

2.2.4 Policy Environment

The independent regulator, is the Australian Telecommunications Authority (AUSTEL). AUSTEL promotes competition, and is responsible for consumer protection, standards setting and technical regulation. Connection of equipment on customer's premises requires a permit issued by AUSTEL. Evaluation of equipment against Australian standards is the responsibility of the equipment supplier.

Policy creation and implementation advice to the Government is the responsibility of the Federal Department of Communication and the Arts. The Department has a policy oversight role in relation to the government-owned telecommunications corporation.

International trade opportunities, including telecommunications services and equipment is the responsibility of AUSTRADE which is within the Commonwealth Department of Industry, Technology and Commerce.

Commercial Network Service Providers

Australian Associated Press (AAP) operates the largest commercial satellite network in Australia, with over 100 earth stations and provides a wide variety of services ranging from voice communications to financial services. AAP has recently combined with USA based M.C.I. Communications and N.Z. based Todd Investments to launch a range of "Virtual Private Networks" for voice and data services using Telstra and AUSSAT capacity.

2.2.5 Electronic Highway - Future Integration of Telecommunications Services

The Government's Broadband Services Expert Group, chaired by Brian Johns (Chair of the Australian Broadcasting Authority), is investigating how Australia should choose technologies for a nationally interactive information highway.

In February, 1994, *Telecom*, the government owned corporation, signed a memorandum of understanding with *Microsoft* to develop a new interactive