

# News

## Telecommunications

THE Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has rejected Telstra's proposed charges to other carriers for inter-connecting to its network to provide national and long distance calls.

Telstra's undertaking, submitted in 1997, provides for an average inter-connection charge of 4.73 cents a minute. The ACCC considered that this should be about two cents a minute in 1998-99, according to ACCC chairman, Professor Allan Fels.

Professor Fels said that the ACCC assessment was based on the costs that an efficient operator would incur in providing these services. The assessment also took into account cost reductions over time driven by lower labour costs and increases in traffic volume which meant that the per call contribution to network costs was lower because the costs of the network were recovered over a larger number of calls.

A report detailing the reasons for the ACCC's final decision is available on the commission's website, [www.accc.gov.au](http://www.accc.gov.au)

THE Australian Communications Authority (ACA) will renew Multipoint Distribution System (MDS) licences (in the MDS A Band between 2076-2111 MHz) for a period of up to three years (to July 2002). Licences in the MDS B Band (2300-2400 MHz) will be renewed for a period up to five years (to July 2004).

The shorter renewal period for MDS A Band licences will enable the ACA to accommodate the introduction of a new generation of mobile telephony, International Mobile Telecommunications, which will allow multimedia services to be transmitted over mobile phones. A frequency band plan will be made available for the 2076-2111 MHz band to support the introduction of IMT-2000 services.

MDS licences are mainly used for the provision of pay television and radio services to domestic premises. The majority are held by Television & Radio Broadcasting Services and Austar Entertainment.

INTERNATIONAL satellite company SkyBridge LP and Telstra have signed an in-principle agreement which gives Telstra first option to become an equity partner and be the regional service provider for SkyBridge in Australasia and south-east Asia.

Skybridge's 80 satellites will provide broadband connection to users who previously only had narrow-band access. They will also optimise the use of radio frequency spectrum by operating in the Ku band. This will be particularly relevant to business and residential users in rural and remote Australia where broadband services are not comparable to those in metropolitan areas.

The final agreement is subject to commercial,

technical and legal due diligence and formal documentation being entered into but the current negotiations should be concluded by September 1999.

Partners in Skybridge include Alcatel, Loral Space & Communication and EMS Technologies from the US, COM DEV of Canada, Japan's Mitsubishi, Sharp and Toshiba, SRIW of Belgium, and CNES and SNECMA of France.

THE Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has announced that telecommunications carriers will be responsible for all costs incurred on their own network when providing local number portability to customers.

"Pricing Principles for Local Number Portability - a guide" indicates the principles the ACCC will apply if it is required to arbitrate a dispute over the terms and conditions of local number portability between the carrier whom the customer leaves and the carrier receiving the customer.

The announcement reflects a change to the previous approach by the ACCC which indicated in a draft guide that most costs should be borne by the carrier whom the customer leaves. Since the draft guide, the ACCC has come to a view that the carrier receiving a customer should not be responsible for any costs incurred by the carrier that initially provided the local service.

Further details are available from the ACCC website on: [www.accc.gov.au](http://www.accc.gov.au)

## Internet/online

ALMOST 1.3 million households (18 per cent of all households in Australia) had access to the Internet from home, according to figures released from the Australian Bureau of Statistics late June. This is an increase of 50 per cent (423,000) compared to February 1998.

The figures also showed that there were nearly 3.2 million households with a home computer, an increase of 10 per cent over the February 1998 estimate of 2.9 million households.

In the 12 months to February 1999, nearly five million adults (37 per cent of Australia's total adult population) accessed the Internet compared to three million in the 12 months to February 1998. The 18-24 year-old group still had the highest level of Internet use (65 per cent compared to 42 per cent for February 1998) and males still accessed the Internet more than females (39 per cent and 35 per cent, respectively, compared to 26 per cent and 19 per cent for February 1998).

Details of the latest Internet usage are available in the ABS publication, "Use of Internet by Householders, Australia, February 1999" It is available from ABS bookshops or from the bureau's website at [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)