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**Australian Communications
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Australia's regulator for broadcasting, the internet, radiocommunications and telecommunications

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Between two worlds – doing research in an evolving communications environment

Opening address by Chris Chapman, ACMA Chairman, to
the 2006 Communications Policy and Research Forum

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Some 500 years ago, a namesake of mine sailed beyond the horizons of the known world – sailed off the map – across a seemingly endless ocean, eventually to arrive on the shores of a ‘New World’. What drove *that* Chris C. to embark upon such a dangerous – and to many of his contemporaries, lunatic! – voyage of discovery?

One reason was market forces. The Spanish, his patrons, wanted to open up a new trade route to the silk and spice markets of the east, India and China, by finding out, by researching what lay *west*. It was hoped that this ‘research’ would give them a competitive market advantage over the Portuguese and other European trading nations. The role of the market in driving change, and the utility of the research that informs it, are no strangers to us today, and they form a theme that underlines my remarks to you this morning.

The other reason was simply this: he had the personality for it. A love of adventure, a passion for knowledge, a desire to explore the new, to satisfy the curiosity, to confront the unexpected, to rise to a challenge – qualities I’m sure everyone involved in research today can relate to.

And when Chris C. returned from the New World, he brought back with him the chilli, the turkey, the pineapple – tangible evidence of his discoveries – and amazed the court of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. Over the next two days, at this Forum, we too are likely to be fascinated and enthralled by discoveries, explorations and speculations – the fruits of much hard work and searching intellectual endeavour – and enticed by new curiosities to ‘keep sailing’.

So let me welcome you to the 2006 Communications Policy and Research Forum.

The very existence of this Forum speaks volumes for the Australian research community in the communications space. Independently funded and organised – in times which, I know, can be very tough for research – the Forum bears testament to the resilience of and commitment to the ideals of academic freedom and the disinterested pursuit of knowledge. It also testifies to the intellectual conviction and extraordinary efforts of the organisers.

May I therefore express, on a personal note, as well as on behalf of the Australian Communications and Media Authority which I represent, my sincere congratulations to the organisers for initially conceiving this Forum and for continuing to give it life.

I also want to express my support and respect for all of you – participants and presenters alike – who will make this Forum a fertile ground for sharing information, discussing ideas, and sowing the seeds of future work. Where minds meet, ideas blossom and bring forth richer fruit – and, hopefully for ACMA, an enlightened regulatory approach.

In today’s address I want to describe the challenges ACMA faces in an increasingly complex and dynamic world, and how it is responding to these challenges on the research front. I will explain why research is important to us and how we intend it, going forward, to underwrite our regulatory role. We have a new research framework and a carefully planned research program – and I will explain what’s driving these and what we aim to achieve. Not least, I want to discuss – and to prompt discussion about – how we might work more closely, more collaboratively, with you, the communications research community.

Let me briefly encapsulate the world as we know it. A few months ago I, like the other Chris C., embarked on a new journey: I took over the helm of the Australian Communications and Media Authority – the ‘good ship ACMA’, with its well-seasoned crews from the former Australian Communications and Australian Broadcasting Authorities. Now, I don’t pretend that my journey, or ACMA’s, is on the same epic scale as our eponymous hero’s; nevertheless, the rapidly evolving communications and media environment presents us with considerable challenges and with great ‘unknowns’, its possibilities stretching out before us like an endless ocean, certainly further than the eye can see.

Some people believe the journey’s almost over, that the first mate will soon be shouting ‘Land ahoy!’, that we’re fast approaching the top of the ‘S’ curve of technological growth. This I seriously doubt. I believe we’ve a long way to go before we reach dry land. You only have to look at the continuing evidence of the prophetic truth of Moore’s Law, that every 18 months microprocessor capacity will double in power. Just last week I read that the silicon chip – for some time, I’m told, the principal limiting factor in microprocessing – will eventually be superseded by an optically-powered chip which will unleash processing speeds of an order of magnitude beyond imagination. Columbus underestimated the Earth’s circumference by 15,000 kilometres, a miscalculation that nearly proved fatal. Let’s not underestimate where we’re at on our ‘S’ curve.

