



... Continued from page 12

recommended that the Government provide the CBC with 'a stable and predictable five-year funding program, revolving annually'.

The Government's response was non-committal: 'While current constraints limit the Government's ability to make long-term financial commitments, the Minister of Communications has stated publicly that he understands the importance of stable funding to the CBC in the years to come'.

In the production area, Canada has survived threats from two US-Canada trade agreements, and has protected its ability to maintain and introduce support measures for production including government subsidy programs. Nevertheless, Canada continues to face similar problems to Australia in producing and distributing material for the domestic market, and the Committee recommended legislation to improve distribution and access for Canadian films to the domestic market. The Government acknowledged that many 'complex and far-reaching' structural problems affecting the production and distribution of films in Canada remain, but did not commit itself further than saying that it would continue to work with producers and distributors to find out how best to meet their needs.

Telecommunications

In telecommunications, the Committee concluded that a new and current federal telecommunications policy and regulatory system were essential to the availability of new technologies and services, as well as to their diffusion across the country.

But legislation was only one element in the development of a comprehensive Canadian telecommunications strategy. There needed to be a concerted approach by federal and provincial governments and the private sector to issues like R&D, convergence, concentration of ownership and international competitiveness. The Committee nevertheless made no specific

recommendation on telecommunications.

Coherent Approach to Cultural Policy

Perhaps the most important recommendation of the Standing Committee, given Australia's current move towards a cultural policy (see CU 92) concerned the need for a national cultural policy for Canada in which broadcasting is an integral part. The Government said that it 'fully agreed' with this recommendation and claimed that it had already put in place many of the key elements that the Committee considered critical to developing sectoral policies in culture and communications.

The Committee further recommended that guiding principles for policy development in culture and communications should include:

- recognition of a priority for standards of excellence in programming and production;
- equitable participation by, and reflection of, aboriginal peoples, cultural minorities and women in culture and communications programming and employment; and
- integrated policy planning among all Federal departments to ensure that they are aware of their responsibilities with respect to culture and communications.

Once again, the Government endorsed this recommendation and claimed that its existing policies and programs ensured that it was being met. □

Canada to Ban Auto-Dial

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) has proposed to ban automatic telephone dialling devices used for such purposes as soliciting money, advertising other telephone services, and fund raising.

The devices can store or generate numbers, and can convey a pre-recorded or synthesised voice message.

The proposed ban is a response to 'dramatic increases' in public complaints about these devices, the CRTC says. In 1987 these complaints represented less than 3 per cent of all telecommunications complaints; by 1992, this had risen to over 25 per cent. Between January and June this year, the devices gave rise to nearly 5,000 complaints or 40 per cent of all complaints to the CRTC about telecommunications during that period.

The complaints included the timing of calls (often waking people up) and repeated calls, sometimes several a day; random or sequential dialling of unlisted numbers, and tying up of lines in institutions like hospitals; and lack of caller identification.

The Telecommunications Act, which came into force in August gives the CRTC wider powers to deal with unsolicited telecommunications, such as imposing this ban. The CRTC was reluctant to impose an outright ban on the technology, pointing out that it could be useful for emergency purposes such as use by fire or police departments, or for companies to notify recalls of dangerous products. It has opened the issue up to public process and called for submissions.

Our own regulator AUSTEL in its report last year on privacy and telecommunications made no recommendations on devices such as these, though it drew attention to the inherent conflict between people's perception of their right to privacy and others' perception of the right to go about their business.

If Canada's experience is any guide, when such devices become more widely used in Australia, AUSTEL may find firmer action is needed. □