

Indigenous consumer justice campaign

The Office of Consumer Affairs and the advisory Consumer Affairs Council are jointly running an awareness campaign to help address issues faced by Indigenous consumers.

Launched in May 2003, the multi-media education campaign is fronted by local AFL football legend Michael Long.

Long features in videos, posters and television commercials which carry important consumer protection messages targeted at Indigenous Territorians.

The campaign focuses on consumer advice on warranties and refunds, buying cars and the safe use of debit cards and PIN numbers. These have been identified as areas where Indigenous consumers are suffering

considerable disadvantage and detriment.

Financial counsellors, Community Government councils, legal services, land councils, Indigenous organisations and schools are helping to distribute the videos and posters to target groups.

So far, the campaign has received positive feedback and it continues to expand as more Indigenous and community organisations become involved in distributing the campaign materials.

According to Northern Territory Minister for Justice, Dr Peter Toyne, there is national recognition that Indigenous consumer protection requires increased focus and effort, including communicating consumer rights to Indigenous people.

Last year the Northern Territory was tasked with leading Australia in developing targeted strategies to address Indigenous consumer protection.

"This education campaign is a key outcome of the work to date," Dr Toyne said.

The next step will be the convening of a forum of all heads of state and territory fair trading agencies, together with the Australian and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and Reconciliation Australia to have a national five-year Indigenous Consumer Justice Strategy prepared.

People wanting more information can contact Marilyn McDonnell-Davis on 8999 6136.①

Government announces an inquiry into child custody

The Federal Government is holding an inquiry into child custody arrangements in the event of family separation.

The inquiry has been called in response to a recent report from the Family Law Pathways Advisory Group, "Out of the Maze - Pathways to the Future for Families Experiencing Separation".

According to the Government, the inquiry seeks to address community concerns about the operation of contact and child support arrangements for separated families and reflects the Government's commitment to ensuring that children have the benefit of the love and care of both their parents when a couple separates.

"There is compelling evidence that Australian children develop best when they grow up in stable, caring,

nurturing and loving environments. However, it is a fact of life that families do separate. When this happens the child's best interests must be the highest priority," Federal Attorney-General Daryl Williams and Minister for Children and Youth Affairs Larry Anthony said in a joint statement.

The Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs will look at what factors should be taken into account in deciding the respective time each parent should spend with the child post separation, considering the best interests of the child.

In particular, the committee will examine whether there should be a presumption that a child will spend equal time with each parent and, if so, in what circumstances such a presumption could be

rebutted.

This proposal has already attracted criticism from some parenting groups.

It will also look at the circumstances in which a court should order that children of separated parents have contact with persons, including their grand parents.

The committee will also investigate whether the existing child support formula works fairly for both parents in relation to their care of, and contact with, their children.

The inquiry is expected to make recommendations regarding the structure of existing arrangements, not for significant additional Government expenditure. The committee will report to Parliament by 31 December 2003.①