



STS Review Group announced

The Director of the Communications Law Centre, Jock Given, has been appointed to Chair the Standard Telephone Service Review Group, established by the Government as part of its *Better Communications* policy. Ten representatives have been appointed from a number of industry groups to carry out the review, which is to report to the Minister for Communications and the Arts by 29 November 1996. The Review Group's terms of reference are listed below.

Terms of reference

The review is to examine whether the definition of the Standard Telephone Service (STS) mandated under the universal service arrangements should be upgraded to accommodate new technologies and minimum service levels. The current definition of the STS is given in section 5 of the Telecommunications Act 1991. AUSTEL's interpretation of the level and quality of service that the standard telephone service constitutes is given in 'AUSTEL's View of Telstra's Universal Service Obligation'.

The definition of the STS should be assessed in the context of the post 1997 legislative framework which has been broadly agreed to date. This framework includes:

- carriers only being eligible to be declared universal service providers;
- pro-rata funding of universal service carriers;
- a scheme by which universal service providers for a particular geographic area can be selected;
- all universal service providers being required to submit a plan for fulfilling its universal service obligations to the Minister for approval; and
- Universal Service Obligation (USO) costs being calculated us-

ing the current 'avoidable cost less revenue forgone' methodology.

The objective of the Review will be to determine whether recent and emerging developments in telecommunications technology, or increased demand for more advanced telecommunications services in the Australian community warrant a change in the level of service mandated under the USO.

Key factors to be addressed by the Review include:

- an assessment of the particular needs and expectations of people living in non-metropolitan areas, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities, and people with disabilities, in relation to basic telecommunications services, including voice, data and facsimile services;
- an assessment of whether the existing definition of the standard telephone service is appropriate to ensure that existing needs are met;
- an assessment of recent and emerging changes in telecommunications technology, in terms of their implications for delivering basic services to all parts of Australia;
- an assessment of the cost implications of any proposed upgrade in the level or quality of the STS under the universal service obligation; and
- an assessment of whether the requirement in respect of payphones under the current universal service obligations is appropriate, particularly in view of the importance of payphones in meeting basic telecommunications needs in remote communities.

Any definition by the Review should:

- focus attention on the functionality of the service, namely basic communications;

- be technology neutral;
- eliminate uncertainty about the meaning of 'public switched telephone service';
- accommodate non-voice users of 'voice services';
- support a consistent definition of the 'standard telephone service' throughout the post 1997 telecommunications legislation.

The Review should assess the need for periodic reviews of the standard telephone service under the post 1997 telecommunications legislation.

The Review should report to the Minister for Communications and the Arts by November 29, 1996. □

CLC welcomes South African student

The Communications Law Centre is pleased to welcome Mawethu Tilimani, a South African postgraduate student of telecommunications.

Mawethu is being sponsored by the Government's AusAID program to undertake a twelve week traineeship in the area of telecommunications, as one of 15 students from his country involved with the scheme. Since arriving in Australia in June, Mawethu spent a month in Melbourne with Telstra, before travelling to Sydney to work with the CLC. The CLC is providing Mawethu with intensive training in the advocacy of consumer and public interests within a competitive telecommunications market, and the major issues confronting policy makers when markets are liberalised. CLC is coordinating the training program with the Consumers Telecommunications Network, which is also training a student, Lucas Gqokoma. A number of other organisations are also assisting Mawethu and the CLC with the program. □