

Q&A's – Release of *What consumers want – Consumer expectations for telecommunications safeguards* position paper

Why did the Minister direct the ACMA to make a standard?

On 23 March 2023, the Minister held a Consumer Roundtable with key stakeholders about the TCP Code.

On 2 May 2023, we released our *Financial hardship in the telco sector: Keeping the customer connected* report. The report clearly demonstrated that a range of rules currently outlined in the TCP Code are not working to effectively protect consumers experiencing financial hardship – especially those in vulnerable circumstances.

While it is a question for the Minister to answer, stakeholders and our research are telling us the same thing. The specific financial hardship protections in the Code are not operating to prevent harm.

Given the current cost of living pressures many Australians are facing, it's important we have clear and enforceable rules so telcos give appropriate support to consumers doing it tough.

Why is the ACMA releasing a position paper now?

Today we have released a position paper *What consumers want – Consumer expectations for telecommunications safeguards* which highlights our concerns in the shortfall in consumer protections being delivered under industry's Telecommunications Consumer Protections (TCP) Code.

The ACMA has been concerned for some time that the current co-regulatory code is not delivering the level of consumer safeguards expected of an essential service.

Our position paper shows that telcos are falling short of what customers want in key areas such as selling practices, credit assessments, payment methods, disconnection processes, financial hardship assistance and the treatment of consumers in vulnerable circumstances, including those experiencing domestic and family violence.

These are not new issues and we expect industry to make the necessary improvements to better protect their customers.

Why are we telling industry what they should do in the TCP Code review?

Previous TCP Code review processes have been protracted. We wanted at the outset to make clear to industry the areas where we find the deficient and which need improvement to provide safeguards for consumers.

The issues of concern that we have identified have been raised over some years with industry and we do not consider the TCP Code is currently providing protections at the level consumers expect from industry.

We consider that improvements cannot wait until the proposed TCP Code review completion timing of end 2024.

