

News Release
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CIPPIC welcomes new Telecommunications Consumer Agency

The Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) today released its decision on the mandate and structure of a new, industry-funded body to handle consumer complaints about telecommunications services.

“This is a big step forward in the development of a fair and effective telecommunications marketplace”, said Philippa Lawson, Director of the Canadian Internet Policy and Public Interest Clinic (“CIPPIC”) at the University of Ottawa, Faculty of Law.

Last April, the federal government ordered the CRTC to oversee the establishment of an effective consumer complaints agency, given increasing deregulation of the industry. Major telecommunications service providers got together and created the [“Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunications Services”](#), which commenced operations in July 2007. The CRTC held a [public proceeding](#) in October 2007 to determine the extent to which the industry model satisfies the government’s Order in Council. CIPPIC intervened in the proceeding, arguing that the industry model was insufficiently independent and empowered to be effective.

The CRTC, while commending certain telecommunications providers for acting as fast as they did last summer to set up a new complaints agency, ordered a number of changes so as to make the body more independent and effective.

“While we would have liked to see a broader mandate for the Agency, this is a very good model to start with”, said Lawson, who represented consumer groups in telecommunications regulatory proceedings for twelve years before joining CIPPIC. “With the changes ordered by the CRTC, this new Agency will be able to monitor the telecommunications marketplace and take action on systemic issues as well as individual complaints. Companies will not be able to hide behind contractual clauses that purport to limit liability when they do wrong, and consumers will now be able to obtain compensation of up to \$5,000 where justified.”

“Our main outstanding concern has to do with the type of complaints that the Agency will accept. As it now stands, the Agency will not assist consumers with complaints about misleading advertising, privacy issues.