



# ACMA sphere

Australia's regulator for broadcasting, the internet, radiocommunications and telecommunications

[www.acma.gov.au](http://www.acma.gov.au)

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## Breaking down the barriers

EXTRACT FROM ACMA CHAIRMAN CHRIS CHAPMAN'S OPENING ADDRESS TO THE INFORMATION COMMUNICATIONS ENTERTAINMENT CONFERENCE, CANBERRA, 23 NOVEMBER 2006

**When I came to this role in late February, with 17 years' experience in telecommunications, internet, broadcasting and regulatory affairs, I thought I was 'across' the media and communications sector in this country. But nothing had prepared me for the scope, diversity and complexity of the work I've encountered these last eight months at ACMA.**

We have our man in Quoin Ridge, Tasmania, who operates the only high-frequency monitoring station in the southern hemisphere. He is responsible for investigating the causes of high frequency interference across one third of the globe.

In Western Australia, ACMA is establishing a protection zone for submarine telecommunications cables. These cables carry around 99 per cent of the country's international voice and data traffic, worth more than \$5 billion a year to the economy: they are truly national infrastructure lifelines. The protection zone also happens to be where the local rock-lobster fishing community haul their daily catch. Our staff are consulting with the fishing community and learning the fine art of distinguishing between pelagic fishing (that's 'mid-upper water') and demersal fishing (that's fishing on the seabed, for example, using pots and traps), and finding out the differences between Danish seining and purse seining, and what a squid jig is.

Back on dry land, we have a team that makes it possible for mining sites in Tom Price, Marandoo, Koolyanobbing and other places 'back of beyond' to get access to radio and TV services. We conduct the planning and grant the licences to enable the retransmission of these services to

what can be described as 'remote areas', but which are areas of massive economic importance.

High above the Earth, satellites relaying vital telecommunications information are another of ACMA's responsibilities. You've heard of satellite TV services, but even phone calls and internet data are routed through space. A team at ACMA is responsible for coordinating the use of satellite services by industry and defence, and for ensuring that there are no interference issues between Australia's satellites and those of other nations.

ACMA is responsible for managing spectrum and frequency issues at major sporting events. At the Melbourne Grand Prix this year, we were also asked to make frequencies available to the Formula One teams so they could monitor the tyre pressure, suspension setting, braking systems, wheel spin, engine performance, fuel consumption and chassis flex points of the cars as they raced around the track.

From Formula One to the family Ford. People driving Fords in certain shopping areas recently were finding that the door locks were mysteriously opening and shutting. The ACMA-busters were called in to investigate. We discovered that some pharmacies were using a new retail check-out



device, imported especially to read pharmaceutical bar codes, and that they just happened to be on the same frequency as Ford's door locks.

ACMA's presence—some of which has a public profile, most of which does not—is felt across the length and breadth of Australia, in the cities, in the country, in the remotest regions, even at the bottom of the ocean and above the Earth's atmosphere. Our work affects the lives of Australians in a multitude of situations, from helping out with the mundane and domestic, to ensuring that some of the biggest corporate deals in Australian history comply with statutory requirements.

From this kaleidoscope of Australia-wide activity, I want to focus on a few key activities we're engaged in

over the next year or so—activities which neatly illustrate the dynamics at work in meeting the many new challenges of this constantly evolving sector. ACMA will need, more than ever, to be smarter, more proactive and better able to read the commercial environment and risk-manage accordingly. At the same time, we must remain firmly committed to our principles and to the long-term view.

The government's media reforms are widely seen as the most wide-ranging changes to media legislation and policy in 15 years. ACMA has been given a central role by the government in overseeing many aspects of what promises to be a new era.

**BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS – CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS (CONTINUED)**

Here's a sample of what lies ahead for ACMA, and it will give you some idea of the scale of the undertaking:

- We need to set up a register of controlled media groups expeditiously, and are looking to do this by early next year. The register is central to managing the new ownership and control arrangements, with our timing and preparatory work recognising the commercial realities already at work in the market.
- We have been directed by the Minister to undertake a legislated review of the local content arrangements for radio and to report back by June 2007.
- ACMA's role in monitoring the free-to-air television industry's use of their sporting rights (which we were given in September 2005 in relation to anti-siphoning) has been expanded, in large part to take account of new 'use-it-or-lose-it' provisions.
- During 2007, ACMA will conduct an allocation process for two currently unassigned digital television channels, previously identified for narrowcasting services. The possibilities for their use have subsequently been broadened to include, for example, the potential for the 'B' channel to be used for mobile television.
- Partly because of this allocation process, ACMA has been asked to

existing planning and standards responsibilities. We expect that ACMA will have a significant role as the digital action plan continues to develop, and that this work will underpin many other aspects of our media-related activities.

