

ACMA extends National Relay Service contracts

Deaf and hearing- and speech-impaired Australians will continue to have access to the successful relay and outreach communications services they currently use, with the two existing providers contracted for another two years.

The ACMA recently extended the existing contract with the Australian Communication Exchange to provide the relay component of the National Relay Service (NRS) for an additional two years from 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2013. The ACMA has also contracted Westwood Spice to provide the outreach component of the NRS for the same two-year period, to ensure alignment with the relay contract.

'The NRS provides a vital communications service to the community, including the provision of an emergency call capability, and the extended contracts provide certainty of service delivery during a transitional period for the NRS,' ACMA Chairman Chris Chapman said.

The NRS acts as a bridge between people who use text-based communication devices, such as teletypewriters (TTYs) and the internet, and others—generally those people who can use voice telephony. Specially trained officers relay what is said by each party, typically converting text to voice and voice to text, as required.

The outreach component of the NRS includes a telephone/TTY-accessed helpdesk; a website; personalised training for potential users; community and professional outreach events; media advertising; and printed, video and DVD resources.

The two-year contract extensions with Australian Communication Exchange and WestWood Spice will maintain the NRS service while the government undertakes a review of access to telecommunications services by people with a disability, older Australians and people experiencing illness.

The extended contracts provide certainty of service delivery during a transitional period for the NRS.

It will also provide sufficient time for a new tender to be undertaken for the provision of services from 1 July 2013 onwards, when the contracts are expected to be managed by a new entity, USO Co.

The Australian Government will establish USO Co to begin operating in July 2012. Over time, it will be the entity responsible for the delivery of, among other things, the National Relay Service and the Universal Service Obligation (USO). The USO requires universal service providers to ensure that standard telephone services, payphones and prescribed carriage services are reasonably accessible to all people in Australia on an equitable basis, wherever they reside or carry on business. Telstra is currently the sole universal service provider.

Australian Communication Exchange is a not-for-profit organisation that has been at the forefront of delivering communications solutions for Deaf and hearing- and speech-impaired Australians for more than 16 years. WestWood Spice is a specialist consulting group with expertise in the community and human services sectors, working in collaboration with the Australian Federation of Deaf Societies to deliver the NRS Outreach contract. ☎

For more information about the National Relay Service, visit www.relayservice.com.au.

ACMA Sydney office moves to Pyrmont

The ACMA's Sydney office has moved from its CBD location in Darling Park, 201 Sussex St, across Pyrmont Bridge to the Pyrmont/Ultimo media and communications hub.

Its new location is:

Level 5, The Bay Centre
65 Pirrama Road
Pyrmont NSW 2009

All ACMA Sydney phone numbers and email addresses remain the same, as does the ACMA's Sydney PO Box address:

PO Box Q500
Queen Victoria Building
NSW 1230

The ACMA's media and communications neighbours in its new location will include the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Seven Network, Network Ten, Premier Media Group (Fox Sports), Macquarie Radio Network, Radio 2SM 1269, Nova 96.9FM, Classic Rock FM, Google and Fairfax Media. ☎