We all know what’s driving this rate of change: an almost exponential explosion in communications and media technology and the enablement and empowerment it provides. And out of this is emerging a ‘new world’ – a global network of networks, multiple service options, distributed control, more abundant and more powerful capacity, shared responsibility – all feeding the constantly changing market with innovations and choices.

We are the first generation to see consumer electronic communications and entertainment technology come and go in our own lifetimes. Think VCR, LP records, analogue mobile phones (the ‘brick’), cassette tapes. If you still have them, it’s for the nostalgia value; all have been superseded, at least once. My children are smart and savvy with technology that was, in my childhood, the stuff of dreams. Remember Dick Tracy’s multi-functional watch? Sci-fi one day, reality the next.

Concurrently, the legislative and regulatory environment for communications and media remains a product of earlier assumptions about business models, network resource allocations, governance arrangements and the structural realities of the market. These framework assumptions tended towards localism, discrete services, centralised control, scarcity, defined responsibility and stability. They were, and are, platform and sector specific.

These assumptions are being challenged by convergence. The historical boundaries are becoming blurred; driving sustainable business models is simply tougher.

Content can now be delivered on any digital platform.

Businesses are changing their structural relationships as well as their consumer marketing strategies.

Consumers, in turn, have more choice of content and greater control over its delivery. They can produce content themselves – through social networking, DIY media and peer-to-peer networking.

Developments such as shared spectrum are starting to challenge assumptions about radiofrequency band exclusivity.

Assumptions about ‘scarcity’, which are fundamental to the existing framework, are becoming redundant as we enter an era of comparative ‘abundance’ through increased bandwidth, better data compression, and, after analogue switch-off, the availability of more broadcasting spectrum.

From this complex mesh of multi-layered distributed networks and business model modules arise ambiguities, uncertainties, questions. Who is the service provider? Who the carriage service provider? Who the content provider?

And what does this mean for regulation? Content regulation issues, for example, have emerged and continue to emerge in the telecommunications sphere, traditionally the province of the broadcasting regulator. There are various indications – for example, from the number and kind of complaints being received by the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) – of confusion amongst some consumers and even within industry. How, people are wondering, will the existing regulatory framework apply to new, convergent sectors? Which laws will apply to what devices or to what content?

In this regard, you may be aware that the Minister [for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts] recently announced her intention to introduce new legislation that will extend the current safeguards that apply to content delivered over the internet or television, to content delivered over convergent devices such as 3G mobile phones. The New Content Services Bill is intended to address widespread concerns about the need to protect, in particular, children from inappropriate or harmful audio-visual content on these emerging communications devices.

And the whole situation we now find ourselves in takes me back to our mate, Columbus, mid-Atlantic, sailing home. To his east the Old World – the well-established traditions, the assumptions, the expectations. To his west, the New World, still mostly unknown, unexplored, with as-yet-unimagined possibilities. Two worlds, separated for millennia by ocean, an ocean that had now been crossed. ‘What happens,’ I imagine him thinking, ‘when two worlds collide’?

Are the implications of contemporary developments in communications and media technology any less dramatic or significant in our time than the discovery of America was in his? It’s my intuition that the capacity of ICT [information, communications technology] to create new possibilities and radically alter the way we live and how we see the world is of a similar magnitude.

We are today at a similar, liminal point. We are caught between two co-existing paradigms. Our universe, it turns out, at least in terms of communications, is after all ‘dualistic’. I say this because we find ourselves suddenly and simultaneously inhabiting two worlds: a world of discrete platforms and services (radio, television, telephone), and a world of digital connectivity where traditional boundaries will increasingly blur through relentless consumer-demanded, market-responsive convergence.

