

The AUSTEL Privacy Advisory Committee

by Kent Davey

On 15 September 1994 the Minister for Communications and the Arts, Mr Michael Lee ('the Minister') requested that AUSTEL establish an advisory committee to examine issues relating to the protection of customer personal information, telemarketing and calling number display. In accordance with the Minister's request AUSTEL established the Privacy Advisory Committee ('the PAC') pursuant to section 53 of the *Telecommunications Act 1991* (Cth) to assist AUSTEL in providing advice to the Minister on these telecommunications privacy issues.

The members of the PAC include representatives of AUSTEL, the Australian Direct Marketing Association, the Attorney-General's Department, the Australian Telecommunications Users Group, the Communications Law Centre, the Department of Communications and the Arts, Optus Communications, the Office of the Privacy Commissioner, the Small Enterprise Telecommunications Centre, Telstra Corporation, the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman and Vodafone.

The terms of reference of the PAC provide that the PAC is established to assist AUSTEL in carrying out its functions generally and in particular:

- (1) to provide advice and assistance on privacy matters as they relate to the interests of consumers of telecommunications services
- (2) to identify general privacy principles applicable to the telecommunications industry and to develop specific guidelines where necessary
- (3)(a) to provide advice on proposed codes of conduct to ensure they meet appropriate privacy standards and principles
- (b) to provide advice to relevant industry and community groups in developing codes of conduct which reflect the general privacy principles and specific guidelines
- (4) to make recommendations concerning appropriate privacy principles, including the principle of 'informed choice', about the introduction of new technologies and specifically the use and reuse of personal data.'

The PAC considers the issues referred to AUSTEL by the Minister at monthly meetings. The Protection of Customer Personal Information, Silent Line Customers, First Report of the AUSTEL Privacy Advisory Committee ('the Silent Line Report') was released in early June 1995.

In the Silent Line Report the PAC observed that silent line customers are very concerned for the integrity of their privacy. There is considerable confusion and misunderstanding amongst silent line customers in relation to the extent of privacy protection offered by the silent line telephone service and the measures that customers may take to ensure that their silent line telephone number is not inadvertently disclosed.

In the Silent Line Report the PAC considered that a consumer education campaign is required to address the confusion and misunderstanding surrounding the silent line telephone service and to advise customers of the steps that they may take to protect their privacy and prevent the inadvertent disclosure of their silent line telephone number.

As an initial step to address the need for a consumer education campaign Telstra has prepared a brochure in consultation with the PAC which outlines the features of a silent line telephone service. A copy of the brochure is attached to the Silent Line Report.

Copies of the Silent Line Report are available from the Public Affairs Section of AUSTEL on (03) 9828 7492.

Having produced the Silent Line Report, the PAC has moved on to consider issues of caller line identification, carrier and service provider handling of customer personal information and telemarketing.

On the following page is extracted The Australian Privacy Charter.

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