



NOIE

The National Office for the
INFORMATION ECONOMY

Mr Andrew Thomson MP
Committee Chairman
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Thomson

Thank you for your letter of 2 August 2000 to the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, inviting the National Office for the Information Economy (NOIE), Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) to make a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties Inquiry into Australia's relationship with the WTO.

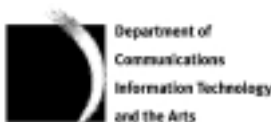
The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is the government agency with primary responsibility for WTO matters. DCITA advises DFAT on telecommunications and electronic commerce issues as appropriate, and participates in relevant WTO meetings. The majority of the items listed in the terms of reference are the responsibility of DFAT and DCITA has no comment to offer on those items.

DCITA does have a comment on Item 7 of the terms of reference, regarding the relationship between the WTO and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). This comment is at **Attachment 1**.

Yours sincerely

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**Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with the World Trade Organisation**

**Submission by the National Office for the Information Economy, Department of
Communications, Information Technology and the Arts**

Terms of Reference Item 7: the relationship between WTO agreements and other multilateral agreements, including those on trade and related matters, and on environmental, human rights and labour standards

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) have negotiated a Cooperation Agreement which reflects the need to establish a close and constructive relationship between the two organisations given the multilateral agreements now established by the WTO on telecommunications and the introduction of competition in numerous markets for telecommunications services and products.

The ITU is an United Nations intergovernmental organisation within which governments and the private sector coordinate global telecommunication networks and services. This involves developing technical and operating standards (known as "recommendations") for telecommunication and radiocommunication, including satellite, services.

The Cooperation Agreement provides for the ITU and the WTO to jointly identify areas of common interest, particularly with respect to technical, regulatory and development matters concerning trade in telecommunications, with a view to ensuring that their activities are mutually supportive and serve to maximize the benefits of trade in telecommunications within the context of their respective mandates. The Agreement recognises the increasing linkages between the various aspects of telecommunications and trade policy-making that fall within the respective mandates of the ITU and the WTO.

DCITA considers that the conclusion of the Cooperation Agreement between the WTO and the ITU is an important initiative to promote harmonisation and clarity between the work of the two organisations.

This should encourage incorporation of the fair trading principles set forth in the WTO's General Agreement on Trade in Services, Annexes on Telecommunications, Agreement on Basic Telecommunications and Reference Paper (such as transparency and non-discrimination) into new or revised ITU recommendations, particularly those involving regulatory issues. The Agreement should also ensure that both organisation will have regard to each others objectives and work to achieve outcomes that are consistent and compatible with their separate treaty responsibilities, thus allowing for efficient allocation of Australian government resources to furthering national obligations in both fora.