This brings to mind an extraordinary phenomenon in the natural world – one which I think illustrates more clearly my point about co-existent paradigms and liminality. Last year I visited Antarctica, where I learnt about what is known as the ‘Antarctic Convergence’. This is a zone some 20 to 30 miles wide which completely encircles Antarctica, where the cold, northward-flowing Antarctic waters sink beneath the relatively warmer waters of the sub-Antarctic. The zone oscillates slightly – no more than half a degree – around a fixed latitude. And it separates two discrete hydrological regions, two discrete climates, two discrete ecosystems with distinctive marine life.

The dualities I have outlined here give you an idea of the world I believe we need to be able to navigate. It is a world more vast, complex, dynamic, and fraught with uncertainty and anxiety, than it has ever been before.

So how should we, as Australia’s regulator for broadcasting, the internet, radiocommunications and telecommunications, be responding to these increasingly challenging conditions? The answer, if I may return to my maritime metaphor, has been to rethink, from first principles, the design of the ship we’re sailing. With the known world rapidly evolving, we’ve taken time to pause and reflect and take a fresh look at our role within it. Should ACMA be a lightweight, fast-paced frigate? A slow and sturdy ice-breaker? An idealistic Rainbow Warrior, perhaps destined for an early grave? A man o’war, bristling with cannon, ready and willing to do regulatory battle with all guns blazing? Or a revolutionary design, with some winged-keel super-solution? Whatever design we choose – and it will be a composite – it has to be equally at home in the well-charted seas of the existing legislative framework and in the relatively unexplored oceans of convergence.

The first phase of this redesign was accomplished in July last year, of course, when the ABA [Australian Broadcasting Authority] and ACA [Australian Communications Authority] merged to form ACMA: in response to convergence, we now have a converged regulator. As such, ACMA is in its superstructure a composite vessel (undoubtedly with appropriate dollops of kevlar and carbon fibre), uniting the traditional functions of the former agencies with new opportunities for cross-fertilisation and innovation. To borrow a term from biology: when two species are cross-fertilised, their offspring is imbued with ‘hybrid vigour’ – it is stronger and better-equipped to deal with its environment than its progenitors.

Subsequent phases of the redesign are on the shipbuilder’s floor. Essentially we have been reviewing our fundamental business processes. We have been rethinking how we fulfil our reporting obligations too – particularly under section 105 of the Telecommunications Act – so as to capture industry, consumer and regulatory issues from across the communications industry, as well as to identify and articulate the regulatory challenges arising from the convergence of services, content and devices. The result is our new *Communications Review*, to be released this November. But more about that later.

We are also in the process of developing a regulatory philosophy, the purpose of which is to articulate clearly as well as publicly what stance ACMA is taking towards the regulation of the communications and media environment so that there is a uniting rationale, or touchstone, against which decisions and work program outcomes can be reconciled.

Finally, we have re-evaluated the objectives and methodologies of our research program. We have asked ourselves: ‘What are our research goals and priorities? How can we best achieve them? And by what principles should our research be governed?’

And I come now to our new research framework. After considerable reflection and many discussions, we finalised our first Framework for Research and Information Collection in June this year. Simply put, this Framework ‘positions’ all our research activities, setting the high-level objectives and parameters.

To start with, our research must support our statutory functions and responsibilities. Broadly speaking, these include:

- informing ourselves and advising the Minister on technological advances and service trends
- reporting on the performance of the telecommunications, broadcasting, internet and datacasting industries
- understanding the issues relevant to both industry supply of and consumer demand for communications and media services
- understanding and responding to consumer attitudes and concerns about content
- reviewing telecommunications services in rural, regional and remote Australia
- reviewing industry codes and standards (such as for children’s television), as well as narrower, targeted regulatory interventions (following the Ministerial direction on reality television, for example).

We need to be in a position to assess the continuing relevance and effectiveness of the existing legislative and regulatory framework, to identify emerging regulatory issues, to contribute to the formulation of sound, sustainable policy, and to have all these influences and inputs similarly guide our navigation in executing day to day activities.

