

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW WATCH

Launch of Window on the Law

On 2 July 1997, the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, the Hon. Daryl Williams AM QC MP and the then Minister for Administrative Services, the Hon. David Jull MP, issued the following Joint News Release

LAW ON THE NET

Australians now have easy access to information on our legal system via a user-friendly Internet site, Window on the Law, launched today by Attorney-General and Minister for Justice Daryl Williams and Minister for Administrative Services David Jull.

Mr Williams said Window on the Law includes an overview of the Australian Constitution, Australia's legal system and court structure and provides access to Commonwealth legal materials, Departmental publications and the Attorney's news releases.

"Window on the Law helps unravel the complex web of laws and regulations which are perhaps a mystery to many ordinary Australians," Mr Williams said.

"It is essential that Australians have access to information relating to our legal system and the operation of Australian laws that may affect them."

The web site also contains a gateway to SCALEplus – the online legal information system of Commonwealth legislation, caselaw and other legal materials.

Mr Jull said the launch of Window on the Law marked an extension of the relationship between the Australian Government Publishing Service and the Attorney-General's Department and a continuation of the Government commitment to providing Australians with easy access to important information.

"Window on the Law is proof of the Government's election commitment to ensure that all Australians have access to clear information about our legal system," Mr Jull said.

"Libraries, students at all levels, legal aid information centres, courts, governments, the media, legal publishers, the legal profession and the general public will all find this site useful. I urge all Australians to take advantage of this service."

The Window on the Law address is <http://law.gov.au>

Government Response to the Humphry Report on GBEs

The Minister for Finance, The Hon John Fahey MP, issued the following Media Release on 30 June 1997.

Government Business Enterprises – New Governance Arrangements

I am pleased to announce the adoption of new governance arrangements for Commonwealth Government Business Enterprises (GBEs), to take effect from 1 July, following a review of the previous accountability arrangements conducted by Mr Richard Humphry, Managing Director of the Australian Stock Exchange.

Mr Humphry's report, *Review of GBE Governance Arrangements*, examined all aspects of the relationships between the Commonwealth and its GBEs and made recommendations for changes or refinements to the arrangements governing those relationships so as to maintain a coherent, prudent and effective policy governing the relationship between the Government and its GBEs. The Government has adopted most of the key recommendations of the Humphry report.

A key change in the arrangements is the adoption of a joint Ministerial shareholder model for overseeing the performance of GBEs. The two shareholder Ministers will be the Minister for Finance and the Minister(s) responsible for the portfolios in which GBEs are currently located.

This arrangement will provide for an increased focus on the financial performance of GBEs, whilst also maintaining attention on non-financial aspects of GBE performance.

The shareholder Ministers may agree to modify the arrangements for GBEs being sold and to agree the timing and application of elements of the arrangements to GBEs that are being reviewed.

The Government has also agreed that the new arrangements not be implemented in respect of the Export Finance and Insurance Corporation (EFIC) at this time.

I appreciate the considerable effort that Mr Humphry had made in consulting with stakeholders and preparing a thorough and useful report. Copies are available from my Ministerial office."

Benchmarks for Industry-based Customer Dispute Resolution Schemes

On 28 August 1997, the Minister for Customs & Consumer Affairs and Minister Assisting the Attorney-General, Senator the Hon Chris Ellison, released the Benchmarks for Industry-based Customer Dispute Resolution Schemes. The text of the Minister's media release (278/97) is set out below.

Consumers To Benefit From Dispute Resolution Benchmarks

Federal Minister for Customs and Consumer Affairs, Senator Chris Ellison, today launched Benchmarks for Industry-based Customer Dispute Resolution Schemes.

Senator Ellison said that dispute schemes are an alternative to the court system, allowing for cost free, accessible and effective resolution of disputes.

"Dispute Resolution Schemes benefit both consumers and businesses and these Benchmarks set the standards for those schemes."

"The voluntary Benchmarks have been drafted in close consultation with industry and consumer groups to guide the development of fu-

ture schemes and improve current schemes," Senator Ellison said.

The Benchmarks contain six main themes:

- accessibility
- fairness
- accountability
- efficiency
- independence
- effectiveness.

Senator Ellison said that each theme contains key practices including having no fee or charge payable by the customer to use a scheme, having a decision-maker who is not selected by the industry, publicising reasons for decisions and setting reasonable time limits for processes within schemes.

"I am pleased to see a trend developing over recent years where industries are setting up dispute resolution schemes to resolve disputes between businesses and their customers."

"I encourage industry to use these Benchmarks when establishing their dispute resolution schemes or when reviewing existing schemes," Senator Ellison said.

Queries about the Benchmarks may be directed to Ms Mandy Doherty, Consumer Policy and Reform Branch, Department of Industry Science and Tourism (Tel 02 62506965).

Commonwealth Services Delivery Agency (Centrelink)

The *Commonwealth Services Delivery Agency Act 1997 & Commonwealth Services Delivery Agency (Consequential Amendments) Act 1997* passed the Parliament during the Autumn Session 1997.

The Second Reading Speech on the Commonwealth Services Delivery Agency Bill (House of Representatives Hansard, 4 December 1996, 7414) explained that the current network of regional offices of the Department of Social Security would form the core of the Agency's