

# ACMA-Communications Alliance 2008 Communications Consumer Dialogue

In late July, ACMA and the Communications Alliance jointly hosted the second annual Communications Consumer Dialogue at Customs House in Sydney, with the theme of 'building communities through communications technologies'. The event attracted more than 100 delegates, most of whom had some professional involvement in the business of communications and communications technologies as regulators, policy-makers, providers, advisors or advocates.

ACMA Chairman Chris Chapman said that the dialogue was an innovative and aspirational event designed to bring together and encourage diverse sectors of the community to think about how the growth of new generation communications technologies could enhance the lives of all within the community.

Hosted by Dr Karl Kruszelnicki, Julius Sumner Miller Fellow at Sydney University, the dialogue offered a broad range of perspectives through speeches, Q&A sessions and panel discussions.

The event was jointly opened by Communications Alliance CEO Anne Hurley and Mr Chapman, who said: 'Much of today will focus on reminding us and stretching our views on what further benefits can be delivered to our communities through communications. In being here today, we are quite literally taking a step away from our day jobs to think about emerging communications issues and how those issues can bring benefit and challenge to our lives.'

Speakers included Dr Andrew Campbell, who examined the impact of technology on human behaviour; Professor Daniela Stehlik, who outlined how technology is driving community business partnerships; and Graeme Innes AM, Human Rights Commissioner, who discussed the 'accessible future'—both challenges and strategies to get there.

Keynote speaker Senator Stephen Conroy, Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, highlighted the advantages technology is providing to our communities in a range of sectors 'from agriculture, to finance, transport, education and health'.

Senator Conroy emphasised that the Australian Government supports self-regulation, but indicated that industry must play its part by remaining 'responsive to consumer concerns and working with consumer organisations and regulators to come up with solutions as problems emerge ... Otherwise, they risk undermining confidence in self-regulation. The government would then have little choice but to consider a more interventionist approach'.

Senator Conroy also pointed to the government's recent adoption of the Seoul Declaration on the Future of the Internet Economy and reiterated its recent funding commitment to

The afternoon included sessions from Jenni Mack, Chair of CHOICE, who considered the regulatory model for telecommunications compared with other industries, and Jack Heath (the Inspire Foundation) and Kylie Little (Essential Baby), who spoke of their business successes in the online world.

The dialogue concluded with round table discussions from the floor on the range of issues tabled throughout the day, with introductory and concluding comments from Tim Noonan of Tim Noonan Consulting; Teresa Corbin, CEO of Consumers' Telecommunications Network; and Deirdre O'Donnell, Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman.

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help establish 'a telecommunications peak body to provide telecommunications consumers with a stronger unified voice'.

The morning concluded with a tribute to the late Rev. Dr Christopher Newell, Associate Professor in the University of Tasmania's School of Medicine. Dr Newell's contributions to the communications sector—particularly for people with disabilities—was recognised, with particular reference to his 10-year tenure as Chairman of Communications Alliance's Disability Council and as a Council member of the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman Scheme since 2001.

Mr Chapman emphasised that, through events such as this, 'ACMA is continuing to look to stretch the boundaries of our interaction with stakeholders ... the dialogue is another way in which we engage with the community and jointly consider the challenges and benefits provided by communications technologies'.

Communications Alliance was formed to provide a unified voice for the Australian communications industry and to lead it into the next generation of converging networks, technologies and services. For more information, go to <[www.commsalliance.com.au](http://www.commsalliance.com.au)>.