Our research must also support ACMA’s appropriations’ mandate, which is to provide a regulatory environment that supports an efficient communications sector; and to contribute to meeting the communications products and services needs of the Australian community by enabling an effective information, standards and safeguards regime.

Using these statutory and governance requirements as the starting point, our Research Framework supports our aspiration to become a leading converged regulator. When applied to the specific subject of my remarks today, this translates into five primary corporate objectives.

First, we endeavour to be an ‘evidenced-based’ regulator. The purpose of our research is therefore strongly pragmatic: we want a robust and credible knowledge-base upon which to make informed decisions, take considered action and respond to information requests from stakeholders. Our regulatory responsibilities are to be grounded in the best information available. Research can then inform all our activities, to counterbalance the idiosyncrasies of ideology or the vagaries of opinion.

Our second objective is a natural corollary of the first. We want ACMA to be a reliable source of relevant, accurate, and up-to-date information on communications and media in Australia. Ideally, we should be the portal – the ‘first port of call’ – for anyone making inquiries or seeking information about communications and media research. We want to be in a sound position to inform debate, influence policy, and correct myths and misconceptions. Our Research Framework looks beyond our regulatory parameters to examine a broader context. It broadens our focus to embrace a wider range of services and service providers, and to develop a more diverse range of information sources, including other agencies, academic and research institutions, equipment vendors, industry, consumer and advocacy organisations.

Third, we want to be known as an integrated, forward-looking, proactive and flexible organisation. We have to be ready and able to research and analyse local, national and international trends and developments, to understand how pressures for change are affecting the market and what implications this has for regulation. We need to move with the times – be strategic, not reactive. More than that – as far as is possible in a rapidly changing world – we want to ‘think outside the box’, push the boundaries, stay ‘abreast of the game’.

Fourth, we aim to steer a careful course between keeping a watchful but unobtrusive eye on the market and acting quickly and effectively in the event of an obvious market failure to rectify it. Ideally, we would want to ‘reach’ with the wind but be ready to ‘jybe’ and ‘tack’ back against it when we have to.

Last but not least, we intend to boost ACMA’s internal research capabilities through new developments in our information and knowledge management infrastructure, and externally to embark on a process of expanding our networks with the research community at large.

To sum up, our new Research Framework represents a fundamental recognition of the increasing complexities of the communications and media environment and the challenges these pose for regulation. The Framework also supports our aspirations to be, quite simply, a better informed, smarter regulator.

Within the parameters of this Framework, we’ve also been busy developing the details of our research program. The program, which includes ongoing and planned projects, will be reviewed annually to ensure that it continues to meet ACMA’s objectives as articulated in the Research Framework.

The first thing to say about ACMA’s new program is that its scope is far greater than the combined research activities of the former ACA and ABA. The (new) whole, if you like, is greater than sum of its (former) parts. Principally this is because of the multiple layers of, and potentialities thrown up by, convergence. Whereas the ACA focused on monitoring industry performance (including quality of service and consumer satisfaction) particularly in the delivery of fixed telephone services, and the ABA focused on understanding audiences’ use of and attitudes to television, radio and the internet, ACMA does both these things, plus has to deal with the new realities of services and content on mobile phones, and, in a short time, other convergent devices. Convergence is throwing up many such challenges; and as

the newly converged regulator, our research program has to put us in the position to be ready and able to tackle them.

To accommodate this greater scope, and to ensure our research is effective and targeted, we have established a new branch within ACMA, dedicated not only to running current research projects but also to identifying future research directions so that ACMA stays ‘ahead of the game’, well prepared to manage emerging issues and challenges.

To increase the efficiency of our research and ensure the highest quality results, we are reviewing enterprise-wide knowledge management systems and examining the use of collaborative technologies to leverage the breadth and depth of knowledge, expertise and information resources across the whole of the organisation.

