

First conference for new global network

The inaugural International Competition Network conference will be held in Italy in September this year. In meetings held in Paris in early June, ACCC Chairman, Professor Allan Fels, and Commissioner Ross Jones have discussed the development of the ICN's work program.

The ICN is a unique international forum dedicated to improving global cooperation in competition (anti-trust) law enforcement by addressing practical competition issues. The network aims to encourage convergence between different countries' competition laws and promote effective competition law enforcement worldwide.

The ACCC, as a founding member, fully supports the objectives of the ICN by actively participating in several major projects, including merger review policy and competition advocacy.

The ICN was officially launched in October 2001 in New York and operates as an informal, project-oriented, consensus-based network of competition agencies from around the globe. Particular effort will be made to focus on the concerns of countries with new competition law regimes.

The ICN will hold its inaugural annual conference at the Castel dell'Ovo in Naples, Italy on 28 and 29 September 2002. ICN members, including Australia, Canada, the European Union, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, South Africa, the UK, the USA and Zambia, will attend.

Key issues for discussion at the conference will include the advocacy and education roles of competition agencies around the world, and the merger control process in the multi-jurisdictional context. The latter will help companies overcome the problems they face when applying for merger approval in multiple countries and jurisdictions.

The focus of the conference will be to produce guidelines and best practice recommendations for member agencies to use in enforcing competition laws.

Guiding the ICN until the inaugural conference is the Interim Steering Group headed by Chairman, Konrad von Finckenstein, the Commissioner of Competition at the Canadian Competition Bureau. The steering group has identified various areas of interest and several working groups have been created to examine individual issues. The working groups comprise mergers, advocacy, membership, non-governmental advisers and funding, covering issues such as investigative techniques and competition policies and procedures.

Professor Fels is a member of the steering group, the advocacy and membership working groups, as well as contributing to work in relation to analytical frameworks for the mergers working group. Commissioner Jones is also a member of the mergers working group. They will both be attending the ICN conference in September, with

Commissioner Jones scheduled to chair a discussion on merger policy.

Any national competition agency responsible for the enforcement of antitrust laws may apply to become a member of the ICN. Currently the ICN has 61 members. Advice and contributions from the private sector and non-governmental organisations will be sought but, because the ICN is designed to promote convergence in government competition enforcement policy, only members will make decisions.

The ACCC's involvement on ICN projects has included input into a study on the merger review process, contributions to work on competition advocacy, and providing information on Australia's merger laws and regulations.

The ICN will be cooperating with other international organisations such as the OECD, WTO and UNCTAD and will seek input from them, as well as competition law and policy experts and practitioners, industry and consumer associations and academics.

Further information about the ICN and their inaugural conference in September can be found on their web site at <http://www.internationalcompetitionnetwork.org>

