

Telecommunications industry satisfies key consumer protection obligations for fixed-line services

A recent ACMA report shows that the telecommunication industry's performance in meeting a number of key consumer obligations for fixed-line services over the past two years has been generally satisfactory.

The *Telecommunications Performance Bulletin* reports on the financial years 2005–06 and 2006–07, covering the two years since the previous bulletin was published, and measures the following consumer protection obligations:

- the Customer Service Guarantee (CSG), which sets standards for the timely provision and maintenance of standard telephone services
- the priority assistance scheme, which provides enhanced telephone connections and fault repair services to any person with a diagnosed life-threatening medical condition
- the provision of public payphones as part of the Universal Service Obligation (USO)
- the Network Reliability Framework, under which ACMA monitors the reliability of Telstra's fixed telephone network.

CUSTOMER SERVICE GUARANTEE

Connection and repair performance by Telstra, Optus, AAPT and Primus under the CSG's standards was generally above the 90 per cent benchmark ACMA uses to monitor and assess such timeframes. When a service provider's performance is below 90 per cent in two quarters, or shows a widespread decline, ACMA may examine the possible causes for the poor performance.

In some rural and remote areas, service levels dipped below the 90 per cent benchmark over the two-year period, although these were isolated cases. Average Telstra CSG compensation payments remained stable over the period, but increased for Optus, AAPT and Primus.

PRIORITY ASSISTANCE SCHEME

Telstra offers priority assistance under a carrier licence condition, while AAPT and Primus voluntarily offer such a service under an industry

code. Although the volume of Telstra's priority assistance customers has increased, priority assistance performance has generally been at an acceptably high level.

UNIVERSAL SERVICE OBLIGATION

To ensure all Australians have reasonable access to payphones on an equitable basis, payphone

provision forms part of the USO. On a quarterly basis, Telstra, as the universal service provider, supplies ACMA with data on its performance in meeting this obligation.

The total number of payphones (Telstra and other operators) is declining—in 2006–07, the number fell by 14 per cent to 49,862. In that year, Telstra removed 4,793 payphones from service, including 3,615 in urban areas.

While in urban and rural areas payphone fault repair performance has been at a satisfactorily high level, performance in remote areas has been consistently below the 80 per cent benchmark ACMA uses to monitor and assess performance. The time taken to clear payphone faults increased across all states and territories during the period September 2006 to June 2007.

NETWORK RELIABILITY FRAMEWORK

The Network Reliability Framework is a three-tiered regulatory arrangement under which ACMA monitors the reliability of Telstra's fixed telephone network. In 2005–06, services were available on average for 99.93 per cent of each month, while in 2006–07, the average was 99.92 per cent.

Publishing performance data is an important part of ACMA's commitment to being an evidence-based regulator and to providing transparent assessments of operators' compliance with consumer safeguards. ACMA now expects to publish these bulletins annually.

The *Telecommunications Performance Bulletin* for 2005–06 and 2006–07 is available on the ACMA website at <www.acma.gov.au> (go to About ACMA: Publications & research > Publications > Telecommunications publications > Telecommunications industry reports > Performance Bulletins).

