[AU] Major changes to telecommunications law proposed

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On 1 August 1995, the Australian Minister for Communications and the Arts issued a Statement on Australia's future telecommunications policy. The Statement announces full liberalisation of the telecommuications sector although restrictions on foreign ownership and control will continue to apply.

There will be no numerical restrictions on carrier licences. Carriers will be under the obligation to interconnect all requesting service providers, including broadcasting services, information and interactive services. Both carriers and service providers will be under the obligation to make available customer equipment they own or for which they specify the technical characteristics, accessible to other carriers or service providers. This obligation is of importance in regards to subscription television services and other services that require decoding devices. Any carrier or service provider operating a subscriber management system used to control or manage access to video, audio or interactive services will have to provide access to that system at a fair price.

Other features of future Australian telecommunications law will be:

- access to a minimum telecommunications service for all people in Australia;

- the legislative concept of `standard telehone service' might be changed to a `standard telecommunications service'. The intention is to make available to all Australians a standard level of service capable of supporing voice telephony, fascimile and data.

- privacy protection; and

- a system of carrier liability for the use of networks, including carrier liability for content carried on networks, and tort liability limits for carriers.

The Australian Government hopes to implement these policy objectives by means of an Act of Parliament by 1 July 1997. (Ad van Loon, European Audiovisual Observatory) Information on law related policy developments which may have legal consequences but of which no documents or other texts are available yet.

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Minister for Communications and the Arts, `A New Era in Telecommunications', 1 August 1995 (`Lee Statement').

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