Particularly important is our introduction of a systematic ‘environmental scanning’ program. This is an organisation-wide program for identifying, tracking and analysing emerging markets, services, applications, technologies and related social developments. It should help inform when we ‘reach’, and when we ‘tack’.

These strategies, to better leverage our internal resources, are matched by our increased external emphasis on sharing information and developing linkages with industry bodies, consumer groups, and the research community. To do this, we are tracking the activities of national and international research institutions to identify activities of interest and opportunities for information-sharing and collaborative research, for example in the areas of digital broadcasting, computing, wireless access technologies, sensor networks and the internet. One of our first moves in this regard has been to participate, as an observer, in the Australian National ICT Industry Alliance from July this year. We are also facilitating presentations and briefings to ACMA by external experts, and scanning cross-portfolio trends and developments, such as security, privacy and media literacy.

Our research activities themselves are, broadly speaking, split fairly evenly between monitoring industry performance and understanding consumer behaviour – the supply and the demand sides of the communications and media market.

On the supply side, we are investigating what services are being provided, how they are being delivered (that is, using what technology or from what platforms), as well as to where in Australia and to whom. This includes our investigations into the availability and use of services in regional, rural and remote areas. We will also examine issues affecting industry services and performance, what’s required for the transition to digital television, and industry’s compliance with and understanding of existing regulatory and legislative requirements.

On the demand side, we are looking again at our approach to telecommunications services in recognition of the importance of market demand and response. In other words, it is what consumers do with new services, not simply the availability of new types of services, that significantly shapes the way these markets develop and the ways new communications technologies contribute to our lives. We are therefore particularly interested in consumer behaviour, preferences and trends.

The transition to digital television is an enormous endeavour that requires research not only into the supply-side of the equation, as I just mentioned, but also into the demand-side. The transition must be underpinned by reliable and comprehensive information about the attitudes, intentions and awareness of consumers about new equipment needs, new services and of course about the timeline for switch-off of analogue transmissions. ACMA began

monitoring early developments in the adoption of digital television last year. Our research on *Digital Media in Australian Homes* was published in November 2005 (and I understand was also presented at this Forum). We are currently doing a 2006 update of this research; and, more generally, we intend to incorporate more longitudinal studies into our research methodology.

This year ACMA is also busy in the area of audience and media research. Having announced a review of the Children's Television Standards last December, we have been establishing the evidence base to enable us to revisit this longstanding and sensitive area of regulation with solid information about trends in children's television viewing, and program preferences and appreciation of the special programs made for school age and pre-schoolers under the Standards. We have commissioned an academic consultant to review the research literature about television advertising directed to children, and have also updated our understanding of overseas developments in the regulation of children's television.

As you can appreciate, the combined breadth and depth of all this activity requires that we augment our in-house research with a considerable amount of commissioned research. In keeping with our new Research Framework's emphasis on collaboration, commissioned research increases our contact with the research community – from academic and social researchers, to market research consultants and other external experts.

I want now to give you a snapshot of several of the more important, interesting and perhaps innovative research and reporting projects we've got underway.

Firstly, our review of regional services. One of our major areas of research is to review the availability, adequacy and use of telecommunications infrastructure and services in regional, rural and remote Australia, including in remote Indigenous communities. Drawing on our information on availability, quality of service, performance, maintenance and reliability of fixed telephony services, mobile service coverage, and access to the internet, ACMA's research addresses inaccessibility to communications technology for geographical reasons – one possible cause of a potential 'digital divide'.

This research will also feed into the review by the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee of regional, rural and remote services (2008), which, when determining adequacy, will consider what types of telecommunications services are 'significant' to people in regional, rural and remote areas, and why. In response to the needs of the Committee, ACMA has ensured that its research program examines both supply- and demand-side issues.

