
Guidance and information

Regular GST bulletins

The Commission's Business and Consumer Information group now regularly releases a bulletin to keep consumers and businesses up-to-date with GST pricing information. The information provided is derived from the Commission's GST price line call centre statistics.

The bulletins are being distributed regularly via the GST information network database and can also be accessed at <<http://gst.accc.gov.au/publications.cfm>>.

ISCCO Conference 2000 — Competition policy: the consumer welfare challenge

The International Society of Consumer and Competition Officials (ISCCO) held its second international conference at The Grand Hotel in Taipei on 2 June 2000.

Its goal was to provide a forum for practical, non-policy and outcome-oriented discussion and action by competition and consumer officials.

The one-day event was a success and attracted speakers and participants from around the world, including Australia, New Zealand, the Republic of China, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, the USA, Canada, Belgium, Germany, Sweden, and the OECD. The conference was divided into four sessions.

There were two or three key speakers in each as well as a moderator to draw out the key issues and actions for the future under each theme.

Session 1: Consumer protection through codes

The two papers in this session considered whether there is a need for a global standard of co-regulation and explored the key elements that are needed for effective co-regulation through codes of conduct.

Session 2: Privatisation and essential services

This session examined the application of competition law to essential services and went on to consider how we can ensure the benefits which ensue from competition in these sectors will be passed on to consumers. It included a case study on Japan's experience in the privatisation of its telecommunications and rail sectors.

Session 3: Achieving consumer welfare in developing economies

This session considered the development of consumer protection and competition policy in emerging economies and the important role of consumer groups in building effective competition and consumer protection regimes in developing economies.

Session 4: Issues in consumer protection and competition

Two main themes were considered during this session. The first was the interaction between intellectual property rights and competition law and ensuring the benefits flow on to consumers.

The second examined emerging e-commerce issues and discussed both the challenges that it creates and the solutions that are being generated to overcome these new issues.

Conference outcomes

An important role for ISCCO is seen to be the deliverance of practical outcomes and skills for all participants. This can be most effectively achieved through:

- pursuing market-based strategies — such as self regulation, consumer charters and industry-based complaints handling schemes; and
- international cooperation and coordination — e.g. through the sharing of information and information-gathering techniques and strategies, international cooperation, international Internet sweep days, and promotion of the OECD guidelines on e-commerce.

Achieving these outcomes is seen as a challenging task because of the different regimes and levels of development of all of ISCCO's members. However, this difficulty was not written off as being too hard but instead seen as a huge advantage in that ISCCO consequently provides the opportunity for all members to learn from each other's skills and experiences. The key to success therefore is to achieve the right balance and mix of seminars, presentations and workshops to ensure all member needs are recognised and addressed.

Conference papers

All of the ISCCO Conference 2000 papers will soon be available from the ISCCO website at <<http://www.iscco.org>>.

Next steps

Considerable enthusiasm was displayed at the Taipei ISCCO conference for the continuance and expansion of ISCCO as an optimal forum for government officials to achieve practical, tangible outcomes in competition and consumer protection. The following three projects will be the focus for ISCCO over the next six months.

ISCCO discussion groups

It is proposed that ISCCO develop a series of Internet-based discussion groups to allow wide participation, immediate access and interactive capacity on various key issues. These discussion groups will operate via the ISCCO website and initially examine:

- e-commerce;
- intellectual property; and
- codes/dispute resolution systems.

Further information about these ISCCO discussion groups will be available on the ISCCO website.

ISCCO workshop — November 2000

The next ISCCO workshop will be held in Durban, South Africa, in November 2000. It will be held in conjunction with the Consumers International World Congress on Consumers, *Social Justice and the World Market* that will take place between 13 and 17 November 2000. Further information will be available soon from the ISCCO website.

Twinning arrangements

One of the key benefits flowing from ISCCO was the opportunity it presents to form strong personal networks and institutional linkages. This opportunity will be advanced even further at the next ISCCO workshop in Durban by exploring how these links could be formalised by establishing twinning arrangements between developed and developing economies or organisations.

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