



Summary
Report 2007
English



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*Secretary for Financial Policy,
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2007 saw a great number of different conflicts that affected numerous consumers and users: the shutdown of an airline company in December 2006, the power cut in Barcelona at the end of July, and different product alerts with cases of toys with a major market penetration. These events generated an increase in the volume of consumers attended to, and there was also an increase of the number of complaints managed and products withdrawn from the market.

It was also a year in which, for the first time ever, the Catalan Agency of Consumer Affairs (ACC) implemented groundbreaking inspection campaigns throughout the State, such as the ones conducted in the air transport sector and credit consolidation companies.

The year 2007 was the first in which the ACC has been a member of the Department of Economy and Finances. In this new stage, it has worked to bring consumer affairs policies in Catalonia to the forefront and to place the ACC at the centre of the defence and guarantee of consumers' rights, and to make this a unifying element between the business world and consumers.



Jordi Anguera Camós
*Director of the Catalan Agency
of Consumer Affairs*

The Report for 2007 that we are presenting is a summary of the actions by the Catalan Agency of Consumer Affairs (ACC) in 2007. As is shown in these pages, all the actions that we carried out are underpinned by service to people: we work to guarantee their rights as consumers and, at the same time, we seek to be an efficacious instrument to obtain a disciplined market in which free competition is guaranteed.

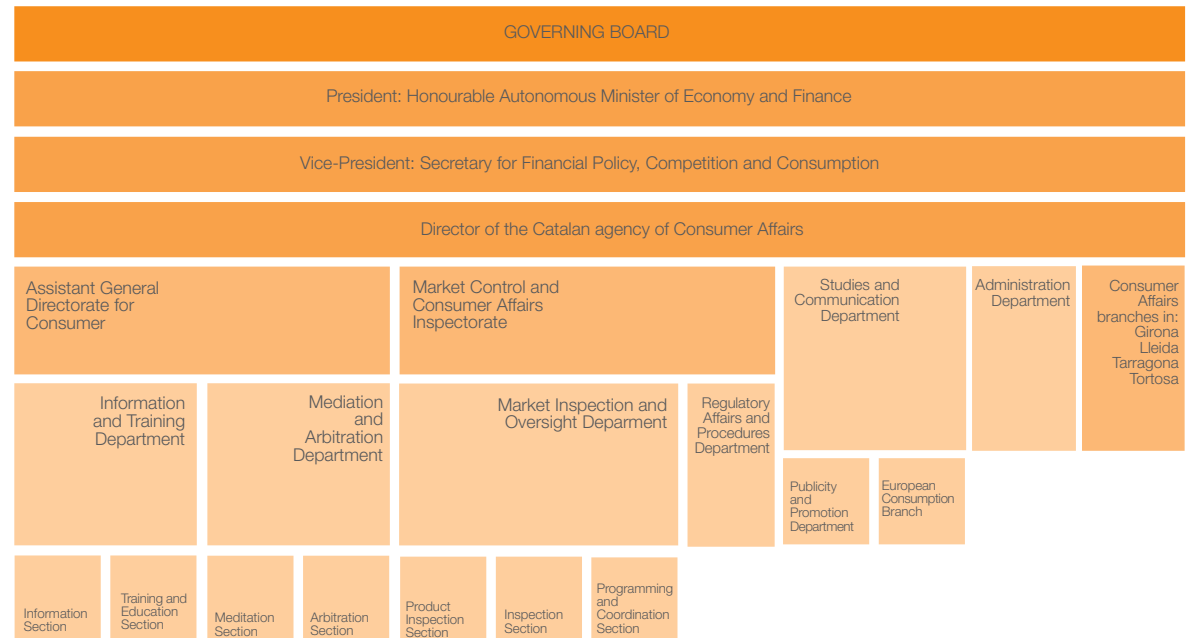
It has been a complex year, in which the ACC had to respond to unexpected situations, and did so with a highly professional and rigorous approach. The results obtained enable us to continue to work with drive to overcome future challenges. One important landmark I would like to highlight is next year's Bill for the Consumer Code of Catalonia, which will constitute a veritable step forward in the legislative framework of our country to guarantee consumer rights.