ACMA's research incorporates a dedicated focus on remote Indigenous communities, populated by some of the most disadvantaged users of communications services. ACMA's research facilitates performance and availability monitoring, and the implementation of the Payphone Policy Review recommendations in Remote Indigenous Communities. This research supports our input into program delivery to these communities through our ongoing contribution to the design and implementation of programs by the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts for the provision of culturally appropriate products and services.

Let me move on to our study of media and society. Many of you may have seen ACMA's recent request for tenders for a major piece of community research titled *Media and Society*. Some of you might be indeed be finalising your tender submissions, as I understand there has been considerable interest in this study from both academic and commercial researchers.

The origins of the study are worth noting – with ACMA being allocated \$200,000 in the May budget to undertake a 'research project on the long-term psychological effect of the media on children, families and society' and asked to report by July 2007. The terms of the grant and the sum involved attests to the abiding interest in the way mainstream electronic media has become such an integral part of our lives and the questions this raises about possible impacts on children and young people in their formative years. Most children's media experience goes far beyond television these days, with the internet and mobile devices broadening their media experience and terms such as the multimedia and multi-tasking being used to characterise the new Generation M. So it's a very exciting time to undertake this research and ACMA has decided to significantly augment from its own funding the original \$200,000 because we sense it will be a significant piece of primary research.

The focus of this study is the psycho-social context of electronic media consumption in Australian family homes. Researchers amongst you will recognise the challenge in completing a study on the 'longitudinal effects' of the media in less than 12 months. The ACMA study will seek to forge a long-term perspective by comparing the 2007 findings on media impacts on behaviour and attitudes with the 1995 joint study by the Australian Broadcasting Authority and the Office of Film and Literature Classification: *Families and Electronic Entertainment*.

The literature review piece within this study will summarise the current state of play of academic research and public policy positions on the effects of media on children, families and society, to give a wider context to the national survey research.

The Media and Society research project will contribute to the information base underlying a number of ACMA's regulatory functions. I'm sure it will place ACMA in an authoritative position on an issue of continuing public interest and concern. Importantly, it will also contribute to the research base for the review of the Children's Television Standards (CTS review) that I mentioned earlier.

My penultimate example for you is our Communications Review. In addition to research and data-sourcing initiatives, we are broadening the coverage of some of our reports. To this end, our *Telecommunications Performance Report* is being replaced by a new annual publication, the *Communications Review*, which expands considerably upon its predecessor.

Reflecting the impact of digital convergence on services and industry structures, as well as the greater range of our responsibilities as a converged regulator, the new Review spans the broad communications environment within which ACMA operates – the telecommunications, broadcasting, radiocommunications and online sectors. The Review, which brings together our work over the whole year, investigates the performance of the communications industry and provides high-level analysis of trends and issues. It also meets a number of statutory reporting requirements (including section 105 of the *Telecommunications Act 1997*).

We will launch our first *Communications Review* in November, at our Annual Conference. And if you'll excuse a short advertising break – what's good for the goose is good for the gander – the conference will be held on 23 and 24 November at the Hyatt Hotel in Canberra. This year's theme is 'ICE': Information, Communications, Entertainment.

The program explores the issues confronting our convergent communications environment and it includes sessions on Digital Privacy, Media Literacy, the Digital Future, the

Converged Business Model, Challenges for Regulatory Philosophies and Models, and the Home Entertainment Hub.

We have some terrific speakers lined up, and you'll get to meet experts from government, industry, special interest and advocacy groups. It promises to be an exciting, informative and entertaining event.

We've put some postcards here at the registration desk which will tell you where to go for more information about the conference – or you can jot down our website address and pay a visit. It's: www.acma.gov.au Easy! And I've saved the most important thing for last: if you register before 31 October, you get a substantial discount for doing so. It would be great to see you there.

And finally an example of research we are scoping for future work: media literacy. As I mentioned, media literacy will be one of the main thematic streams in our conference because we feel it is an area deserving of research attention by ACMA. It has ramifications for the deployment, take-up and exploitation of new communications and media services, and for the potential implications of 'digital divides'.

