

Building a regional network

The ACCC's Rural and Regional Program started only a few months ago but it has already made progress down the road of informing businesses and consumers in regional Australia about their rights and obligations under the Trade Practices Act.

The first priority was to appoint Regional Outreach Officers (ROOs) to ACCC offices across Australia. Once appointed none of them let the dust gather before beginning what will be regular visits to their regional areas.

The plan is for the ROOs to build on existing ACCC contacts in communities and establish a regional network with local organisations such as:

- local governments;
- Business Enterprise Centres;
- Regional Development Boards;
- Area Consultative Committees;
- chambers of commerce; and
- Regional Organisations of Councils.

These supporters will use their own contacts in business, community and

government to spread information about the Trade Practices Act and the ACCC. ROOs will provide training and publications for each supporter.

A feature of the Rural and Regional Program already up and running is the Competing Fairly Forum satellite broadcast series. To date the ACCC has successfully broadcast three forums to towns throughout Australia; the topics being the Trade Practices Act, unconscionable conduct, and advertising and selling. The fourth, set down for 21 May 2002, will deal with how to handle disputes.

The broadcasts give people an opportunity to discuss their trade practices concerns directly with the experts, including the ACCC's Chairman and Commissioners.

Information provided by the Rural and Regional Program includes:

- a publication entitled *Rural Industry and the Trade Practices Act*;
- a publications range specifically for small business;



ACCC ROO, Vern Gardam (L) and Shire of Mukinbudin CEO, Andrew Borrett.

- regular advertisements and articles on trade practices issues in rural and regional press; and
- a video on unconscionable conduct, *Fair Game or fair Go*, which has a particular emphasis on rural and regional business operators.

Plans include more publications and videos to tackle topical issues.

The Rural and Regional Program will be officially launched in early 2002 at a function in Bendigo, Victoria.

More information on the program, including contacts for each State and Territory, can be found at the ACCC's website <<http://www.accc.gov.au>>. For phone inquiries call the ACCC Infocentre on 1300 302 502.





Tamworth-based ROO, Steve Kilfoyle, describes a typical day on the road.

12.00 already. Arrive in Forbes and meet with the local Council, BEC and the Chamber of Commerce. Very enthusiastic reception and a proposed local media interview.

So today has seen nine meetings with local business people and councils, introductions to various media outlets, inspections of brochure display stand sites and 392 kilometres of driving. It's one small part in the new business map we are charting for Australia — a map which will reflect support networks between partners striving to create a strong and informed business community.