1. Structure and budget

In 2007 the ACC managed total expenses of 16,563,544.10 €, with a work force of 188

Its organic structure is as follows:



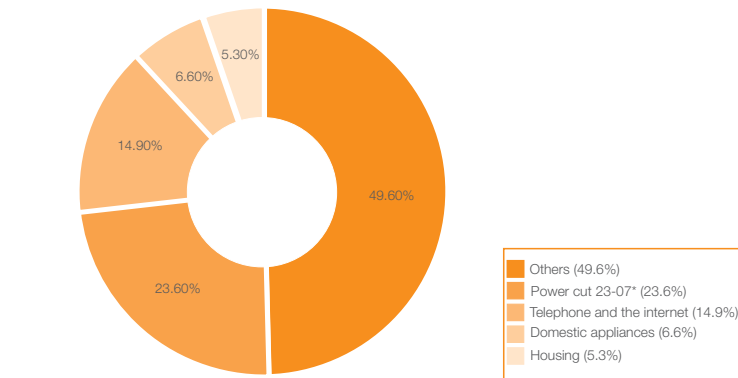
1. Structure and budget

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2.1 Telephone advice

2.1.1 The "Telèfon d'atenció ciutadana" hotline (012)

The number of consumer affairs-related queries was 117,646. Of these, 35,816 were calls seeking information on addresses and the powers of consumer affairs-related public bodies and entities. The remainder, 81,830, were requests for information on the following matters:



(*) Note: Power cut 23-07. On July 23, in the Barcelona area, there was a major power-cut which affected a great number of users and left many areas without electricity for a long time.

2.2. Information to consumers via the ACC's website

A new web structured to respond to the three main groups related with the ACC was presented on April 23, 2007: the consumers, consumer organisations and companies. The ACC web (www.consum.cat) provides updated information on consumers' rights and obligations.

The most important novelty, and one of the most visited pages in 2007 was the on line claim/complaint form, which allows consumers to lodge claims/complaints from their home. This process generates an incoming registration number, which affords this electronic form the same validity as a document submitted personally at any of the branches of the Administration.

STATISTICS ON THE CONSUM.CAT WEB FOR 2007

Total number of visits

15,942,484

Mean number of visits per day

43,678

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3.1. Training for professionals in the world of consumer affairs

The ACC engages in different training activities targeting professionals of the public consumer information offices and consumer associations in Catalonia.

Fourteen activities were organised in the course of 2007, with 303 contact hours and 437 participants.

3.2. Consumer and trader training

The ACC carries out a number of training activities aimed both at all types of consumers (consumers, neighbourhood associations, senior citizens, housewives' associations and other groups), and at traders, to educate them in general consumer affairs, the resolution of disputes and new laws and regulations.

3.2.1. Consumer training

A total of 73 talks were held, attended by 2,476 participants.

3.2.2. Trader training

A total of 26 informative sessions were held, attended by 477 participants.

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4. Education: The Catalan Consumer Affairs School

One of the main goals of the ACC is to train consumers in Catalonia, and with this in mind the Escola del Consum de Catalunya was opened in October 2003 to provide ongoing training for young Catalans.

4.1. The target public

The School targets pupils in primary and secondary education, higher education and training cycles, initial teacher training, special education and free time training.

4.2. Participation

Twenty-one types of workshop were staged in the 2006-2007 academic year, attended by 15,101 pupils. These workshops were organised at the head offices in Barcelona and in 12 mobile branches throughout Catalonia.