Unlike our UK counterpart Ofcom, ACMA has an *inferred* legislative obligation in relation to media literacy. Media literacy and consumer understandings link to a number of important ACMA responsibilities – namely, access and accessibility, media content regulation and consumer education across both telecommunications and media functions – and to a number of our programs, such as the Do Not Call Register and Cybersmart Detectives.

Ofcom has reached a definition of media literacy, developed, as 'the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts', and has recently undertaken a media literacy audit for the UK. With some very interesting if not altogether surprising results, the communications regulator will use these research outcomes to inform and refine its strategies and programs in meeting the current and future media literacy needs of society.

I would like to think that a study which gave us insights into media literacy levels in Australia would be of similar utility for ACMA.

I want to close by considering some of the constraints and challenges facing us – and by 'us' I mean both ACMA specifically and, more generally, everyone engaged in research and policy work in this field, for this very Forum is testament to the fact that we at ACMA are not alone in facing these challenges. So, I want to float some ideas as to where we go from here: some 'forward bearings', so to speak.

Let me simplify for a moment: it is the task of research to understand how our world has changed and is changing, and, where possible, to understand what are the implications for the future. It is widely accepted that research can translate into significant practical benefits, nationally as well as internationally: increased productivity and economic growth; greater social inclusiveness and cohesion; environmental solutions. At the broadest level, the conclusions and 'understandings' researchers come to, after months or years of focussing on an issue or problem, can help us manage change better. And in this movement from 'wanting to find out' to 'actually understanding' and finally to 'putting our understanding into action',

we come to appreciate the critical nexus between research, policy and regulation. This is the nexus that should be bringing us together today.

But this centripetal force, if you will, is up against a rival centrifugal force. New developments in communications technology, the very pace of change itself – and the ability (or otherwise) of participants to absorb, process and respond – as well as the effects these developments are having on industry and consumers, will eventually pull apart the assumptions and frameworks that held us all together and kept ‘our world’ (the ‘Old World’) coherent for so long – although each assumption, and the several frameworks, will in due course have different ‘tipping points’.

Being dynamic, flexible, proactive, and as far as humanly possible, prescient but not prescriptive – this is the challenge for ACMA, and perhaps for us all, if we are to keep abreast of the newly emerging technologies, markets, applications, and services. This means a wider scope of activity, a broader range of inquiry, a quicker response to assessing the implications for regulation. It also means, for ACMA, a carefully considered and strategic deployment of our own resources and abilities and a greater engagement with yours.

Our role as regulator gives us a unique mandate and particular expertise. We’re better positioned than most to know what’s feasible, what’s practicable. We need to have a ‘balanced view’: indeed it is our statutory obligation to balance consumer protection with industry efficiency.

You have a wealth of knowledge, specialist expertise and intimate subject-matter awareness.

We have often worked together in the past, but we need to do so even more. In today’s environment, the task of research is immense: it has never been more important; arguably it has never been more difficult. To understand the ‘new world’ and its implications, we need to be more than isolated ships floating on a vast sea. By sharing information and knowledge; cooperating and collaborating on research; engaging in debate and discussion – our understanding collectively will grow, and our capacity to make the right decisions, to act so as to balance the interests of industry innovation and consumer protection, can only improve.

The name of the game, as far as I can see, is collaboration.

Let me leave you with this question. Can we – all of us in this room – do more to cooperate and collaborate in our research, to share ideas and information, to ‘cross-pollinate’ and oxygenate that ‘hybrid vigour’!? And if your answer is ‘Yes’, then please talk to us. ACMA wants to hear from you.

I spoke a moment ago about a greater engagement with your research resources and abilities. Can we, at least, ‘portalise’ our collective research and insights?

It now gives me great pleasure to ‘launch’ this Forum and ‘bless’ all those who sail in her. It would also follow that I wish you safe seas and fair winds.