



TELSTRA DISCUSSION PAPER  
Industry Development Plans

HREOC FORUM  
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### **Recommendation 3: Telecommunications Carrier Industry Development Plans**

Telstra welcomes the opportunity to participate in the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Forum and to provide some comments on the discussion paper commissioned by HREOC, *“When the Tide Comes In: Towards Accessible Telecommunications for People with Disabilities in Australia,”* released in July 2003.

Recommendation 3 of the paper relates to Industry Development Plans, proposing HREOC discussions with DCITA to review the purposes and effectiveness of the disability-related provisions in Schedule 1 of the Telecommunications Act 1997 which cover Telecommunications Carrier Industry Development Plans.

The telecommunications industry generates growth, employment and export revenue for Australia. The carrier Industry Development Plan (IDP) arrangements contained in the Telecommunications Act 1997 are designed to capture and maximise the benefits for the many industries that supply products and services to the carriers.

The obligation requires carriers with approved IDPs to undertake telecommunications activities in the following areas:

- Strategic commercial relationships with Australian and multinational companies;
- Research and development;
- Exports;
- Employment and training; and
- The supply of equipment for people with disabilities.

A carrier must comply with the research and development activities of its IDP. Other commitments made under the IDPs are, in a formal sense, voluntary. Research and development activities include research and development in relation to addressing the needs of people with disabilities.

With respect to the supply of equipment for people with disabilities, the IDP must provide the Minister with an understanding of the carrier’s planned activities aimed at improving access, services and the supply of equipment for people with disabilities.

Licensed telecommunications carriers are required to report annually to advise the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts about the industry development outcomes resulting from their activities.

The legislation requires that a carrier must have a current IDP at all times and that an IDP must run for at least 12 months. The duration of the individual IDPs range between one and five years.

The legislation also requires that each carrier provide an annual report to the Minister describing progress made by the carrier in implementing the IDP during that year. A summary of that report must be made available to the public. Telstra’s IDP is accessible at [www.telstra.com.au/corpsupply/reports.htm](http://www.telstra.com.au/corpsupply/reports.htm)

In recent years Telstra has consolidated its annual report on the prior year, and the plan for the year ahead into one document, which is submitted to the Minister by 30 September each year.

## Telstra's Industry Development Plan and disability-related activities

- Research undertaken to investigate accessibility of services such as the work being undertaken on behalf of Telstra Research by National Acoustic Laboratories (NAL), the research division of Australian Hearing, to establish the benchmarking required for future assessments of potential interference from current and new generation mobile phone technology with hearing aids.
- Research to investigate potential impacts of new technology such as a research study undertaken in 2002 into Telstra's voice recognition technology with particular groups of people with disabilities who normally ring Telstra to enquire or conduct transactions.
- Research to monitor customer satisfaction with particular services targeting people with a disability, eg the regular annual Disability Enquiry Hotline user study.
- Support for research projects or activities being undertaken by disability groups such as that provided to:
  - Regency Park Rehabilitation Engineering in South Australia to enable it to purchase mobile phone handsets, Personal Digital Assistance and accessories for its research into the development of a mobile phone interface for people with physical disabilities;
  - Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind College Training Facility to run a Telstra Accessibility Program that will offer a broad curriculum of accredited training programs and courses ranging from adult Braille courses, to industrial training and computing and adaptive technology for people who are blind or have a vision impairment;
  - Disability Solutions Innovation Centre (DSIC), an innovation centre established at Australian Technology Park, Redfern NSW, to help develop new products to improve the lives of people with disabilities; and
  - Deakin University, in support of a study to explore the use of videoconferencing using VIDEOoverIP and video relay interpreting, which enable the transmission of visual and gestural sign language, Auslan, for Deaf people to enhance their identity through increased participation in community life.

In its IDP, Telstra has also outlined the projects and undertakings of the Centre of Accessibility at Telstra Research Laboratories.

### Discussion point

- There is probably little awareness of Industry Development Plans in the disability community but greater awareness of Disability Action Plans. We suggest for discussion that the inclusion of proposed research initiatives in the Disability Action Plans would contribute to greater awareness of services providers' commitments, and consequently lead to a wider engagement and feedback from interested stakeholders.
- In view of the enforceability of the provisions relating to research and development activities of a carrier's IDP and the fact that Disability Action Plans are not mandatory, consideration needs to be given to the implications of this suggestion, including the legislative implications.