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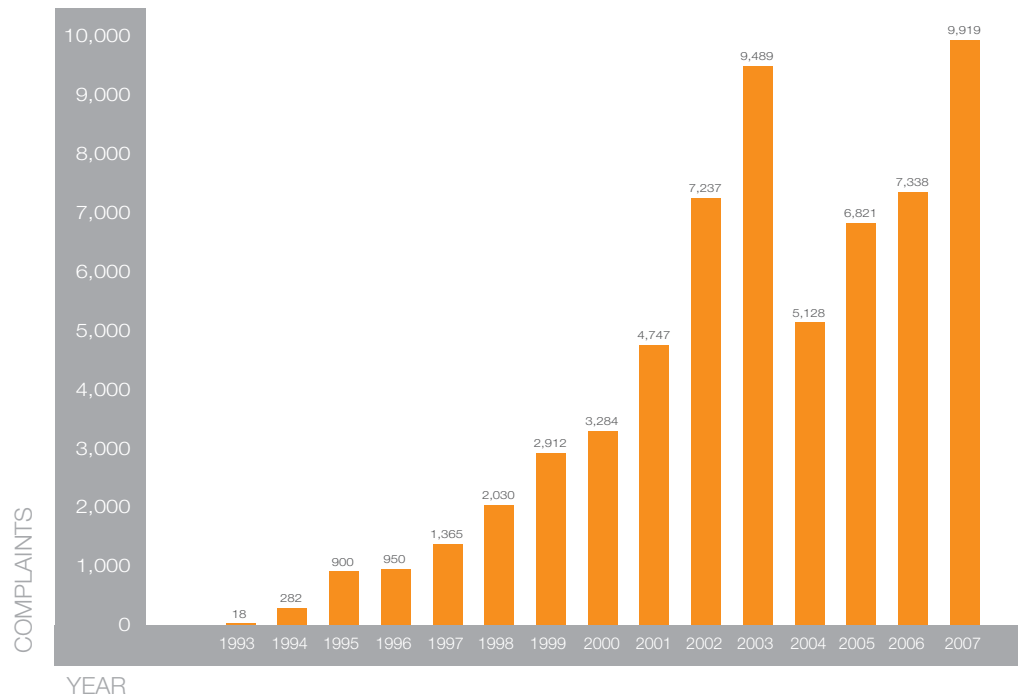
La Junta Arbitral de Consum de Catalunya (JACC) [Catalan Consumer Tribunal], attached to the ACC, manages complaints made by the public in Catalonia when they feel they have been unfairly dealt with when purchasing a product or receiving a service.

COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

A total of 9,919 complaints were lodged in 2007, a notable increase on 2006, when 7,338 were made.

Of these complaints, particular mention must be made of the transport sector (mostly derived from the Air Madrid case). Also noteworthy are those received following the power cut on July 23, in Barcelona.

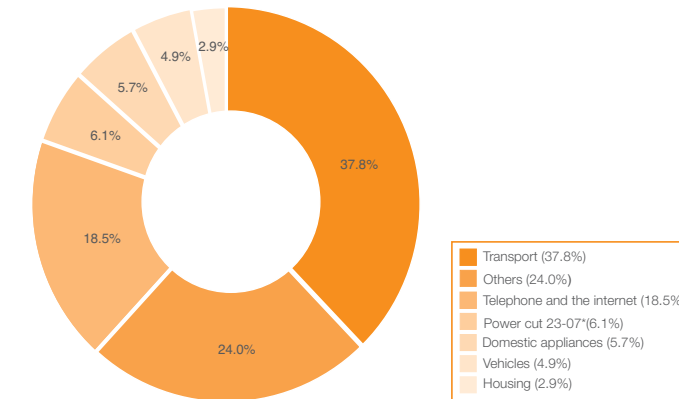
COMPLAINTS LODGED WITH THE JACC



5. Mediation and arbitration

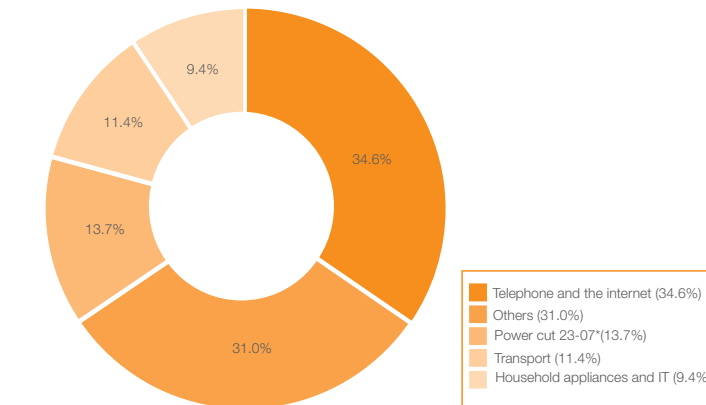
The breakdown of the cases handled in 2007 is as follows:

RECEIVED IN 2007 BY SECTORS



5.1 Mediation

A total of 2,603 complaints were solved by mediation, corresponding to the following sectors:

