

# News

## Cross-media ownership

AFTER a nine-month investigation, the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) has found that the appointment of Brian Powers as chairman of John Fairfax Holdings did not breach cross-media ownership laws because he is not in a position to exercise control of the relevant newspapers.

"While Mr Powers may be persuasive in arguing his particular point of view on any issue, this alone does not place him in a position to exercise control of Fairfax," said the ABA.

The ABA investigation began in May 1998 after Mr Powers resigned as chairman of Kerry Packer's Publishing & Broadcasting Ltd and bought a 15 per cent stake in FFX Trust which owns a 16.15 per cent shareholding in Fairfax.

## Telecommunications

INDEPENDENT senator Brian Harradine has refused to support the government's planned \$55 billion full privatisation of Telstra.

The government has a bill before the Parliament for the full sale of Telstra and was relying upon Senator Harradine's vote to help it pass through Senate before the end of June when the balance of power in the upper house swings to the Democrats, a party which does not support Telstra's full sale. The senator is not saying whether he will endorse the government's initial sell down of a further 16 per cent tranche, leaving it with a 51 per cent stake of the telecoms giant.

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THE Australian Communications Industry

Forum's (ACIF) new code on Prices, Terms and Conditions aims to set a clear benchmark for advertising in the telephony industry, according to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC).

The Code is based on the same standards for advertising as required under the Trade Practices Act 1974. It has special provisions dealing with mobile phone advertisements and requires advertisers to give better explanations in comparison advertisements (see CU April 1999 for a full report on ACIF's new code).

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A REVIEW of the National Relay Service Plan 1998-99 (NRSP) will be conducted at a forum organised by the Australian Communications Authority (ACA) on March 26, 1999 in Melbourne.

The National Relay Service provides people who are deaf, hearing or speech impaired with access to the standard telephone service through the relay of voice, modem and telephone typewriter equipment. The plan outlines how the Australian Communications Exchange (ACE), as the National Relay Service provider, intends to fulfil its obligation.

Interested parties are directed to Nora Brodian at the ACA on telephone (03) 9963 6966, or to the authority's website at <http://www.aca.gov.au>

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THE Australian Communications Authority (ACA) has granted Telstra, Optus and WorldCom an extension until November 1999 to implement local number portability (LNP). The ACA says the extension was necessary because the process being

undertaken by the industry to develop the operational code of practice for the provision of LNP to carriage service providers, for simple and complex services, has taken longer than expected.

LNP is quite clearly a competitive issue, with the carriage service providers preparing to face greater competition as soon as LNP is brought in for the wider telecoms community (Telstra and Optus have had some portability between the two of them since the end of 1997).

The ACA granted Telstra and Optus a number of exemptions in September 1998, including an exemption until May 31, 1999 from the provision of number portability for complex services to each other, and number portability to other carriage service providers. The ACA reconsidered the timeframe in November 1998 following advice from the Australian Communications Industry Forum (ACIF) that it intended to have an industry code published by around the end of May 1999, and an extension was granted.

## Online

FOLLOWING the signing of the Australia-Singapore Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in IT on February 22, 1999, the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Singapore Department of Statistics have established a Working Group to cooperate on the development of electronic commerce statistics.

The Working Group will build on the ongoing exchange of information about statistical collections in electronic commerce. It aims to improve the range and quality of

data produced by each organisation and help produce internationally comparable data to meet new demands for statistics in this rapidly changing field.

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THE Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has released its six monthly estimate of Internet access. The figures show that in November 1998, an estimated 1,272,000 households (19 per cent of all households) had access to the Internet from home. This is an increase of 23.7 per cent over the number of households with home Internet access in May 1998 (970,000).

In the 12 months to November 1998, almost 4.2 million adults (31 per cent of Australia's total adult population) accessed the Internet: 1.9 million persons from work, 1.7 million from home, 1.1 million from a neighbour or friend's house, and 0.8 million from a tertiary institution. Of those accessing the Internet from work, almost 78 per cent frequently used it from that site (once a week or more). But only seven per cent of adults who accessed the Internet in the 12 months to November 1998 reported using it for shopping. This represents only two per cent of all Australian adults.

## Legal decisions

THE High Court has refused the editor of student magazine *Rabelais* an application for leave to appeal against the Full Federal Court decision that it had breached censorship laws in publishing the article "The Art of Shoplifting" (see CU 143, May 1998). The editors now face potentially heavy penalties.