



**The International
Telecommunication Union**

**2008 World
Telecommunication
Standardization Assembly**

Over 1000 representatives from 99 countries gathered in Johannesburg, South Africa in late October to attend the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly (WTSA-08). WTSA-08 focused on ensuring that the guiding principles and working methods of the WTSA are relevant and responsive to the current Information and Communication Technology (ICT) environment.

WTSAs are held every four years and set the overall direction and structure for the ITU Standardization Sector (ITU-T). They define policy for the sector by establishing study groups to undertake the standardisation work. WTSAs also approve the work program for study groups for the next four-year period and appoint chairs and vice chairs.

WTSA outputs are generally made through developing and approving resolutions of the assembly and, infrequently, approving ITU-T recommendations. Resolutions are akin to policy statements, expressing broad intentions, objectives and parameters. Recommendations are the major outputs of the ITU-T and are essentially standards

by a Global Standards Symposium that developed initiatives to assist in bridging the standardisation gap, and the first accompanied by an ICT exhibition. In pursuit of the ITU's wish to engage with academia, students were invited for the first time.

During the assembly three side events were held focusing on accessibility to ICTs for persons with disabilities, cybersecurity, and ICTs and climate change. ACMA's Mick Owens gave a presentation on accessibility and outlined the Asia-Pacific's proposed resolution that will ensure accessibility issues remain squarely in focus over the next four years of the ITU's Telecommunication Standardization Sector calendar.

Vietnam. ACMA representatives Ron Box (head of delegation) and Mick Owens, and Dr Jason Ashurst from the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy represented Australia at WTSA-08.

While there were many issues of interest to Australia, those of special significance from this assembly include:

- satisfactory outcomes on internet governance and internet public policy issues
- the major restructuring and downsizing of study groups
- the adoption of a new (Australian-originated) resolution on accessibility issues for people with disabilities
- a new resolution on ICTs and climate change, ensuring that study will be undertaken on this very important issue
- revision of two resolutions on cybersecurity and combating spam
- a new resolution (proposed by the Pacific nations through the APT) to assist Small Island Developing Countries in overcoming hijacking of their national numbers
- more empowerment for the Telecommunication Standardization Group to act on behalf of the WTSA between assemblies
- a revision of the resolution on the use of gender-neutral language in all ITU-T documents to promote and advance gender mainstreaming.

WTSA-08 was the first WTSA held in Africa, the first preceded by a Global Standards Symposium and the first accompanied by an ICT exhibition. Students were invited for the first time.

defining how telecommunication networks operate and interwork. WTSA-08 adopted 21 new resolutions, revised 27 resolutions, adopted 2 new recommendations and revised 7 recommendations.

There were several 'firsts' at WTSA-08. It was the first WTSA held in Africa, the first preceded

At a local level, preparations for WTSA-08 were undertaken throughout the year, with meetings hosted and chaired by ACMA, and regional preparatory meetings hosted by the Asia-Pacific Telecommunity (APT) and the administrations of Thailand, Japan and

THE AUSTRALIAN DELEGATION AT THE WORLD TELECOMMUNICATIONS STANDARDIZATION ASSEMBLY. LEFT TO RIGHT: MICK OWENS (ACMA), RON BOX (ACMA) AND JASON ASHURST (DEPARTMENT OF BROADBAND COMMUNICATIONS AND THE DIGITAL ECONOMY).



Telstra representative Phillip Day was nominated by Australia and accepted as Vice Chairman for ITU-T Study Group 5. Study Group 5 develops recommendations on the protection of telecommunication networks and equipment from interference and lightning. The group is also responsible for studies on electromagnetic compatibility and health and safety issues related to electromagnetic fields produced by telecommunication installations and devices, including mobile phones.

A contentious and major issue of concern to Australia and other nations was the push by some developing countries for the implementation of a

network externalities premium through approval of a recommendation (new Recommendation D.156 'Network Externalities') at WTSA-08, which could artificially inflate communication costs. Despite intense discussions throughout WTSA-08 a compromise could not be found. The recommendation was finally adopted with changes, many proposed by Australia, that identified further areas of study before it can be implemented. Even with these additions, 28 countries including Australia made reservations on the application of the recommendation. Study Group 3 will make a continuing study of the issue.

Notwithstanding the D.156 outcome, Australia,

through engagement with the Asia-Pacific region via the APT, achieved considerable success at this assembly. It is now important for ACMA to review its level of engagement in the various forums for international standards, drawing from WTSA-08 and its experience and involvement in international standardisation.

A full report on the WTSA-08 outcomes will be available on the ACMA website at www.acma.gov.au in December. For further information please contact either Ron Box at ron.box@acma.gov.au or Mick Owens at mick.owens@acma.gov.au.