

News

Telecommunications

THE June 1999 quarter performance figures for fixed and mobile carriers have been released by the Australian Communications Authority (ACA) in its Telecommunications Performance Monitoring Bulletin.

In relation to Telstra's fixed network, the continued "degradation of service responsiveness" to customers seeking new connections in urban and rural areas without infrastructure was "the most significant performance result", according to the ACA. Telstra reported that nationally only 63% of new services requested in urban areas without infrastructure were connected within the Customer Service Guarantee (CSG) Standard timeframe of one month. This is a decline of 10 percentage points when compared to the performance achieved in the corresponding 1998 quarter.

In response to the findings, the ACA will investigate Telstra's performance in the provision of services against the CSG Standard.

National performance figures for fault restoration against CSG timeframes were relatively steady for the period when compared to the same quarter in 1998.

Telstra's performance in answering calls to its Directory Assistance Service within 10 seconds improved by 13 percentage points over the quarter and represented the national telco's best ever result. Its performance in provision of payphone services, however, worsened.

Payphone serviceability dropped a further three percentage points to 82%, the poorest on record for both indicators. Nationally, the average time to clear a payphone fault increased by six hours to 42 hours. The ACA has commissioned research into Telstra's payphone service performance and the results will be released later this month.

C&W Optus reported a 10% increase in complaints over the quarter, resulting in an increase in the number of claims made by its growing customer base for breaches of the CSG Standard.

Radio

THE public hearing regarding 2UE and radio stars John Laws and Alan Jones will commence on October 19, 1999 in Sydney. The announcement from the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) came after two hearing conferences, the latest on October 12, which determined directions regarding:

- the names of the parties who have been given leave to participate in the hearing; and
- a timetable for the ABA and participants to identify witnesses and provide relevant documents to each other.

The "affected participants" include Qantas, John Laws, Alan Jones, Sony Music, Radio 2UE Sydney, Sky Radio, C&W Optus, the NRMA, and Australian Bankers' Association. The "public interest participants" include the Australian Consumers Association, Public Relations Institute of

Australia, the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, and the Communications Law Centre.

The ABA has widened the terms of reference of the hearing to include consideration of whether the conduct of the presenters, in giving effect to their agreements, has led to political matter being put to air without it being "tagged" as required by the Broadcasting Services Act 1992.

In addition, ABA chairman Professor David Flint has ruled that television and radio broadcasters will not be permitted to record or broadcast the opening statements or witness testimony at the hearing. He left open the possibility of broadcasters recording or broadcasting the closing addresses.

Public documents relevant to the ABA inquiry are available on its website, www.aba.gov.au

Spectrum

THE Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Senator Richard Alston, has confirmed the re-allocation of the remaining 2x30 MHz of 1.8 GHz spectrum - suitable for mobile telephony - in metropolitan areas, clearing the way for an auction of spectrum licences in early 2000.

The new allocation will follow a similar process to the 1998 auction. Spectrum will again be sold with incumbents in place. According to the Minister, incumbents they will not be compelled to relocate before 2002.

Internet/online

Some 29% of businesses had access to the Internet and 6% had a website or home page at the end of June 1998, according to estimates from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

It estimated that 16% of all employing businesses had gained access to the Internet prior to July 1997, 13% gained access during 1997-98 and a further 14% intended to gain access during 1998-99. This would have lifted the expected rate of Internet access by employing businesses to 43% at June 1999.

The majority of employing businesses with Internet access at June 1998 used the Internet for email (92%) and less than a quarter (23%) used it for marketing and promotions.

The proportion of businesses using Internet technology for selling and purchasing goods and services was also low with only 16% of businesses with Internet access using the technology for placing purchase orders and 10% using it to receive sales orders.

Only 8% of businesses with Internet access used Internet technology as a method of making payments, and 2% to receive payments.

Full details are in the ABS publication "Business Use of Information Technology, Australia, 1997-98". A summary of the publication is on the Internet at www.abs.gov.au