

Combined Pensioners & Superannuants Association

OF NEW SOUTH WALES INC



Submission to the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA)



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Combined Pensioners & Superannuants Association of NSW Inc (CPSA)

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CPSA is a non-profit, non-party-political membership association founded in 1931 which serves pensioners of all ages, superannuants and low-income retirees. CPSA has 130 Branches and affiliated organisations with a combined membership of over 29,000 people living throughout NSW. CPSA's aim is to improve the standard of living and well-being of its Members and constituents. CPSA depends for the majority of its funding for core activities as a peak body on a \$440,000 grant from the NSW Government and a \$68,000 grant from the Australian Government. CPSA engages in systemic advocacy on behalf of its constituency and also auspices four services which receive Government funding: the Health Promotion Service for Older People, the Older Persons Tenants' Service, the Park and Village Service and a Community Visitors Scheme. CPSA acknowledges the potential for conflict of interest arising for CPSA and the NSW and Australian Governments as a result of this funding arrangement. CPSA is committed to managing any conflict of interest issues in an ethical manner.

CPSA welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Telecommunications Numbering Plan Variation 2013.

CPSA is very supportive of the proposed move to make free call and local rate 1300 numbers available at the stated price for people ringing from mobile phones.

Making 1800 calls genuinely free (or the cost of a local call for 1300 numbers) is an important step towards greater price transparency where consumers will be able to know that the calls they are making will be at the price outlined by the name of the call. There has been some confusion among new mobile users around this, who have received higher than expected bills.

The current system for charging calls to 13, 1300 and 1800 numbers from mobiles on a per minute basis disadvantages people on low incomes who may have resorted to only having a mobile phone rather than also maintaining a landline in an effort to reduce their expenses. As the system currently stands, these people are often shocked when they receive their mobile phone bill after making a “free call”, particularly when they have been placed on hold for considerable periods of time.

There is also a need for certainty that pre-paid mobile users who run out of credit are still able to telephone essential numbers. Calls to essential services such as Centrelink, Medicare and utility providers are also unavoidable calls and ones that can leave the caller on hold for considerable periods of time.

While CPSA acknowledges that there are 1800/13/1300-friendly plans available, many consumers are either locked into a contract or choose to stick with the same plan for many years leaving a significant proportion of consumers who are not on 1800/13/1300 plans. Less informed consumers are unaware of these plans and are unable to access information easily to learn about their existence. People who do not use the Internet for example, have a more difficult time accessing information about competitive products.