



**Australian  
Privacy  
Foundation**

post: GPO Box 1196  
Sydney NSW 2001  
email: [mail@privacy.org.au](mailto:mail@privacy.org.au)  
web: [www.privacy.org.au](http://www.privacy.org.au)

29 January 2009

Hon. Chris Bowen MP, Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs  
Hon. Lindsay Tanner, Minister of Finance  
Members of Expenditure Review Committee  
ALP Economic Caucus Committee

Dear Ministers and members of ERC and ECC,

**Funding of National Consumer Representation**

We are writing to urge you to support the funding application by the Consumers Federation of Australia (CFA) for an allocation of funds in the 2009 federal budget.

CFA and its predecessor AFCA have made a major contribution to consumer policy in Australia over the last 34 years. However, for the last twelve years, since the Howard government abruptly removed funding, CFA has operated on an entirely voluntary basis, with a minimal budget. This has inevitably limited the effectiveness of this important consumer voice, and undermined progress on standards of consumer protection in a range of areas.

You may be aware that following the Productivity Commission Report on Consumer Policy in 2008, which recommended a funded national consumer body (Recommendation 11.3), CFA prepared a proposal *Strengthening Consumer Voices* which was submitted to the Minister for Consumer Affairs in September 2008 (see <http://www.consumersfederation.org.au/documents/CFA-StrengtheningConsumervoices.pdf> >)

As a member of CFA, the Australian Privacy Foundation strongly endorses the arguments made in the proposal -- summarised below -- and requests your support for full funding of a new national consumer representative body.

Yours faithfully,

(sgd)  
David Vaile, Vice-Chair  
For the Australian Privacy Foundation  
e: [vicechair1@privacy.org.au](mailto:vicechair1@privacy.org.au)

## ***The case for a fully-funded national consumer representative body***

### Policy Benefits

- A strong, coordinated organisation through which consumer organisations can work to help the government deliver on its goal of a world class consumer policy.
- A consumer perspective in policy development, standards-setting and regulatory decision-making processes – to balance the perspectives of other stakeholders and ensure that decision makers have a range of stakeholders' views to reach a balanced and informed decision.
- The wealth of experience gained by consumer organisations whether as grass roots representative organisations or service delivery agencies, can be made available for public policy development. Where possible, common positions can be identified or developed, and policy suggestions tested and refined. An increase in common positions amongst consumer organisations may reduce duplication and overlap and facilitate industry and government engagement with consumer voices. Facilitating information sharing will also create opportunities for reconciling the different needs of consumers.
- Increased capacity of consumer organisations to engage with, and have meaningful participation in, policy processes, either individually or in concert with other consumer organisations.

### Evidence Base

- Casework data relating to consumers' on-the-ground experience.
- The sharing, comparing, collating and analysing of data, case studies and experiences of consumer organisations.

### Access to expert consumer representatives

- A diverse range of consumer representatives to draw on to participate effectively in government and industry forums, and an arms-length mechanism to ensure that consumer representatives are nominated through an appropriate process, and have access to support, resources and training.
- Regular monitoring of international developments in consumer law and policy, consumer representation and consumer engagement, with a view to informing policy and practice in Australia.

### Access to consumer networks

- Access to a network of expertise on consumer law and practice.
- A locus for the identification of issues and trends emerging from the experiences of grassroots service delivery member organisations.
- A single entry point for distributing information to, and communicating with, a large number of consumer and community organisations.
- More effective and efficient national consultation and education efforts, reaching both domain experts and the grass roots in diverse communities.