

## NEWS

# Delay urged for anti-piracy treaty

Independent economic analysis needed.

Federal parliament's Treaties Committee has recommended the controversial Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) not be ratified until certain conditions are met.

ACTA focuses on strengthening intellectual property standards through trademark and copyright enforcement.

It is heavily backed by much of the global entertainment industry, which is losing billions of dollars each year through the illegal downloading and piracy of films and television shows.

However the treaty has been met with international protests from groups concerned about its impact on privacy and freedom of expression.

Committee chair Kelvin Thomson (Wills, Vic) said the treaty has a number of flaws and the committee is not yet convinced it is in Australia's interests.

Mr Thomson said he is particularly concerned about the use of the term 'intellectual property' throughout the text, which may take it beyond the area of simple copyright enforcement.

"If that then becomes a matter of patents being able to be challenged through this process then there is the potential for downside impacts on consumers," Mr Thomson said.

The committee report calls for an independent and transparent economic analysis of the treaty's costs and benefits to be done before Australia considers ratifying the treaty.

The committee was also wary of pre-empting an ongoing Australian Law Reform Commission inquiry into copyright in the digital era.

"We want to allow that law reform commission report to proceed and we think that there is a risk if we ratify ACTA now that we will effectively lock



**FLAWED:** Treaty may impact consumers

out the potential changes that the law reform commission might recommend."

Mr Thomson said the international environment has also played a role in the committee's recommendation to delay ratification. ACTA has been rejected or deferred in a number of similar jurisdictions, including the United States and various European nations.

Mr Thomson said the fate of the treaty internationally should be clearer by the time the recommended analysis of the treaty is complete.

"The law reform commission is not scheduled to bring down its report until late next year so if we are waiting for that report we have time," he said.

"We have time to do the cost benefit analysis properly, and we have time to see what is going on in Europe – whether this treaty has legs and is going to get international support and is going to get off the ground, or whether the revolt we are seeing against it will prevent it from moving forward." •

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**PRICE WATCH:** IT costs under scrutiny

## CUTTING THROUGH IT PRICING

Are Australians paying more for IT software and hardware than consumers in overseas markets and, if so, why?

These are key questions for the House of Representatives Infrastructure and Communications Committee as it undertakes a review of IT pricing in Australia and its impact on consumers, businesses and governments.

"The committee will look into the costs of computer hardware, software, downloads and e-books to name a few," said committee chair Nick Champion (Wakefield, SA). "We look forward to hearing from the companies who set these prices and the consumers and businesses that purchase their products."

Committee member Ed Husic (Chifley, NSW) stressed the economic importance of the issue. From the evidence received by the inquiry, he expects the committee will be able to make recommendations for the market to operate in a way that is fair to businesses and to consumers.

"The internet itself has been estimated to add between \$50 billion and potentially up to \$70 billion to our economic growth," Mr Husic said. "As many jobs are created as a result of the internet in Australia as they are by mining. Within business these days IT is a major capital and operating expense."

Another committee member, Jane Prentice (Ryan, Qld), expressed concern about price disparities faced by consumers.

"Why in this day and age does it cost us more to download an Australian artist on iTunes than it does in the US? That's the sort of thing we need to get to the bottom of," she said.

Deputy chair Paul Neville (Hinkler, Qld) said the inquiry will help to "flush all the issues into the open" and make the market more transparent.

"We've become an easy mark in Australia," he said. "I hope we can drill down to the wholesale levels to find out what the real costs are and come out with a report that hopefully will be a benchmark around which the parliament can base their future work." •

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**HARASSED:** Millions of workers face bullying during their careers

## Rising costs of bullying prompt review

**W**orkplace bullying is costing Australia between \$6 billion and \$36 billion annually, according to estimates from the Productivity Commission. It contributes to decreased productivity, increased staff absenteeism and poor morale.

Research cited by the Australian Human Rights Commission estimates that between 400,000 and 2 million Australians will be harassed at work and 2.5 to 5 million will experience workplace harassment at some time during their careers.

To help tackle the problem, the House of Representatives Education and Employment Committee is examining the nature, causes and extent of bullying in the workplace, and will look at ways to combat the workplace cultures that allow bullying to thrive.

Committee chair Amanda Rishworth (Kingston, SA) said workplace bullying can have a profound effect on all aspects of a person's health as well as their work and family life.

"Bullying has serious consequences for individuals and the wider community," Ms Rishworth said.

"Every Australian has a right to feel safe and respected at work."

The experiences of workplace bullying victims will be considered during the inquiry and the committee will also examine the adequacy of existing education and support services.

"While it is not the role of the committee to intervene in or consider individual cases, we welcome submissions from employers, employees and their representative organisations regarding proposals and suggestions for securing workplaces against bullying at a national level," Ms Rishworth said.

The inquiry will also review the effectiveness of existing anti-bullying regulatory frameworks, and investigate how coordination between agencies and research on workplace bullying can be improved.

Public hearings for the inquiry have begun and will continue throughout August in Adelaide, Perth and Canberra. •

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