



goodbye Allan, hello Graeme

Professor Allan Fels left the ACCC as chairman on 30 June 2003 after leading the organisation from its inception.

Here are some reflections on his tenure as chairman.

‘Allan Fels; one of Australia’s great public servants, probably the most visible that Australia has had. A politician once said that he’d do a deal with the devil to get the kind of media profile that Allan Fels had but he’d better not do a deal with the devil because Allan Fels would call it a collusive agreement.

One of the most active people I have ever seen explaining the new taxation system. The goods and services tax affected the pricing of an estimated two billion individual items. You were given the job of policing the price exploitation which turned out to be minimal. I think you brought one case and the reason you brought only one case is the whole of Australian industry was petrified that if they didn’t do the right thing in relation to price changes, then you would be there as an active enforcement agent. And more than that, your educational activities in explaining price changes, the way in which it should operate, was second to none. It was a magnificent job.’

[Peter Costello](#)

‘He is the man who forced the Olympics minister Michael Knight to apologise—16 times in 40 minutes. He cost the building materials companies Pioneer, Boral and CSR \$21 million in fines for price fixing. He stopped Telstra from taking over OzEmail; he prevented Cable and Wireless Optus buying AAPT and he declared Telstra’s local-call network open to competitors. He has forced cigarette and oil companies to sell parts of their business to rivals. He even dared to take on the Maritime Union of Australia during the waterfront dispute, threatening the union with prosecution for secondary boycotts. He is Allan Fels, chairman of the ACCC and Australia’s most powerful regulator.’

[Business Review Weekly](#)

‘We think the ACCC and Allan Fels are probably the best friends that consumers have. He’s become something of a Robin Hood for Australia.’

Louise Sylvan

‘I reluctantly wish him well; he’s a good sparring partner. I’m going to buy the retirement home that he goes to so that I can treat him the same way he has treated me.’

Gerry Harvey

‘The highlights of my tenure here have been getting exciting results. I was really pleased with the big cases; when we broke the cartels, Mayne Nickless/TNT, building codes, vitamins, power transformers, some of the consumer protection cases including life assurance and the Aborigines and quite a few others. They were fantastic experiences with great results.

I was really pleased that we got the merger law changed in 1993 from dominance to substantial lessening of competition—that’s something that will have an abiding effect on the Australian economy and competition.

Personally I was always deeply involved in the question of whether there should be parallel imports of compact discs and I was unbelievably pleased when that went through the Senate by one vote at 2am on a Sunday morning. I am pleased with the other parallel import cases although I’d like books to go further.

More generally making the Commission a very effective enforcer of the Trade Practices Act and quite an effective regulator of public utilities.

Allan Fels

‘I don’t regard myself as a hero but as someone very determined to do the right thing.’

Allan Fels

Allan Fels leaves and Graeme Samuel takes over as the chairman for five years from 1 August 2003. The Treasurer has written to the states and territories seeking their support for the appointment of Louise Sylvan as deputy chair.

Louise Sylvan is currently chief executive of the Australian Consumers Association and has served for six years on the Prime Minister’s Economic Planning Advisory Council.