

## Prevention is better than cure

The ACCC's fourth Competing Fairly Forum was broadcast via satellite to over 110 venues across regional Australia on 21 May 2002.

The May forum focused on the idea that complying with the Act is not only good for business but is also not hard to do. A responsible approach to business has a positive impact on customers and fellow businesses.

The forums give small businesses, especially those in regional and rural areas, practical information on the Trade Practices Act through a simultaneous satellite broadcast from Sky TV studios.

Convenors in each of the locations around the country invite local businesses to their particular venue to participate in the forum, either by listening to the panel discussion or responding by phone to the issues raised.

This time the forum panel consisted of Professor Allan Fels, ACCC Chairman; Mr Sitesh Bhojani, ACCC Commissioner; Louise Castle, Australian Law Council; David Newton, Managing Director of the Accord Group and from the Office of the

Mediation Adviser; Ken Carslund, Registrar, NSW Retail Tenancy Unit; and Bruce Reid, Principal Associate, Government Relations and Business, Australian Regional Consulting Group.

Scenarios dramatising problems that can arise in running a small business were used as reference points for panel discussion. Issues covered were: entering into a business arrangement without knowing the facts; supply chain problems; unconscionable conduct and warranty problems.

The forum's overall message was that prevention is better than cure. It saves on lost customers and lost income.

Clear messages to small business operators were sent out by the panel:

- do your homework—find out all the facts before entering into any business arrangement
- keep good records—a diary of conversations and meetings is very useful in a dispute
- put in a compliance program so that everyone involved in the business knows the rules

- find out about any industry codes or associations for your industry for support and information
- if it does not pass the 'smell test', beware there may be something wrong.

Following these simple strategies can help avoid difficulties and possible disputes. If a problem does arise face up to it straight away. Discuss the problem and outline any possible solutions. If this fails, mediation is a cost-effective way of dealing with disputes.

The next Competing Fairly Forum will be on 15 October 2002.

For more information on complying with the Act or the Competing Fairly Forum call the ACCC Infocentre on 1300 302 502.

