

Reaching out to country communities



The Competing Fairly Forums are a key feature of the ACCC's outreach program to rural and regional Australia. Hosted by George Negus and telecast into towns around Australia, they provide an opportunity for small business operators and consumers to receive information in an entertaining way and to talk directly to trade practices and business experts.

In effect, they are national business forums that people can attend in their own community.

One of the key aims of the forums is to give businesses and consumers in regional areas a better understanding of their rights and obligations under the Trade Practices Act. They also give them the opportunity to hear the views of people in the rest of rural and regional Australia.

Each forum addresses a different topic. The first was about the Trade Practices Act; the second about unconscionable conduct; and the latest about advertising and selling.

The next forum, to be held on 21 May 2002, will be on how to avoid problems and resolve disputes.

The forums are broadcast into venues that have satellite facilities, such as local

clubs. In each town a local convenor organises the event and the ACCC provides them with promotional material.

Before the event, the convenors invite people to submit questions relating to the topic. The more commonly asked questions are answered by the expert panel during the telecast and those not addressed on the night are responded to after the forum.

The first forum was broadcast to 28 towns on 8 November 2000.

Participating town numbers doubled for the second forum on 1 May 2001. Sixty towns tuned in to discuss unconscionable conduct, confirming that it is a concern for many rural and regional businesses.

During the lead up to the second forum the ACCC produced a training video to explain the concept of unconscionable conduct. The video was used to provide participants with some background on the topic before the actual broadcast.

Town numbers leapt again to 90 for the third forum about advertising and selling on 2 October 2001. Discussions on the night covered product safety standards, labelling, country of origin claims, two price advertising, fine print advertising,

earning misrepresentations and the liability of advertising agents. The broadcast featured a number of business scenarios that the panel used as examples to illustrate answers.

Panellists have included:

- Professor Allan Fels, ACCC Chairman;
- Commissioner Sitesh Bhojani, ACCC Commissioner;
- Yasmin King, ACCC Associate Commissioner;
- Mark Paterson, Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry;
- Phil Naylor and Stan Moore, Australian Retailers Association;
- Phil Holt, Australian Business;
- Louise Castle, Law Council of Australia;
- Mick Keogh, National Farmers' Federation; and
- Gail Kennedy, spokesperson for CHOICE Magazine published by the Australian Consumers' Association.

All forums are available on video after the event. For further information contact the ACCC Infocentre on 1300 302 502 or visit the forums website at <<http://forums.accc.gov.au>>.

