

News

Telecommunications

THE federal government has accepted Telstra's proposal to introduce charges for directory assistance calls made from mobiles and business phones, following the introduction of similar charges by Optus and Vodafone. A charge of 40 cents will apply for calls to national directory assistance and \$1.50 for international directory calls.

The Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Senator Richard Alston, said that Telstra had made a convincing argument that its customers should also contribute to the cost of the service. He said the government had accepted the proposal because it came with important consumer safeguards.

Telstra fields 1.2 million directory assistance calls each day. Just nine per cent of phone services make 80% of these calls, according to Telstra, and many businesses are frequent callers, some lines averaging between 200 and 500 inquiries a day.

DESPITE the Australian Competition and Consumer Council's (ACCC) formal declaration of pay TV carriage services, Telstra maintains it is not bound by the ruling which requires it to open access to its \$4 billion broadband cable network.

The declaration means that network operators including Telstra, Cable & Wireless

Optus and Austar have to grant access to outside parties to their cable networks in order to distribute analog pay TV services.

Telstra is claiming that its agreement with pay TV operator Foxtel, granting exclusive pay TV access to its cable network, was made before the introduction of the present telecommunications regime and the ACCC's ruling is therefore not enforceable.

Radio

SYDNEY will get another commercial FM radio licence next year and an additional one in four years time under a draft licence allocation plan from the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA). The ABA also proposes to make spectrum available for three new Sydney-wide community radio services and three new open narrowcasting services, also in Sydney.

The draft plan means that Sydney will have five commercial FM licences from next year and a new commercial service in Campbelltown, western Sydney.

Amid claims that the service in Campbelltown constitutes overkill in an area already well serviced with commercial radio, the ABA said that there had been a 80% growth in commercial radio advertising revenue comparing the 12 months to July 1999 to the year to July 1998 and that there was room for an additional service.

The draft licence plans for Sydney are the first to be released for a metropolitan area. Plans for Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth should be released early in 2000.

Television

A potential coast-to-coast indigenous television network has completed test transmission, marking the first time a national indigenous channel has been attempted and the first time community television has had a national transmission test.

The two hour long trial on September 2, 1999 was received in sites in Queensland, South Australia, West Australia and the Northern Territory.

Program content was completely indigenous, provided by communities with access to the service. Reception was through satellite equipment installed in remote indigenous communities as part of ATSIC's Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme.

The broadcast used a second channel provided by indigenous commercial broadcaster Imparja Television in Alice Springs, and it is expected that this channel may be used in future to deliver specific and culturally appropriate television to remote indigenous communities nationally.

Online

THE Internet Industry Association has released

its fifth Draft Code of Practice for Internet business in Australia. Intended to be a mainstay of Internet industry self-regulation, the Code addresses the most frequently cited causes of consumer reluctance to embrace the Internet, particularly for e-commerce.

Initially drafted almost four years ago, the Code was intended to cover issues of customer churn in the ISP sector but it has been redrafted to keep pace with the growing range of user concerns.

The Code provides best practice benchmarks for industry players in several areas, including:

- user privacy;
- e-commerce transactions;
- spamming (unsolicited emails);
- content regulation;
- copyright; and
- fair dealing practices for business.

The Code will be administered by an independent council. Businesses which sign up will be entitled to display a compliance symbol which marks them as adherents to the Code. It can be found on the IIA's website, <http://www.iaa.net.au/code.html>