



Still No Privacy Protection

For the price of a 0055 call, any member of the public could recently discover the name and address of any telephone subscriber listed in the white pages simply by supplying the subscriber's telephone number.

This lasted only until the resulting outcry persuaded Telecom not to allow provision of the new 0055 service.

The operators of the service apparently employed workers overseas to re-key the information in Telecom's White Pages. Although Telecom holds copyright on these publications, the situation becomes complex when the work is taken overseas (*Australian*, 16/8/93).

Senator Alston, Shadow Minister for Communications has ensured that,

while the service is no longer available that issue won't be allowed to drop and has referred the issue of the 'Reverse Phone Directory' service to the appropriate Senate Select Committee.

The immediate concerns raised by reverse telephone directories will be dealt with, but the larger issue of a continuing lack of any process to deal with privacy issues in telecommunications remains. Currently, neither AUSTEL nor the Privacy Commissioner has jurisdiction to handle a range of privacy issues in telecommunications - including reverse telephone directories, telemarketing and the provision of calling number display.

Almost a year ago, AUSTEL's report, *Telecommunications Privacy*, called for the establishment of a Tel-

communications Privacy Committee to deal with privacy issues raised in telecommunications. The proposed Committee structure was criticised at the time for having no reporting requirements, either to Government or AUSTEL. However, it did provide a structure in which industry codes of practice covering privacy issues could be developed, monitored and enforced.

Perhaps the Senate Committee should go beyond the issue of reverse telephone directories and ask why, almost a year down the track, there is still no mechanism for developing, monitoring and enforcing many privacy issues in telecommunications. □

Holly Raiche

The Problem with EUCAs

EUCA, Extended Untimed Call Area, the latest acronym to curse telecommunications lingo.

And no sooner has the term entered the lingo than it's become another area of controversy.

Currently, most Telecom local call charge areas cover approximately a 32 km radius. What Telecom is proposing to offer is the EUCA - an option to extend the local call area to 75 kms. Calls within the EUCA would be charged at a higher local call rate - 35 cents rather than the current 25 cents. But as the calls are 'local calls', they are untimed. Telecom plans to trial EUCAs in areas outside Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, and expand the EUCA option throughout Australia, depending on the results of the trial.

The proposal was developed in response to long standing consumer demand for people living just outside urban centres to have access to **untimed** calls into their urban centre. For example, people in Penrith, whose

calls into Sydney are now charged on a timed basis, will have access to untimed calls, at the higher rate of 35 cents.

Like all its charges for service, Telecom filed its EUCA proposal with AUSTEL for approval - only to have the proposal questioned by AUSTEL.

For technical reasons, people who have preselected Optus as their long distance carrier will have to dial both the four digit override code and an STD code to access the EUCA calling

option - an extra six digits for a local call! In Optus's view, that may well threaten Optus's ability to compete - particularly when the EUCA proposal goes beyond the trial stage and is offered throughout Australia.

The other difficulty, Optus argues, is that the interconnect fee it pays Telecom for use of Telecom's network is based on *timed* traffic. Clearly, Optus could not compete in providing untimed local calls if it is paying for access to Telecom's network.

The choice AUSTEL had to make was between undoubted benefit to consumers of the EUCA proposal, as against the potential for damaging Optus's ability to compete in the marketplace.

In the end, AUSTEL has allowed the EUCA trial to proceed, but will evaluate all the results before allowing EUCAs to be offered by Telecom more generally. □

