



On behalf of the consumer organisations named below

30 April 2008

Senator Stephen Conroy
Minister for Broadband Communications and the Digital Economy
By email

Dear Senator Conroy

Consumer Protection Regulation in the Telecommunications Industry

As you are no doubt aware, self regulation (or more, precisely, 'co-regulation') is a central element of the consumer protection regime in the telecommunications industry, and has been so since structural reform of the industry commenced in 1997.

We do not believe the current system is working adequately to protect consumers.

We believe that co-regulation, properly designed, can play a role in producing timely, nuanced and effective consumer protection rules. But the current legislative scheme, consumer advocacy arrangements and code development culture have not – and in our submission without reform cannot – produce adequate consumer protection.

We congratulate you on your initiative in calling stakeholders together to discuss current consumer advocacy arrangements on 1 May 2008. We understand that the main focus of the meeting is intended to be on the funding arrangements for consumer advocacy. While we agree this is important, we suggest that new arrangements for consumer advocacy are just one of several matters that need to be attended to in order to produce adequate consumer protection. We suggest that it would be useful to address each of the following matters through a consultative process over the next few months:

1. A comprehensive review of current co-regulatory arrangements for consumer protection.
2. Establishment of regular effective communication processes between consumer organisations and government (including you/your office)
3. Strengthening consumer representative *processes*
4. Strengthening funding for telecommunications consumer *advocacy and research*.

57 Carrington Road Marrickville NSW 2204

Phone 02 9577 3333 Fax 02 9577 3377 Email ausconsumer@choice.com.au www.choice.com.au
The Australian Consumers' Association is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. ABN 72 000 281 925 ACN 000 281 925



To assist consumer organisations and government in relation to the first item, CHOICE has prepared a draft issues paper identifying some specific weaknesses in the current co-regulatory arrangements and some possible ways forward. This paper has been sent to your office under separate cover. CHOICE has not yet had time to consult widely on this document and plans to revise it in light of those consultations. In the meantime we, the undersigned organisations, note the issues raised in the CHOICE paper and urge the government to use them as a starting point in the recommended review of the current regulatory arrangements.

We acknowledge and welcome your initiatives in this area and look forward to working with you and the Department to achieve significant improvements for Australian consumers.

Yours Faithfully

Gordon Renouf
Director, Policy and Campaigns
CHOICE

Teresa Corbin
CEO
Consumers Telecommunications Network

Catriona Lowe
Joint CEO
Consumer Action Law Centre

Su Robertson
Acting Director
Communications Law Centre