

International relations

Mr Gareth Grainger, ABA Deputy Chairman, reports on his recent meetings at UNESCO and the OECD in Paris.

ABA participates in Australian delegation to UNESCO

Mr Gareth Grainger, ABA Deputy Chairman, was invited to be a member of the Australian delegation at UNESCO's 29th General Conference in Paris from 21 October. The invitation reflected the ABA's active involvement with UNESCO since 1995, an involvement which appears certain to continue for the next three years.

The ABA in 1996 was invited by UNESCO to prepare a pilot study on content issues on the Internet. Mr Grainger presented the final report to Mr Henrikas Yushkiavitchus, UNESCO's Assistant Director General Information, Informatics and Communications, on 24 October.

The ABA is seeking UNESCO support and funding for two projects:

(i) UNESCO/ABA Regional Forum on On-line Services in Asia and the Pacific

to be held in Jakarta in late 1998; and (ii) an international forum on young people and media research issues proposed for 2000 in Sydney.

Mr Cameron Forbes, Australia's Youth delegate to UNESCO, at the UNESCO Youth Roundtable on 31 October, supported the young people and the media research conference. The proposal attracted strong interest and it appears certain that it will now proceed. The ABA will develop a formal proposal to undertake the organisation of the conference. The conference would follow on from the highly successful 1995 Melbourne World Summit on Television and Children and the 1997 International Forum on Young People and the Media.

Mr Grainger was highly impressed by the very strong bloc which has been established between Australia, New

Zealand and 16 other Pacific Island nations which ensures a powerful voice for this region in UNESCO. It has resulted in UNESCO establishing a 'Focus on the Pacific' program. Of real interest was the importance of Commonwealth of Nations membership in such international fora. Australia delivered its intervention to the UNESCO Communications Commission IV on 6 November.

The ABA's participation in the Australian delegation was greatly appreciated and has helped ensure UNESCO support for those projects which the ABA is keen to advance. The high level of recognition of the ABA's leadership role in the areas of on-line self-regulation, protection of children from harmful content and youth and media research issues is a tribute to the hard work of the ABA in recent years.

OECD forum on content on the Internet

The ABA has been monitoring international regulatory developments in relation to on-line services. The ABA's Deputy Chairman Mr Gareth Grainger was a member of the Australian delegation at the OECD's Directorate for Science, Technology and Industry Second Ad Hoc Meeting On Approaches to Content On The Internet in Paris on 22 October.

The ABA's Manager, On-line Services, Ms Kaaren Koomen, has contributed to the OECD's work in this field and participated in the first of the OECD's Ad Hoc meetings, held in July 1997.

The second meeting considered two key documents. The first was the Secretariat Report on *Approaches to Content on the Internet* which described the background of content on the Internet so members could comprehend the unique issues in policy-making for new technologies. It also considered the various strategies adopted in relation to the Internet by OECD member countries. The report contained an inventory of:

- existing legislation, policies and

practices, and national approaches in the OECD member countries;

- initiatives currently being undertaken in this area from the private sector – including technical solutions, self-regulatory measures, and contractual agreements; and
- the work already achieved or being undertaken in other international organisations.

The inventory of approaches to content on the Internet has revealed that identifiable 'common threads' appear in most national approaches. This shows that countries are taking similar points into account when approaching the issue of illegal and harmful content on the Internet.

The meeting also considered *Supplementary Paper on Issues and Options for Future Work to Accompany the Report on Approaches to Content on the Internet*. The meeting acknowledged the primary role of the private sector in regulating the Internet. It was agreed that a joint OECD/Business and Industry Advisory Committee forum would

be held in March 1998 to discuss approaches to content on the Internet. The forum will focus on illegal content and will include links to other work in the OECD on privacy and security issues.

The forum will consider:

- industry approaches in response to market and policy pressures, including models for self-regulation, and implementation mechanisms, including technologies; and
- government roles in supporting self-regulation.

This agenda is in line with the overall policy direction taken by the Australian Government. The ABA will contribute to the preparatory work for the March 1998 joint OECD/industry forum and will encourage Australian industry participation in the forum itself.

For more information about either of these meetings, please contact Mr Gareth Grainger on (02) 9334 7700 or e-mail gareth.grainger@aba.gov.au

