

Friday 21 November

Ombudsman challenges industry to improve customer service

The Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman is calling on the telecommunications industry to work with it to tackle the continuing high level of complaints about poor customer service and complaint handling practices.

The TIO's **connect.resolve** campaign was officially launched today by the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Stephen Conroy.

“Our vision is to see service providers **connect** with their customers and **resolve** their concerns fairly and efficiently,” said Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman, Deirdre O’Donnell.

“During the 2007/08 financial year, complaints to the TIO rose from 102,463 in 2006/07 to 149,742, the largest increase in the past 10 years. The TIO recorded 268,645 complaint issues in 2007/08, an increase of 61 per cent from 2006/07. Customer service is now the top complaint issue – with 52,527 complaint issues recorded in 2007/08, and another 28,821 complaint issues recorded about complaint handling.”

Ms O’Donnell said that customer service and complaint handling issues formed over 30 per cent of all complaint issues that the TIO recorded over this last financial year.

“These complaints are often about basic matters such as waiting a long time to speak to someone or getting the run-around between departments,” said Ms O’Donnell. “Or they can be about service providers not following up straightforward requests, such as a change of address or cancelling a service. They can involve simple process and service issues that service providers ought to address at first contact with their customers.”

Senator Conroy said consumers have the right to expect telecommunications providers to deliver the services they promise and deal with complaints in an efficient and courteous manner.

“There has been a worrying increase of consumer complaints and I congratulate the TIO for its efforts to arrest that trend with the **connect.resolve** campaign,” Senator Conroy said.

Throughout the campaign, the TIO will work together with service providers and the industry to address these types of complaints.

connect.resolve will run until June 2009 and aims to:

1. create awareness of increases in complaints about customer service and complaint handling
2. encourage the telecommunications industry to focus on improving its customer service and complaint handling processes and systems as a priority
3. promote a collaborative response from all stakeholders – the TIO’s member organisations, industry groups, consumer groups, the regulators and the TIO – which leads to:
 - an improvement in customer service and complaint handling, and
 - a sustainable decrease in the rate of growth of complaints about customer service and complaint handling, and in the number of such complaints, to the TIO.

The TIO is a free and independent dispute resolution service for consumers and small businesses who have not been able to resolve a problem with their telecommunications or internet service provider.

For further information, please contact TIO Public Affairs on 03 8600 8738, 03 8600 8701 or 0403 601 532.