

Role of the 'citizen' examined in new occasional paper

The significance of citizen concepts for its regulatory role is the subject of a new paper released by the ACMA in June.

While debates about citizen concepts in Australian media and communications regulation have occurred over several decades, recent developments—including the rise of social networking and the availability of Web 2.0 tools—have reinvigorated the idea of citizen participation in public services.

The paper proposes a framework for use by the ACMA to embed citizen considerations into its work in a structured and considered manner. This is an evolutionary approach which would consider the ACMA's activities—service delivery, encouraging active citizen contribution, regulating in the public interest and educating, informing and advising citizens—through the citizen filter detailed below, in a way that is consistent with, and amplifies, current public interest obligations.

'Part of the ACMA's strategic response to the dynamics of change in media and communications has been a refined focus on the role of the "citizen interest",' said Chris Chapman, Chairman of the ACMA. 'The ACMA considers that the concept of "citizen" will be an invaluable touchstone in engaging with and responding to the regulatory imperatives of the emerging digital economy.'

There are two main drivers for the ACMA's examination of a citizen-centric approach to media and communications regulation:

- > the whole of government reform agenda sponsored by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet which seeks—among other things—to place the citizen at the centre of public sector policy design and service delivery
- > the ACMA's related need to develop and maintain an enduring focus on the place of the citizen in the regulation of communications and the media.

The paper notes that 'citizen' is one of a number of terms used to refer to the public for the purposes of regulation and policy. While the definition of 'citizen' is dependent upon context, the term 'citizen' can refer to an individual who participates in a broad relationship with the state, and whose interest includes, but also extends beyond, the market place. Participation in this context relates to the broader public interest, involving a range of social, cultural and political activities that are not strictly the subject of commercial objectives.

The individual citizen can also be understood as a member of a community, which recognises that the citizen interest is about more than an individual or private interest or right, but relates to the public realm and requires a sense of commonality and plurality. ☎

Feedback

The paper is intended to be a starting point for considering the ACMA's role relating to citizens. Feedback on citizen concepts and their application by the ACMA is welcomed and should be sent via email to regulatory.frameworks@acma.gov.au or by mail to:

Project Manager
Citizens and the ACMA
Regulatory Frameworks Section
Australian Communications
and Media Authority
PO Box 13112
Law Courts
Melbourne Victoria 8010

The paper is available on the ACMA website at www.acma.gov.au (go to About ACMA: Publications & research > Research > 'Citizens' and the ACMA).

Environment

Internal processes

Categories of activity

Outcomes

