

Cellphone complaints rise in Australia

Complaints about mobile phones to Australia's telecoms watchdog jumped 9% in a year, accounting for two-thirds of all gripes received due to growing smartphone use, a study said on Monday.

Telecommunications industry ombudsman Simon Cohen said there were 122,834 mobile phone complaints for the year to June 30 - 9% more than last year -- despite overall grievances dropping by two percent.

Two out of three complaints related to mobile phones, reflecting what Cohen said was the "rising use of smartphones".

Some 89% of Australians owned a mobile phone in 2011 -- rising to 97-98% in the 18-44 age bracket -- with the market dominated by Internet-enabled handsets sold by Apple and Samsung.

Only Japan and South Korea have a greater level of 3G handset penetration, according to the government's Australian Communications and Media Authority.

Sketchy coverage, over-charging and other bill disputes were the most common complaints, although those relating to Internet usage charges rocketed by 150%.

Cohen said the number of complaints over credit blacklisting due to unresolved debts had also increased, a trend which he described as "concerning".

"Credit listings can have a significant impact on people, affecting applications for credit, including housing and personal loans," the ombudsman said.

He called for an improved system of notifying consumers when they are approaching a data or call limit, which will be required under a new telecommunications consumer protection code that comes into effect from 2013.

"Complaints about unexpectedly high bills and unnecessary financial over-commitment point to the urgent need for strong management rules, including those that are included in the new code," Cohen said.

Source: *AFP* via I-Net Bridge