

# AUSTEL recommends changes to telecommunications national code

29 January 1996

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AUSTEL, the telecommunications industry regulator, today released the report on its review of the Telecommunications National Code. The report contains 57 recommendations which would place more stringent obligations on carriers when installing telecommunications infrastructure and give local government authorities greater influence over the process.

AUSTEL has recommended in its report that the Code be amended to:

- Enable authorities to require carriers to consult the community where proposed facilities are likely to have a significant environmental impact;
- Place more definite obligations on carriers to co-locate their facilities to reduce environmental impact;
- Require carriers to satisfy authorities that proposed facilities will not significantly affect the environment, or if they will they are so vital that they should be installed despite that impact;
- Give local and State authorities more time to consider proposals to install facilities (they currently have 50 business days) and where

public consultation is required, extending the process to 65 business days;

- Set up a national dispute resolution body attached to AUSTEL to settle disputes between authorities and carriers about facilities likely to have a significant environmental impact;
- Establish an Advisory Committee representing carriers and authorities to monitor and advise on matters arising under the Code.

AUSTEL Chairman Neil Tuckwell said: "The report recommends significant changes to the consultation process required of carriers, and addresses many of the concerns expressed to AUSTEL during the review, especially the mounting community concerns about installation of mobile phone towers and broadband cable."

AUSTEL's review of the National Code commenced in July 1995 and included two opportunities for public submissions as well as a series of public forums in capital cities.

The Code has been in operation since 30 June 1994 and imposed

requirements on telecommunications carriers (Telstra, Optus and Vodafone) to consult with all relevant authorities when installing facilities, in lieu of complying with requirements under State and Territory laws from which the carriers exempt under the *Telecommunications Act 1991*.

AUSTEL's report was forwarded to the Minister for Communications and the Arts, the Hon. Michael Lee in December 1995. The Minister has now agreed to the report being made public (See attached background papers).

Copies of the report are being sent to all persons who made submissions to the review and all local government authorities and are available from Mark Leckenby on (03) 9828 7410. The report is available on the Internet at <http://www.austel.gov.au/> under 'reports'.

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