

FINANCIAL REVIEW**Shake-up to streamline industry forum**

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The Australian Communications Industry Forum is set to undergo a major shake-up aimed at streamlining its less than efficient systems and processes.

The forum, established in 1997 to develop and administer technical standards and industry codes for the telco sector, this week received a wide-ranging report from independent consultants ThinkEvans outlining 80 recommendations on how it could improve its operations.

According to ACIF chief executive Anne Hurley, a subcommittee has been formed to "analyse the way forward" and report to the board.

"The review is to look at how to go forward into the next seven years," Ms Hurley said in her first media interview since her appointment in April.

"The feedback I got when I arrived was that the processes were a little slow, and there were comments that, while still successful, we needed to optimise consumer protection and . . . minimise time and resource intensive processes."

A move ACIF hopes will improve consumer protection is its new industry code which regulates contracts for consumers and small business.

Ms Hurley said the draft code, released last Monday, was loosely modelled on Victoria's tough new fair trading legislation. That legislation, which came into force last year, introduced the concept of "unfair terms" and set out the circumstances under which unfair terms in contracts would be prohibited.

ACIF's draft code notes that, with the exception of Victoria, "federal and state laws do not identify or provide guidance on contract terms which may be unfair".

"This code builds on the Victorian legislation by providing industry specific examples and specific rules identifying contract terms which are unfair and how contracts should be set out to ensure legibility and comprehension of the terms," it says.

Ms Hurley said ACIF planned to hold an industry roundtable in February to ask telcos for feedback on the code. She also said ACIF expected some telcos would incur significant costs in order to comply.

"The cost will come from resources spent assessing existing contractual documents and amending those."
