

Reconnecting the Customer

ACMA public inquiry

Consultation paper

([Full Paper 30 pages-500Kb](#))

Introduction

Rising complaints in any regulated industry are a cause for regulatory concern. In the past three years, the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (the TIO) has recorded significant increases in complaints from telecommunications consumers, particularly complaints about customer service and complaints-handling. While this upward trend has stabilised in the past six months, the number of complaints made to the TIO remains unacceptably high.

The purposes of this inquiry are to:

- identify systemic causes of dissatisfaction with complaints-handling and related customer service matters
- identify 'best practice' standards for complaints-handling and customer service in the telecommunications industry
- assess the extent to which current regulatory and institutional arrangements support or hinder the adoption of adherence to best practice
- identify enduring solutions to systemic problems having regard to the nature of the rapidly changing communications environment.

The specific terms of reference for the inquiry are set out in Attachment A to this paper.

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (the ACMA) is seeking input from stakeholders about the difficulties that consumers face in the Australian telecommunications industry, with particular reference to customer service and complaints-handling practices.

This consultation paper paints a broad-brush picture of the industry, the current regulatory regime and the relevant TIO complaint statistics. It also poses a series of questions around which stakeholders might usefully structure their input.

A consolidated list of questions appears at Attachment B.

It is not necessary for stakeholders to confine their input to the questions expressly posed in this paper. Nor is it necessary for stakeholders to address every question posed. The ACMA understands, for example, that its questions seek input and evidence across a range of areas and disciplines.

Contributors who are not in a position to answer the full range of questions may wish to consider addressing the four 'overview' questions that the inquiry is posing. These are:

Overview questions:

1. Are there systemic problems in the Australian telecommunications sector with respect to the way it deals with its customers?
2. If there are problems, what are the causes?
3. What are the potential solutions to any problems?
4. What is the best strategy going forward for addressing customer service and complaints-handling issues in the converging communications environment?