

# ACIF forum on VoIP self regulation identifies the way forward for the industry and the consumer

Forum confirms industry and consumer support for self regulation in VoIP

The Australian Communications Industry Forum (ACIF) yesterday brought together carriers, service providers, vendors, integrators, industry associations, government agencies and consumer groups to examine regulatory, legal and technical issues relating to the provision of VoIP. Specific issues that were examined by industry experts included numbering, quality of service, emergency call services, law enforcement, number portability, the provision of fault management services, interoperability and the customer service guarantee. Although VoIP is more widespread in business communications, the discussion focussed on VoIP for consumers because of the broader range of issues it raises.

ACIF Chief Executive Officer Anne Hurley said the forum was highly successful with more than 80 industry and consumer representatives attending to voice their opinions on the best way forward in developing an appropriate regulatory framework for VoIP.

Industry and consumer groups alike agreed that VoIP presents some exciting opportunities now and in the future, and has the potential to change the way that we communicate, she said. There was also agreement that it is vital for all players to work together in order to develop the best response through self-regulation.

Some key themes were present across all of the discussions. Firstly, in the short term the focus should be on educating and protecting the consumer through the provision of information from the industry on the services available to them and what they can expect from those services.

Secondly, all participants acknowledged that it is important not to stifle the development of VoIP services as it offers the consumer so many opportunities through increased functionality, applications and potential cost savings.

It is clear from the views expressed by those attending the forum that the issues facing the industry in relation to VoIP are not insurmountable and that self regulation is the preferred approach to tackling these issues. It is also widely accepted that ACIF has an important role to play in facilitating that process, Hurley said.

ACIF identified four issues for further investigation in relation to existing codes and standards affecting consumer issues, number portability, emergency services and law enforcement.

There were two streams of responses that were identified as starting points for immediate action the provision of consumer information, and investigating the best way for that to be managed, and technical work that will be managed through ACIF to progress towards interoperability and any-to-any connectivity between VoIP providers in future.

Also encouraging was the number of new industry players that attended the forum and participated in the industry dialogue for the first time.

It was encouraging to see the number of people and companies that attended the forum to discuss these important issues, Hurley said. Self regulation relies on the involvement of industry as a whole to widen the dialogue and develop structured outcomes. The forum has provided us with a wealth of information, which we will now use to achieve the best outcomes for the consumer and the industry.

Feedback and outcomes that were developed during the forum will be made available to government and regulatory bodies.

About ACIF

ACIF is a member-funded organisation established in 1997 to facilitate communications self-regulation in the interests of both industry and consumers. ACIF provides a neutral forum in which all participants and end-users in the Australian communications industry can work together to foster an efficient, competitive environment through self-regulatory processes, technical codes and standards.