an effective way of digging deeper into particular consumer issues. In some cases the research programs have been joint programs with the ARC and universities …thus multiplying the resources and research expertise available. In other cases it has allowed self-help and education for particular groupings.

## 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?

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

## 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?

I believe that consideration could be given to a funding base for regional consultation. The particular issues related to remote and regional communities. These issues were not fully considered when ACCAN was established. Funding is required to allow adequate consultation of communities.