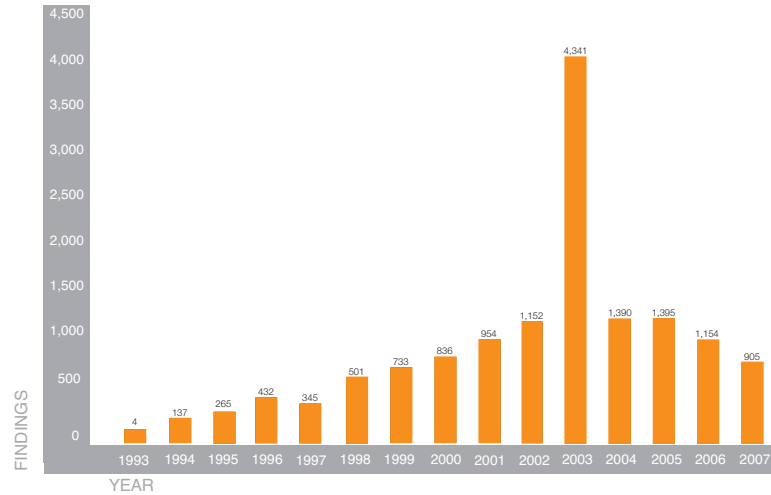


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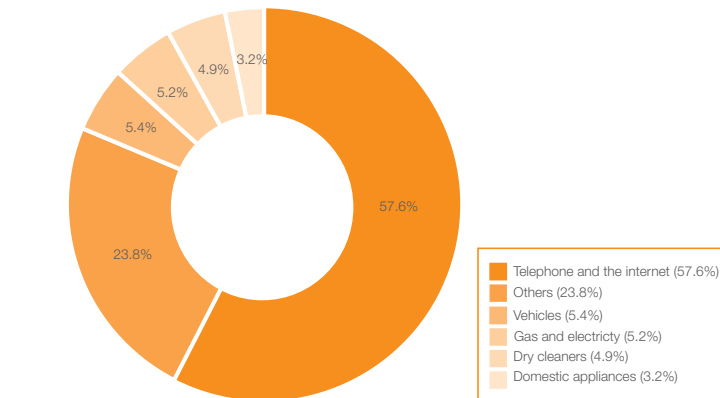
5.2. Arbitration (findings)

The JACC issued a total of 905 findings.

FINDINGS ISSUED



FINDINGS ISSUED IN 2007 DISTRIBUTED BY SECTORS



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6.1. Inspection Campaigns

The following inspection campaigns were carried out:

6.1.1. Food product control campaigns

- Olive oil labelling and composition control
- Food labelling control
- Functional foods

6.1.2. Non-food product control campaigns

- Non-food product information and safety
- Textiles control
- Water articles and toys control
- Christmas decorations
- Motorbike helmets
- Children's articles: baby pushchairs

6.1.3. Service control campaigns

- Artificial tanning establishments
- Housing purchases
- Debt consolidation
- Implementation of DTT

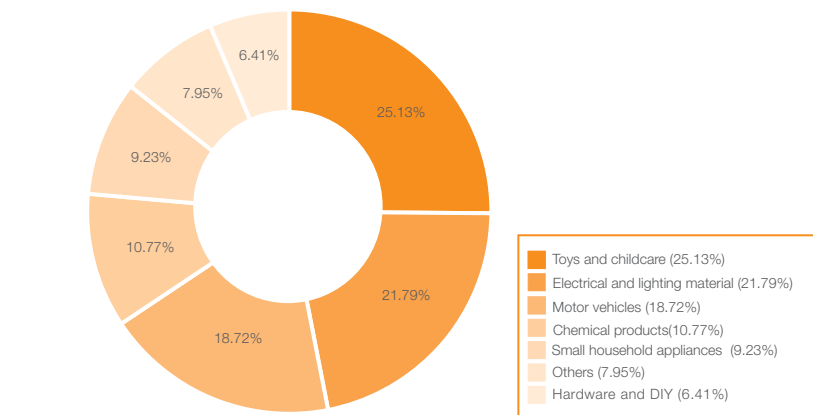
6.1.4. Sales techniques conditions

- Winter and summer sales
- Price-point retailers

6.2. Alert network

A total of 2,235 product alerts were managed.

ALERTS BY PRODUCT TYPE



6.3. Inspections

A total of 13,191 inspections were made.

