

## Timeframe Rules

Under the Complaint Handling Code, you must adhere to the following complaint handling timeframes.

Obligation	Timeframe within
Acknowledgement of written complaint	5 working days
Customers informed of timeframe for possible resolution of complaint	5 working days
If advised timeframe is to be exceeded, customer informed of 'revised' timeframe	Before or at the time the timeframe expires
Complaints resolved	30 days or as soon as practicable
Complex or circumstantial complaints taking longer than 30 days, customers must be kept informed of progress	Regular progress reports
If complaint handling fee imposed, refund must be made if complaint is upheld in favour of complainant	30 days
Analysis and reporting of complaints data	3 monthly minimum
Improvements to complaint handling process	As soon as practicable where areas requiring attention have been identified
Updating information regarding variations to complaints handling process	60 days or as soon as practicable
Customers informed of significant variations affecting their access to complaint handling process	16 weeks of their coming into effect
TIO provided with copy of internal complaint handling policy and significant changes to policy	7 days or as soon as practicable
Retention of material collected and recorded throughout the complaint handling process	2 years following closure of complaint

## TIO Complaint Resolution Timeframes

If your customer takes their complaint to the TIO, you must handle the complaint within the following timeframes.

Complaint Level / Type <sup>2</sup>	Timeframe within
Level 1 complaints – respond to complainant	48 hours
Level 1 complex complaints unable to be resolved in 48 hours: must make contact with complainant and provide estimated timeframe for resolution and follow-up	48 hours
Level 1 complaints resolve directly with complainant	14 days
Urgent Churn Enquiry: written response to the TIO	48 hours
Urgent Disconnection Enquiry: written response to the TIO	48 hours
Level 2 complaints: response to the TIO	21 days
Level 3 complaints: written response to the TIO	28 days
Level 4 complaints: resolution provided to the TIO	120 day benchmark (no specified timeframe, however, TIO aims to resolve within 4 months)

## Breaches of ACIFs Complaint Handling Code and the Role of the TIO

The Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman is an office of last resort and is authorised to investigate complaints about the provision or supply of telephone or Internet services, as well as potential breaches of ACIF codes.

The TIO provides a free and independent alternative dispute resolution scheme for small business and residential consumers in Australia who have a complaint about their telecommunications service.

The TIO consistently reports a high number of breaches of the ACIF Complaint Handling Code by service providers. The TIO notes that this is largely due to service providers not informing dissatisfied customers about their right to escalate unresolved complaints to the TIO.

Under the ACIF Complaint Handling Code customers have the right to:

- speak to a supervisor upon request
- escalate a complaint internally
- be told about the TIO by their provider if their complaint is not resolved.

Should you require any further information about the TIO, please go to the website at [www.tio.com.au](http://www.tio.com.au), or contact the TIOs Member Communications Team on:

- Ph: 03 8600 8700
- Fax: 03 8600 8797

<sup>1</sup>A copy of this Standard is available for purchase online at <http://www.saiglobal.com/> or by calling 131 242.

<sup>2</sup>Further details about the TIOs complaint classification regime are available online at <http://www.tio.com.au/Members/>

\*ACIF is a division of Communications Alliance Ltd

# Complaint Handling

## Your obligations as a service provider



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All Telecommunication service providers in Australia are bound by the **Complaint Handling Code** that establishes comprehensive industry-wide complaint handling rules and guidelines for service providers.

The establishment of complaint handling systems and processes enhances communication between all parties and ensures customers are made aware of how to seek external redress if they remain dissatisfied with the way their service provider handles their complaint. These processes allow all consumers to have confidence that their dissatisfaction will be dealt with in a timely and consistent manner.

Communications Alliance is committed to supporting the telecommunications industry by promoting best practice behaviour and increased customer satisfaction. As part of that process, we are keen to promote compliance with ACIF\* codes of practice.

Communications Alliance has therefore developed this guide for service providers to help you understand your obligations in relation to complaint handling. By understanding your complaint handling obligations you will be better equipped to gain and maintain consumer confidence.

**Please Note:** Under the Telecommunications Act, compliance with registered ACIF\* codes is mandatory. To obtain a copy of an ACIF\* code, please visit our website [www.commsalliance.com.au/ACIF\\_Documents](http://www.commsalliance.com.au/ACIF_Documents)

## Complaint Handling Code Objectives and Principles

The code sets out minimum requirements for complaint handling by service providers, from the first point of contact at which the complaint is lodged until it is eventually resolved.

To comply with the code, you must develop and enforce a comprehensive complaint handling process that will maintain and enhance customer satisfaction.

Your complaint handling process should:

- recognise, promote, and protect customers' rights, including the right to actively provide feedback;
- provide an efficient, fair and accessible mechanism for handling customer complaints;
- provide information to customers on your complaint handling process and policy; and
- monitor complaints for the purpose of improving the quality of your services and products.

The code includes a number of principles that you should also comply with, including:

- there should be adequate resources for complaint handling, with sufficient delegated levels of authority;
- your complaint handling process should have regard to the **Australian Standard AS ISO 10002-2006<sup>1</sup>: Customer Satisfaction - Guidelines for Complaints Handling in Organisations**;
- complainants should be treated with courtesy; and
- you should seek to resolve complaints at the first point of contact, where possible.

## Complaint Handling Rules

You should have a thorough understanding about the specific rules you must adhere to under the Complaint Handling Code. **Some** of the rules have been summarised below, but should not act as a substitute for your detailed review of the code itself.

### Complaint Policy and Process

- Your complaint handling policies must be in plain English and accessible to all customers (including people with disabilities and from non-English speaking backgrounds).
- You must publicise the policy to staff and customers alike.

- Your policy must contain information about a customer's right to complain and where they can lodge complaints.
- Your complaints process must include an escalation process, and mechanisms for you to take action and monitor undertakings made to customers in the resolution of complaints.
- You must exercise caution not to dismiss complaints as frivolous or vexatious.
- You must make improvements to your complaint handling processes where areas requiring attention are identified.

### Record Keeping and Data Collection and Analysis

- You must keep a record of complaints, as well as classify and analyse complaints to identify recurring and systemic problems and trends.

### Authorised Representative and/or Advocate

- You must ensure that customers can be easily represented by a third party to make a complaint.

### Free or Low Cost Complaint Handling and the provision of assistance

- You must ensure that customers have access to free or low cost methods for lodging a complaint, and upon request provide your customers with assistance in formulating and lodging a complaint.
- A fee can only be charged in specified circumstances and only after the customer has been fully informed.

### Information to Customers

- You must ensure that customers are provided with sufficient information so they can inquire on the progress of their complaint.
- You must advise customers of their internal and external avenues of recourse when they are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and/or upon request.

### Suspension of Disputed Amounts

- You must not demand payment of genuinely disputed amounts whilst the complaint is being investigated.