

Media literacy

This session looked at how people make appropriate choices in a converged communications world—what do they need to know and who is responsible for telling them?

Societies with higher levels of media literacy are better placed to reap the economic benefits of the information age, according to Malcom Long, Director of the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS) and ACMA Authority Member, who moderated this session.

Mr Long introduced his colleague, Mark Pesce, a lecturer in interactive media at the AFTRS, who looked at changes over the last 10 years, as we have moved from a mass media culture to one where, increasingly, there is no 'centre' and is audience-driven—a micro culture, where subjectivity dominates. Initially, the internet was evangelised as the ultimate democratic medium, but is this still the case? And how do we

achieve balance—for ourselves, our children, our nation?

An educator's perspective was presented by Dr Susan Turnbull, Associate Professor of Media Studies at La Trobe University. Media literacy is now in the curriculum mainstream, no longer a soft option subject, and it is critical for all students.

Being the only consumer representative among conference speakers, according to Myra Pincott of the Country Women's Association, meant that she was acutely aware of the difficulties faced by some groups in the community in making choices in communications and media. She pointed out that for some disadvantaged groups—for example, people in rural and remote areas,

Indigenous communities, people for whom English is not the first language and people with disabilities—gaining access to services, or even to information about services, was difficult. She also mentioned the concerns people have about the dangers posed by the web, especially to children, and said forcing people to take up digital TV could have a political impact.

Mike Walsh, from Screenmedia, pointed out that the generation born since 1994, when the world wide web hit the mass market, has a different view to those born before. They see media as intrinsic to life—anything, anywhere, anytime. He said that in the past, there were 'pipes' where now there is a 'playground', and this generation does not want restrictions on its media playground.



MIKE WALSH, SUE TURNBULL, MALCOLM LONG, MYRA PINCOTT AND MARK PESCE

Challenges for regulatory philosophies and models

This session asked 'How do you regulate material that is coming in through various pipes? What are the trigger points for intervention?'

Apart from generational differences in attitudes to regulation, there are national differences in the approaches taken.

New Zealand's experience of deregulation was described by Jane Wrightson, the chief executive of the Broadcasting Standards Authority. After explaining that regulation was abolished in 1989 during a period of economic difficulties—market forces ruled—she pointed out that in spite of deregulation, the market is still dominated by a few companies, and broadband is very slow and expensive. She added that in New

Zealand, the industry strongly supports self-regulation and is tough on members who breach it.

In Hong Kong, according to Lorna Wong Lung-Shi, Commissioner for Television and Entertainment Licensing, there is a licensing regime with low entry barriers and the industry is relative free of restrictive regulation. The result is a large

number of TV channels, very fast broadband, and Hong Kong is a world leader in delivering IPTV. They are preparing to unify regulation of the entire communications sector to deal with convergence, and recognise the need for a new approach, particularly to deal with content issues in the overlap between TV and the internet.

Malaysia was one of the first countries to establish a converged regulator, according to Datuk Dr Halim Shafie, Chairman of the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, which was set up in 1998. Its broad regulatory role is similar to ACMA's. While still relatively new to self-regulation, they recognised the need for transparency, especially in processes for investigation and public consultation. The switchover to digital TV also presented a challenge for his country—perhaps they should develop a Digital Action Plan like the one developed for Australia.



JANE WRIGHTSON, DATUK DR HALIM SHAFIE, CHRIS CHEAH AND LORNA WONG LUNG-SHI