

This arrangement will provide for an increased focus on the financial performance of GBEs, whilst also maintaining attention on non-financial aspects of GBE performance.

The shareholder Ministers may agree to modify the arrangements for GBEs being sold and to agree the timing and application of elements of the arrangements to GBEs that are being reviewed.

The Government has also agreed that the new arrangements not be implemented in respect of the Export Finance and Insurance Corporation (EFIC) at this time.

I appreciate the considerable effort that Mr Humphry had made in consulting with stakeholders and preparing a thorough and useful report. Copies are available from my Ministerial office."

Benchmarks for Industry-based Customer Dispute Resolution Schemes

On 28 August 1997, the Minister for Customs & Consumer Affairs and Minister Assisting the Attorney-General, Senator the Hon Chris Ellison, released the Benchmarks for Industry-based Customer Dispute Resolution Schemes. The text of the Minister's media release (278/97) is set out below.

Consumers To Benefit From Dispute Resolution Benchmarks

Federal Minister for Customs and Consumer Affairs, Senator Chris Ellison, today launched Benchmarks for Industry-based Customer Dispute Resolution Schemes.

Senator Ellison said that dispute schemes are an alternative to the court system, allowing for cost free, accessible and effective resolution of disputes.

"Dispute Resolution Schemes benefit both consumers and businesses and these Benchmarks set the standards for those schemes."

"The voluntary Benchmarks have been drafted in close consultation with industry and consumer groups to guide the development of fu-

ture schemes and improve current schemes," Senator Ellison said.

The Benchmarks contain six main themes:

- accessibility
- fairness
- accountability
- efficiency
- independence
- effectiveness.

Senator Ellison said that each theme contains key practices including having no fee or charge payable by the customer to use a scheme, having a decision-maker who is not selected by the industry, publicising reasons for decisions and setting reasonable time limits for processes within schemes.

"I am pleased to see a trend developing over recent years where industries are setting up dispute resolution schemes to resolve disputes between businesses and their customers."

"I encourage industry to use these Benchmarks when establishing their dispute resolution schemes or when reviewing existing schemes," Senator Ellison said.

Queries about the Benchmarks may be directed to Ms Mandy Doherty, Consumer Policy and Reform Branch, Department of Industry Science and Tourism (Tel 02 62506965).

Commonwealth Services Delivery Agency (Centrelink)

The *Commonwealth Services Delivery Agency Act 1997 & Commonwealth Services Delivery Agency (Consequential Amendments) Act 1997* passed the Parliament during the Autumn Session 1997.

The Second Reading Speech on the Commonwealth Services Delivery Agency Bill (House of Representatives Hansard, 4 December 1996, 7414) explained that the current network of regional offices of the Department of Social Security would form the core of the Agency's