That's not a complete list, but you'll agree, I think, that it's a large and ambitious work program.

Pursuing it vigorously is critical to Australia's communications future and is integral to many aspects of the objective intended by the new legislation—a transformation of our digital media landscape. Here are some of the more significant media-related projects that we need to progress next year:

- a review of the commercial TV industry standards as they relate to reality television, following community concerns over the *Big Brother* series last year, which the Minister directed ACMA to report on by 1 April 2007—we are undertaking research and will be conducting surveys soon
  - a review of the Children's Television Standards, to be completed by the end of 2007
  - development of options for broadening digital radio and
  - assessment of a large number of community broadcasting licences.
- We have other projects that are just as large and critical to our constituency. The quintessential

The Do Not Call register project has brought into our orbit many new stakeholders and it is highlighting the growing significance of privacy-related concerns in the evolving communications landscape.

One last project I will mention is ACMA's wireless access review. Last February, we released a major spectrum planning discussion paper and held a seminar that was intended to scope the dimension of the spectrum management task raised by new wireless broadband access technologies. I hope to release a further discussion paper with some specific proposals before our inaugural spectrum management conference on 11 and 12 December in Sydney. This Radcoms Conference, to be held annually, is a new way of bringing together spectrum users, current and prospective, to meet with each other and with ACMA to share ideas on how Australia's radiofrequency spectrum should be planned as we move forward.

We have also announced that, in conjunction with Communications Alliance, we will hold an annual consumer conference. These are examples of the way ACMA is looking to re-invigorate its whole approach to stakeholder communications and consultation—to be both inclusive and pragmatic.

Of course, all this work is in addition to ACMA continuing to do its 'day job' of being efficient and effective, as well as aspiring to become a world class regulator.

Transforming ourselves into a world class regulator is a major task in itself. As we all know, one of the key reasons the government created ACMA was because it realised Australia needed a genuinely converged communications regulator to address a rapidly converging environment. One of my tasks as CEO is to shape ACMA into that fully converged organisation. It is a journey that one takes in small steps, but I mention it today because the benefits of its outcomes will be an increasingly important feature of

your future dealings with ACMA, and a task to which we will continue to devote attention and resources.

One concrete manifestation of this was the tabling in Parliament of the first ACMA Communications Report. This new report is a landmark for us in a number of ways. Its origins lie in a statutory requirement under the Telecommunications Act to report on a range of telecommunications industry developments. But ACMA has chosen to expand this into a broader and very interesting, informative and authoritative source of data and insight about where the communications industries as a whole are going. The report will evolve over the coming years, to give everyone a real sense of how the sector is changing and how ACMA itself is continuing to develop. It is our hope, our expectation, that by the time you're flicking through the pages of the 2010 Communications Report, you'll find that Australia's comms and media sector is at the forefront internationally, and that ACMA has truly come of age as a world class converged regulator.

For ACMA, this conference is a fantastic informal opportunity to listen and learn from you—our industry stakeholders, consumer groups, government policy makers, and fellow regulators—and to facilitate, collaborate. By putting on this conference, we want to lead the way in offering an intellectual and social environment for breaking down walls and bringing people together, to encourage dialogue and the lively exchange of ideas. By providing such opportunities for interaction and by nurturing collaboration, we aim to encourage the diverse range of interests and groups across the sector to understand each other and to continually review their ideas and activities within this dramatically changing, incredibly challenging communications environment.

**The full text of Mr Chapman's speech is on the ACMA website at [www.acma.gov.au](http://www.acma.gov.au) (go to ACMA > Speeches).**

## 'For ACMA, this conference is a fantastic informal opportunity to listen and learn from you ...'

develop some guidelines on how it will determine what an open narrowcasting service is.

- At the ACMA conference last year, the Minister announced that the government would be working towards a digital action plan to accelerate Australia's transition from analogue to digital television. The new legislation has given ACMA powers to supplement its

example is the new Do Not Call register, to be operational by no later than May next year. If experiences in the US and UK are anything to go by, we could have millions of people wanting to register their phone numbers within the first few weeks of operation. ACMA has been given a significant budget for the project and we are currently in a tender process for an operator to run the register.