

CONFERENCE REPORTS

1 BUREAU OF TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS ECONOMICS: COMMUNICATIONS RESEARCH FORUM, CANBERRA 30-31 AUGUST 1993.

This forum was the first to be held by the Bureau of Transport and Communications Economics (BTCE) and was inspired by the success of a similar forum in transport economics. A mix of policy makers, academics, finance industry, and broadcasting and telecommunications industry representatives attended. The forum provided an opportunity for researchers and policy makers to present their work and to get an overview of where research in the two fields is going.

In the opening address by the Minister for Communications, the Hon. David Beddall announced the BTCE's 'Communications Futures Project' which will look into the investment decisions driving service convergence and the implications for consumers and government that flow from them. BTCE's Research manager, Chris Cheah later presented an

outline of how the project will proceed.

The link between research and public policy was drawn by the BTCE's Maurice Haddad and Henry Ergas. Sessions on two key aspects of the current telecommunications reforms (market liberalisation and efficient pricing) provided a lead up to the review scheduled before the end of the carrier duopoly in mid 1997. The market structure and the need for pricing controls will both be central issues for that reform. Sessions on telecommunications and broadcasting convergence then set the tone for the second day on broadcasting.

Papers on media competition in the Australian context and media deregulation in the UK were included in the broadcasting day as well as the session on allocation, with two papers on auction systems. The ABA and Austel then pre-

sented papers on research from the regulators perspective.

The papers illustrated the extent and high quality of work in these fields of economics. Coming into a decade of rapid structural change, this type of research will be a critical aspect of the policy process. The challenge is how the work in both fields can be informed as the two industries move closer.

The structure of the telecommunications industry will have an impact on broadcasting and it is clear that many policy makers are keen to anticipate these changes rather than react once they have occurred. A related research issue is how the social and cultural objectives in broadcasting and telecommunications can be harmonised within two converging industries.

2 CONSUMER KIDS CONFERENCE

NOTES FROM A CONFERENCE ON 'CONSUMER KIDS', SEPTEMBER 2 & 3, 1993, SYDNEY BOULEVARD HOTEL.

Representatives from the ABA attended this two day conference which featured discussion and case studies from representatives of companies such as Sega-Ozisoft, Reebok, Peters Foods and Pepsi-Cola. The conference was organised for marketing and media executives as well as for representatives from advertising, market research and public relations organisations.

According to speakers at the conference, Australia's 'consumer kids' contributed to more than \$3 billion in sales last year. Children were presented as being

knowledgeable consumers who are media literate and who have definite brand preferences. Children of all ages were said to have a critical impact on the marketplace through their influence on parental spending, especially on clothes, fast foods and what videos the family will watch. It was suggested that children are increasingly independent shoppers who make their own decisions at an early age. Suzanne Douglas from Peters Foods said that by the age of seven children are making most of their own ice cream purchase choices.

Dina Browne from the Seven Network reported that an Australian child is exposed to about 22 000 commercials each year and that television advertising exerts a powerful influence on children's product preferences. Ms Browne concluded by stating that advertisers could consider including pro social messages in commercials and that the ethical implications of advertising to a young audience need to be understood.

This conference attracted substantial media interest and provided an opportunity to consider prevailing attitudes on the 'consumer kids' debate.