BREAKDOWN BY CAUSE FOR ACTION

Cause	Barcelona	Girona	Lleida	Tarragona	Terres de l'Ebre	Total Catalonia	Percentage
Campaign	1,004	786	595	323	279	2,987	22.64
Complaint	2,756	333	170	151	7	3,417	25.90
Communication	1,610	431	44	113	3	2,201	16.69
Ex officio/D.O.Departmental Order	564	174	76	22	10	846	6.41
Alert network	1,828	894	527	425	66	3,740	28.35
Total	7,762	2,618	1,412	1,034	365	13,191	100.00

6.3.1. Market recalls and goods destroyed

Depending on the type of product type, the following units intervened:

Type of product	Destruction of goods	Recalled from
Toys	16,685	115,923
Paediatric	60,378	82,012
Electrical material	15,367	79,464
Chemical products	2,189	40,241
Cosmetics	3,135	22,302
Fishing products		11,280
Household	8,258	4,821
Diff. indus. prod	1,101	4,570
Oils and fats	28	4,344
Sundry food	4,433	2,274
Textile, leather and furs	109	1,587
Motor vehicles	6	289
Automobile accessories and spares	152	211
Hardware and DIY	7	125
Total	111,986	369,443



7.1. Cases handled

In 2007, a total of 1,016 penalty proceedings were brought by the Market Control and Consumer Affairs Inspectorate.

Cases brought grouped by type of product/service:

Type of product/service	Barcelona	Girona	Lleida	Tarragona	Terre de l'Ebre	Total
Food	61	16	19	2	1	99
Industrial products	164	47	21	13	5	250
Services	481	61	32	19	4	597
Supplies and telecommunications	56	10	4			70
Total	762	134	76	34	10	1,016

7.2. Type of offence punished

	Total	Percentage
N1 Product alteration, adulteration and fraud	33	2.65
N2 Non-compliance in documentation, information, books	448	35.93
N3 Non-compliance in commercial transactions	29	2.33
N4 Offence in inspection collaboration and control	113	9.06
N5 Advertising offences	108	8.66
N6 Offences in price matters	37	2.97
N7 Offences in product labelling and packaging	83	6.66
N8 Non-compliance in trading activity	91	7.30
N9 Product safety	39	3.13
NB Contract clauses	266	21.33
Total	1,247	100.00

7.3. Amount of penalties

Year of ruling	Barcelona	Girona	Lleida	Tarragona	Terres de l'Ebre	Total
2007	2,698,000€	128,850€	30,150€	52,500€	19,700€	2,929,200€

7.4. Administrative appeals

In the year 2007, a total of 320 appeals to a higher instance were lodged: 122 rejected, 10 upheld, 9 partially upheld and 10 regarded as unacceptable. There are 169 cases pending. Two appeals for reversals were made and 32 contentious-administrative appeals lodged.

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8.1. Published procedure

The following regulations were drawn up and published::

- Order ECF/215/2007, of May 30, establishing the procedure for the granting and withdrawal of the public mark of on-line trust, as well as for exercising functions designed to maintain the requirements justifying such an award (DOGC [Official Gazette of the Government of Catalonia] no. 4912).
- Order ECF/188/2007, of May 23, approving the electronic submittal of complaints, complaints and queries of the Catalan Agency of Consumer Affairs (DOGC [Official Gazette of the Autonomous Government of Catalonia] no. 4902).

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9.1. Aids for consumer and user organisations

Subsidies totalling 549,846.21€ were granted to a total of 15 entities for their activities, with a total expense budget of 1,358,728.70€.

9.2. Subsidies to district councils for consumer and user information and defence

In the framework of this line of aid, subsidies totalling 365,918.75 € were granted to 27 district councils for a number of lines of action, with a total expense budget of 962,797.38€.

9.3. Delegation of powers to district councils

Agreements on the delegation of powers in matters of consumer affairs have been signed with 19 district councils, for a total financing value of 759,520.00€.

The Vall d'Aran had powers transferred to it in 2005.

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10. Studies and opinion polls

10.1. Studies

The following studies were carried out:

- Study on consumer affairs and senior citizens. Do we squander the resources and habits of the elderly?
- Study of food labelling in trade.

And within the research framework of the School of Consumer affairs of Catalonia, the following study:

- Young people and money. Study of the management of the economic resources of young people in Catalonia.

10.2. Surveys

We participated in the Baròmetre del clima de confiança del sector de l'habitatge [Barometer of the climate of confidence in the housing sector].

A survey was conducted on the satisfaction of users who have lodged a complaint with the ACC.

