

Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman Consumer Panel Terms of Reference

September 2019

SCOPE

1. The Consumer Panel is established to provide the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman with access to diverse consumer perspectives to inform its work.

PURPOSE

2. The Consumer Panel's purpose is to provide feedback and advice to the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman on a range of topics and issues, including:
 - the needs and interests of vulnerable, disadvantaged and hard-to-reach consumers
 - the needs and interests of small business consumers
 - consumer relationships with telecommunications providers
 - systemic issues, trends and regulatory issues
 - consumer views on the awareness and accessibility of the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman to consumers
 - community outreach
 - offering feedback on the continuing development and enhancement of complaint handling processes
 - key issues arising in the sector likely to impact on telecommunications complaints and complaint handling.
3. It is intended that the Consumer Panel represent a diverse range of perspectives, minority groups and special interests, including but not limited to:
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers
 - consumers living in rural, regional and remote areas
 - consumers with disabilities
 - culturally and linguistically diverse consumers
 - older consumers
 - small business consumers
 - vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers
 - young consumers.

PANEL MEMBERSHIP

4. Consumer Panel members will be organisations or individuals appointed by the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman that are well placed to represent diverse perspectives of consumers in the telecommunications sector.
5. The Consumer Panel will consist of up to 15 Panel members at any time.
6. Consumer Panel members are expected to canvass the views of consumers they represent in order to contribute comprehensive consumer feedback.

7. Organisations are to be represented by the head of the organisation or another senior office holder nominated by the head of the organisation.

APPOINTMENT OF PANEL MEMBERS

8. The TIO will undertake a selection process for organisations or individuals to be appointed or reappointed as Panel members.
9. Panel member selection will be based on the following criteria:
 - expertise, experience and knowledge of consumer interests
 - ability to actively identify, prioritise and represent consumer views and issues
 - ability to provide information and communicate key messages to consumers they represent
 - ability to contribute to the diversity of perspectives represented by the Consumer Panel as a whole.
10. Panel members will be appointed for a period of up to two years.

PANEL CO-CHAIRS

11. The Consumer Panel will be co-chaired by the Ombudsman and a Consumer Co-Chair selected by the Ombudsman.
12. If the Ombudsman is unable to attend a Consumer Panel meeting, the Ombudsman will appoint an Assistant Ombudsman as acting Co-Chair.

MEETINGS

13. Meetings will be held at least twice per year, generally at the TIO's Melbourne office.
14. Meetings may be attended physically or by teleconference.

PANEL MEMBER RESPONSIBILITIES

15. Unless expressly stated otherwise by the Ombudsman or the acting Co-Chair, the activities of the Consumer Panel are confidential and must not be disclosed to anyone other than the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman or other members of the Consumer Panel.
16. Panel members are responsible for declaring any conflicts of interest when they arise.

REVIEWS

17. The TIO will review the Consumer Panel every two years to ensure that the Consumer Panel is fulfilling its purpose, that its structure and functions have ongoing relevance and that it adequately represents diverse consumer views.

PAYMENT OF TRAVEL COSTS

18. The TIO will pay Panel members their reasonable travel costs for attending Consumer Panel meetings.