

# ISCCO conference

assurance examination is successfully completed at certain defined intervals. Consumers may view the highly encrypted seal using their Internet browser software. Whilst not yet available in Australia, WebTrust is leading the way in independent quality assurance for Internet traders.

## **Richard Cousins, Chairman, Internet Industry Association**

Mr Cousins discussed the benefits of self regulation but emphasised that a successful regulatory framework requires a mix of self regulation and legislative safety net. He pointed to the unique features of the Internet which mean that traditional regulation alone would be ineffective — the diffuse, international nature of the net, the rapidity of technological change and the difficulties involved in identifying offenders and effectively enforcing rules.

The primary focus of the talk was on the IIA's own Internet Industry Code of Practice. The code is voluntary and may apply to participants such as ISPs, web designers, content providers and vendors. It seeks to regulate illegal and unsuitable content, consumer remedies, privacy and confidentiality and provides for use by members of a 'Code Compliance' symbol.

## **Michael Kay, Executive Chairman, Corporate Affairs, AAMI**

AAMI broke new ground in 1996 with its consumer service charter which has become a market sensitive means of managing consumer issues at AAMI.

Mr Kay explained that, while charters are aimed at delivering excellent customer service standards, they also act as mechanisms for compliance with relevant fair trading laws and codes, and allow companies to gain a competitive advantage by offering 'quality trader' guarantees which inspire confidence in risk averse consumers.

Following immediately on from the global conference was the inaugural annual general meeting and conference of the International Society of Consumer and Competition Officials (ISSCO).

ISSCO was established at the 1997 Consumer International World Congress in Chile. It aims to encourage cooperative international approaches to solving competition and consumer problems via a world-wide network of competition and consumer officials.

Members come from the USA, Europe, Asia, Australia, New Zealand and Africa.

The executive committee reflects ISSCO's Australian origins and its international profile. The President is Allan Asher, Deputy Chair of the ACCC. Vice-President is Antoine Van der Haegen who is in charge of international relations at the European Commission's consumer policy directorate (DG 24). The treasurer is Bill Dee, Director of compliance strategies at the ACCC.

Ordinary members include Michael Donohue, a staff attorney with the US Federal Trade Commission; Dr Changfa Lo, a Commissioner with the Fair Trade Commission of Taiwan; Dr Alistair Ruiters, Chief Director of business regulation and consumer services in the South African Government; and Hamish Gilmore, Commissioner of Consumer Affairs in South Australia.

The conference brought together a wide range of speakers from around the world, beginning with Tony Van der Haegen who spoke on how international cooperation in the area of consumer protection is helping consumer officials respond to the challenges created by borderless markets.

Allan Asher took up this theme in his paper on the need for greater

international harmonisation of consumer and competition standards to enhance global governance.

Michael Donohue spoke about US efforts to fight Internet fraud and discussed recent international cooperation through such activities as international Internet sweep days like the one recently coordinated by the ACCC.

ACCC Queensland Regional Director Alan Ducret talked about the ACCC's experience in training enforcement investigators.

John Bridgeman, Director-General of the Office of Fair Trading in the United Kingdom, Keith Manch, General Manager of the Ministry of Consumer Affairs in New Zealand and Janet Murphy, General Manager of the Consumer Affairs Division of the Commonwealth Treasury participated in a panel discussion on 'Getting industry to shoulder the burden of disputes; corporate and industry complaints handling'.

Another panel discussion with Caroline Banks from the UK Office of Fair Trading and Bill Dee focused on 'codes of conduct as a fair trading compliance mechanism: success or failure?'

The afternoon workshops were one of the most exciting aspects of the conference. Participants discussed the experiences of their own countries and exchanged information and ideas on how best to tackle particular problems. Workshops were held on hard core cartels, consumer education and integrated compliance strategies.

If you would like more information about ISSCO and how to become a member, contact Bill Dee on (02) 6243 1093.