

President's chat: Oct—Dec 2010

The last couple of months have seen me tramping the Pilbara doing a flora survey followed by moving house, business and years of accumulated storage to our new place where the orchids are flowering and the new chooks are settling in. Heh, we might now be a one stop shop - like the Building Commission. So apologies for the lateness of this issue of Consumer Comment – I have been totally distracted.

House moving has provided me with opportunities to experience some of the frustrations consumers encounter during the relocation process. Mostly it was just the usual back breaking but uneventful slog, but there were a couple of exceptions: Telstra whom I'll vent about later in the newsletter and Watercorp who advised that our scheme water may not meet drinking water standards in relation to its aesthetic, microbiological and/or chemical qualities. We also had to change banks – so much paper. Other consumer events like organising the gas heater conversion from natural gas to LPG are yet to be undertaken.

On 15th June, several CAWA members met with Anne Driscoll and senior Consumer Protection staff to discuss the impact of the New Australian Consumer Law and a few of our other pertinent questions. You'll find more on the meeting later in Consumer Comment. All parties committed to maintaining closer contact after the meeting.

In 2006, The Department of Consumer and Employment Protection in Western Australia publication "Consumer Representation on Boards and Committees A GUIDE FOR CONSUMERS" maintained that Consumer Protection kept a register of people interested in becoming consumer representatives on boards and committees or willing to participate in consultation processes with regard to consumer protection policy and other initiatives. It was called the "Consumer Protection Panel". I've been trying to establish whether such a register still exists so I've trawled the websites of the Department of Commerce and the Department of Premier and Cabinet without much success. Searching for "consumer" and "consultation" only takes me back to the 2004 "Proposal for the Establishment of a Consumer Research and Advocacy Centre in Western Australia" prepared by the (now disbanded) Consumer Advisory Council of WA. The Trading Hours report (the only tangible outcome of the whole process) was effectively complete some months ago but still no sign of it. With the exception of Health Consumers, the idea of consumer consultation seems to have languished in WA.

The Economic Audit Committee's final report – "Putting the Public First: Partnering with the Community and Business to Deliver Outcomes" – was released in October 2009. More information later in Consumer Comment but a newsletter can be reached via the DPC website. I'll remain optimistic but so far CAWA has not been informed of any developments let alone consulted about any partnerships.

The new Boards reform legislation envisages the establishment of a new Consumer Advisory Council. We will be interested to see how that goes too.

In my web search I also found www.complaints.wa.gov.au, the Western Australian Government's Complaints Information Site which explains how to complain about WA Government agencies and services. It defines a complaint as "any expression of dissatisfaction made to an organisation, related to its products, services, or the complaints handling process itself, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected". It suggests contacting the government agency involved or the Ombudsman. No mention of Consumer Protection. General comments about the Government can be made to wa-government@dpc.wa.gov.au

It wouldn't be a President's report without some mention of the same old thorny issues like fresh food safety and unit pricing, GM, Nanotech, aged care etc so I've mentioned them. If anyone wants to mention anything to me please email me at info@consumers.asn.au

Genette Keating