



# Members and Objectives of Broadband Group

**The Government in early December announced the composition of its Broadband Services Expert Group, which is to be chaired by ABA Chairman, Brian Johns.**

The group includes a total of 12 members, each of whom is drawn from a specific area of interest, ranging across carriers, education, industry and finance.

Earlier press reports suggested that the group, which was conceived as an important 'think tank' on the implications of an information highway for Australia, might be reduced to a forum for policy information by sectional interests. In a meeting with Communications Minister Beddall in August, the Director of the Communications Law Centre, Helen Mills, expressed a strong view that the group should be able to canvass the views of a wide range of interests and avoid capture by industry and technocrats. Consumer and public interest groups called for the appointment of someone to represent the interests of the general public, the great mass of potential users of the services an information highway will offer. There is no one on the group specifically designated to fill this role or drawn from these areas.

Nevertheless, Mills told *CU* that the final composition of the group was better than she had expected. The appointment of a 'neutral' chairman was welcome, as were the appointments of two people with strong broadcasting/communications experience, Ian Reinecke (former journalist and author of books on telecommunications, now with the Qld Premier's Department) and Patricia Gillard (formerly of the ABC and now at RMIT), Research Director for the Telecommunications Needs Research Group. The terms of reference have also been redrafted, to put more emphasis on assessments of customer demands and the potential benefits to and the impact on the Australian community of the availability of new broadband services.

Other noteworthy members are well known lateral thinker and Nine Network Chairman Bruce Gyngell, Dr Dennis Cooper of the CSIRO's Radiophysics Division, and Alf Forster of the Communications Workers Union.

The remaining members are from Westpac, GE, Vistel, AWA, Telecom and Optus. The ABC was reported to be very miffed at not being included.

The Expert Group is expected to produce a draft report by mid-1994 and a final report before the end of the year. □

## Terms of Reference

The inquiry will examine the technical, economic and commercial preconditions for the widespread delivery of broadband services to homes, businesses and schools in Australia, having regard to matters such as:

- current and likely future broadband services and the customer demand for these services;
- the relative costs/benefits of delivery by optic fibre compared to other means, drawing on local and overseas experience;
- the extent to which broadband services may be delivered by technologies other than optical fibre or through a staged evolution of technologies;
- the industry development and export opportunities including the potential for increased employment;
- the degree to which industry will be able to take advantage of the opportunities presented; and
- the potential benefits to and impact on the Australian community of the availability of new broadband services.

The inquiry will also examine the research and development effort required, the educational and training requirements for economic use of the proposed services options, the funding mechanisms for investment in such services and the role of international standards. The inquiry will identify options for co-operation among relevant interest groups and an appropriate role for government within the context of existing telecommunications policy.