

# Optional services on directory assistance **number 12 23** proposed

ACMA recently proposed changes to the *Telecommunications Numbering Plan 1997* to permit optional services on the free directory assistance number 12 23. Under the proposed changes, optional national and international operator call connection and operator services will be permitted on the special services number 12 23. It is envisaged that any optional services on 12 23 would be offered on a fee-for-service basis.

In ACMA's view, enhanced optional services on 12 23 have the potential to benefit consumers as long as there are appropriate safeguards in place to ensure the benefits of the current free directory assistance service are not compromised.

ACMA is proposing to introduce measures to preserve the integrity and prime availability of the existing directory assistance service on 12 23. Information about any call and connection charges should be provided to customers using 12 23 before they accept any additional service, to ensure informed consent is obtained.

Guidelines to assist carriage service providers, which will include ACMA's policy for delivery of optional services on 12 23, were also proposed.

The telephone number 12 23 is a special services number presently specified in the Numbering Plan exclusively for

directory assistance service. In addition, 12 23 is a 'shared number', which can be used by all carriage service providers (CSPs) to provide directory assistance services.

The service offered on 12 23 is the means by which CSPs meet their obligations under the *Telecommunications Act 1997* to provide directory assistance service to customers of their standard telephone services. Directory assistance service is currently not defined in the Numbering Plan. It is defined in the Telecommunications Act as services that are:

1. provided to an end-user of a standard telephone to help the end-user find the number of another end-user of a standard telephone service; and
2. provided by an operator or by means of:
  - i. an automated voice response system; or
  - ii. another technology based system.

This definition does not include optional services such as through connection. Under the existing provisions of the Numbering Plan, 12 23 must not be used except in connection with the supply of a directory assistance service. The applicable charges for directory assistance on 12 23 are limited under the Numbering Plan to a low charge amount (excluding public mobile telecommunications services), reflecting the government's

intention to maintain accessible directory assistance as a core service for users of standard telephone services.

Any service offered in addition to directory assistance service would be subject to a separate and distinct charge. An amendment to the Numbering Plan is required if optional services are to be provided on 12 23 for an additional charge, such as through connection to fixed and mobile networks.

At present, additional operator services such as through connection services are provided for on the national and international operator-connected call service associated with the number 12 34, and the operator service associated with the prefixes 124 and 125.

There are no changes proposed to the existing directory assistance service offered on 12 23. Call charges to directory assistance on 12 23 will remain subject to the low charge amount.

Under the proposed amendment, optional and international operator call connection services and operator services will be permitted on the special services number 12 23 in addition to directory assistance service. In certain circumstances, this permission will be subject to ACMA's approval of an implementation operation plan submitted by a CSP wishing to provide optional services on 12 23.

Conditional approval will apply to calls to 12 23 from services subject to the price control arrangement under Part 9 of the *Telecommunication (Consumer Protection and Service Standards) Act 1999*.

Submissions on the proposed changes closed on 18 December 2006. A discussion paper and the proposed changes to the Numbering Plan are on the ACMA website at [www.acma.gov.au](http://www.acma.gov.au) (go to **Phones > Numbering > Numbering Plan**).