

News

Telecommunications

CARRIER performance figures for the June 1998 quarter have been released by the Australian Communications Authority (ACA). Service provision across a range of factors was monitored for AAPT, Optus, Telstra and Vodafone. For the first time the ACA included Primus and also monitored performance by each carrier against the Customer Service Guarantee (CSG) standard for new phone connections.

Telstra's provision of services for urban customers improved by two percentage points to 84 per cent within the timeframe set by the CSG. Queensland and Victoria received the highest level of service at 91 per cent, with the Northern Territory receiving the lowest level at 69 per cent.

Some 89 per cent of Telstra customers received their new services in rural and remote Australia within the CSG timeframe (which allows longer provisioning times for rural and remote customers).

Telstra's urban customers experienced an improvement in fault repair times, with 79 per cent of faults repaired within the CSG timeframe, 12 percentage points better than the March quarter. In rural areas, 82 per cent of faults were repaired by Telstra on time but in remote areas, only 60 per cent of faults were repaired within the timeframe.

Optus again cleared 99 per cent of all faults within one day. (The differences in business mix - long distance versus access and local - mean that Telstra and Optus fault performance figures are not directly comparable).

A DRAFT new Australian radio frequency Spectrum Plan has been released by the Australian Communications Authority (ACA) which is

intended to replace the January 1997 Plan. It divides the radiofrequency spectrum into frequency bands and informs radiocommunications users about the services allocated at the highest level to each frequency band. It is derived from spectrum arrangements developed internationally for Asia-Pacific and reflects Australia's treaty obligations as a member of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

The Plan is being updated primarily to incorporate changes made to international frequency allocations at the 1997 ITU World Radiocommunication Conference, and which come into effect on January 1, 1999. These changes will provide additional support in Australia for new developments such as high capacity orbiting systems and high altitude communications platforms delivering telecommunication services.

Privacy

THE NSW Privacy and Personal Information Bill was tabled in the Legislative Council and given a second reading by the Attorney General last month. It replaces the Privacy Committee with a Privacy Commissioner who will continue to exercise the same kind of investigative and reporting functions as the committee.

The Bill has a set of enforceable information protection principles which apply to public sector agencies and IT outsourcers only. Agencies may develop privacy codes with input from the Privacy Commissioner to vary the principles. There are a range of specific exemptions to the principles, mostly in favour of law enforcement and special investigative bodies, also some significant general exemptions. There are also provisions for restricting disclosure of personal information from public registers.

The Bill also implements recommendations of the 1992 Independent Commission Against Corruption's Report on Unauthorised Release of Government Information to penalise corrupt disclosure and trade in personal information held in the public sector.

Internet/online services

THE Australian Communications Authority (ACA) has issued its first direction requiring an Internet service provider (ISP) to join the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) scheme. The direction was issued under section 102 of the Telecommunications Act 1997.

The TIO scheme provides for the independent resolution of complaints and is a central element of the self-regulatory arrangements of the telecommunications industry. But the TIO is only able to take up complaints on behalf of consumers against providers who are members of the TIO. There are almost 600 members of the TIO scheme. Some 450 of these are suppliers of Internet services, the remainder are carriers and suppliers of telephony services.

Apart from its first direction to registered business Healey Communications, the ACA has also issued a formal warning to two other ISPs for failing to join the TIO scheme.

Publishing

AVERAGE sales growth in bookshops dropped from eight per cent in the 1995-96 financial year to 5.9 per cent in 1996-97, according to the latest Australian Booksellers Association Economic Survey. Sales growth in 1996-97 was the lowest of seven surveys conducted since 1990. Median growth fell from six per cent in 1995-96 to 3.5 per cent.

Independent bookshops were affected most. Average sales there were 16 per cent higher in 1996-97 than in 1990-91, compared with 52 per cent in chains, 74 per cent in campus outlets and 40 per cent in "other" shops. Average annual sales in independent bookshops were \$648,000, \$1,316,000 in chains; \$3,099,000 in campus shops; and \$635,000 in "others". Academic and professional books claimed a 42 per cent share of the total sales made, general books 35 per cent, primary and secondary schoolbooks 12 per cent, children's books seven per cent, religious books three per cent, and secondhand books one per cent.

Television

THE Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) is proposing to amalgamate the licence areas of Imparja Television (IMP) and Queensland Satellite Television (QQQ) to allow two commercial television services to be made available throughout remote Central and Eastern Australia.

IMP broadcasts to remote regions of the Northern Territory, South Australia and New South Wales, and QQQ broadcasts to remote regions of Queensland and New South Wales. The proposal will allow them to provide their services across the entire area. The ABA is also proposing to extend the amalgamated licence area to include those parts of New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania which are not in the licence area of any commercial television service or are unserved by a terrestrial commercial service.

If the proposals are accepted, Shire Councils and self-help groups will no longer have to apply to the ABA for permission to retransmit IMP or QQQ within the proposed combined licence areas.