



Australian Government
The Treasury

Benchmarks for Industry-based Customer Dispute Resolution



BENCHMARKS FOR INDUSTRY-BASED
CUSTOMER DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Principles and Purposes

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Released by the Hon Bruce Billson MP
Minister for Small Business

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FOREWORD



The Australian Government is pleased to relaunch the *Benchmarks for Industry-based Customer Dispute Resolution*. Dispute resolution services make excellent business sense, as they provide businesses with another avenue of recourse for their consumers to resolve any disagreements that may arise when transacting.

The original *Benchmarks for Industry-based Customer Dispute Resolution Schemes* (the CDR Benchmarks) were established in 1997. The CDR Benchmarks were designed as a non-regulatory standard for industry-based dispute resolution, which was then emerging as an accessible alternative to the court system. Through the CDR Benchmarks, the government hoped to encourage best practice in industry-based dispute resolution services.

Since that time, the CDR Benchmarks have proven to be timeless ideals for dispute resolution services in general. The CDR Benchmarks are now referenced in legislation and regulation, in both the telecommunications and finance sectors. In relaunching the principles and their underlying purposes as the *Benchmarks for Industry-based Customer Dispute Resolution*, the benchmarks are permanently preserved for the purposes of this legislation and regulation. Moreover, many other dispute resolution schemes have voluntarily adopted the benchmarks. Stakeholders have described the benchmarks as ‘immutable’ standards for industry-based dispute resolution in Australia and New Zealand.

The *Benchmarks for Industry-based Customer Dispute Resolution* are complementary to the *Key Practices for Industry-based Customer Dispute Resolution*. The Key Practices provide dispute resolution services with practical ways of implementing the benchmarks in their schemes. As these practices are now contained in a separate, living document, they are able to be revised and updated as necessary in response to stakeholder feedback, or to incorporate changes in technology and the community at large.

The Principles and Purposes have been drafted to be flexible and not prescriptive or onerous. Schemes are encouraged to apply the benchmarks to meet the needs of their industry sectors. In doing so, schemes should endeavour to achieve an appropriate balance between the interests of customers and businesses, and between the different benchmarks.

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THE BENCHMARKS AND THEIR UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES AND PURPOSES

1. ACCESSIBILITY

Underlying principle

The office makes itself readily available to customers by promoting knowledge of its services, being easy to use and having no cost barriers.

Purpose

To promote access to the office on an equitable basis.

2. INDEPENDENCE

Underlying principle

The decision-making process and administration of the office are independent from participating organisations.

Purpose

To ensure that the processes and decisions of the office are objective and unbiased, and are seen to be objective and unbiased.

3. FAIRNESS

Underlying principle

The procedures and decision-making of the office are fair and seen to be fair.

Purpose

To ensure that the office performs its functions in a manner that is fair and seen to be fair.

4. ACCOUNTABILITY

Underlying principle

The office publicly accounts for its operations by publishing its final determinations and information about complaints and reporting any systemic problems to its participating organisations, policy agencies and regulators.

Purpose

To ensure public confidence in the office and allow assessment and improvement of its performance and that of participating organisations.

5. EFFICIENCY

Underlying principle

The office operates efficiently by keeping track of complaints, ensuring complaints are dealt with by the appropriate process or forum, and regularly reviewing its performance.

Purpose

To give the community and participating organisations confidence in the office and to ensure the office provides value for its funding.

6. EFFECTIVENESS

Underlying principle

The office is effective by having an appropriate and comprehensive jurisdiction and periodic independent reviews of its performance.

Purpose

To promote community confidence in the office and ensure that the office fulfils its role.