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11. Communication and publicity

In 2007, the ACC was present in the mass media (printed press, radio and television) through adverts on the occasion of different events. This participation in television, radio and printed press had 218,241,886 impacts in 2007.

11.1. Presence at trade events

The Catalan Agency of Consumer Affairs actively participates in Catalonia's trade fairs to provide information directly to members of the public requesting it, either distributing its collection of informational literature on the defence of consumer and/or user rights, or by promoting itself with the distribution of merchandising.

The ACC took part in 13 trade fairs.

11.2. Press releases and conferences

Eleven press conferences were held and 53 press releases issued on a range of matters.

11.3 Publications

The following brochures were published or republished:

- Information for those buying a home
- Catalonia's Consumer Associations
- If you have the invoice, you have the guarantee
- Recommendations before starting a trip
- Escola del Consum de Catalunya [The Catalan Consumer Affairs School]
- Mediation and arbitration in consumer affairs
- Fair trade
- Be a responsible consumer: buy locally
- Senior citizens as consumers
- Videogames: be a responsible, thinking user
- Debt consolidation
- Catalan Agency of Consumer Affairs
- Fast credits
- Control of the market and consumers
- Recommendations to users affected by the power cut on 23 July, 2007.

It has also published, in collaboration with other organisations:

"Who sets the rules of the game? A guide to choosing and using videogames", in collaboration with the Institute of Education of Barcelona of the City Council of Barcelona

Guide to fish labelling.

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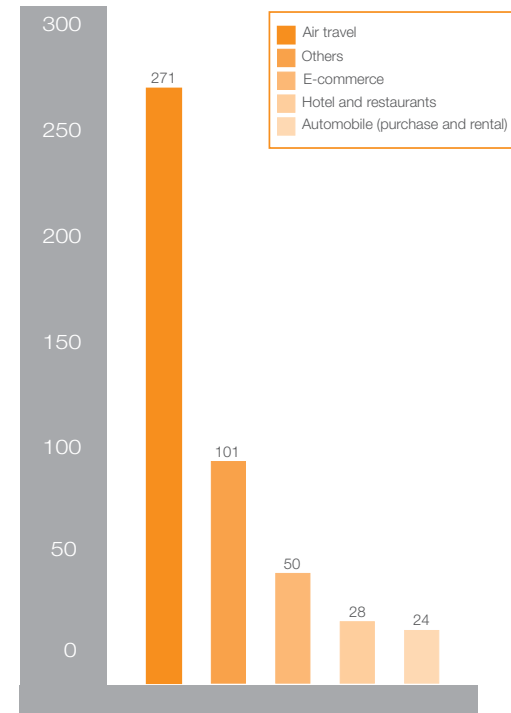
The ACC has been involved in 1,072 cross-border cases (474 complaints and 598 queries).

12.1. Queries by sector

Sector	Total
Air travel	353
E-commerce (the Internet)	66
Others	38
Tourism	24
Household appliances	22
Time sharing	19
Hotels and restaurants	15
Housing-rental	12
Car	11
Overland transport	11
Travel agencies	7
Services	7
Financial services	6
Furniture	4
Product safety	3
Total	598

12.2. Complaints

Breakdown of complaints by sectors:



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13. The Council of Consumers of Catalonia



The Council of Consumers of Catalonia is the organ of representation and consultation of consumer and user associations, it is the institution which represents the consumer and user associations before the Generalitat de Catalunya (Catalan Government) and other public administrations, entities and bodies.

The Council of Consumers of Catalonia has played a very active role in 2007. Major questions were dealt with, such as the power cut in Barcelona July in and the problems with rail transport. The logotype of the Council was also approved and the information available on the web was also improved.

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14. The Catalan Agency of Consumer Affairs month by month

January

Jordi Anguera Camós, new director of the ACC.

The JACC started up new arbitration hearings by videoconference in the Baix Camp.

February

The Autonomous Minister for Economy and Finance, Antoni Castells, opens up consensus-based consumer affairs policies.

The Autonomous Minister Castells convened the Governing Board of the ACC. This organ brings together associations of consumers and users, of municipalities, trade union and business organisations and the different Government departments with powers in areas related to the direct rendering of services to citizens.

The JACC started up arbitration hearings by videoconference in Osona.

March

The ACC issues recommendations to telephony users on the occasion of the approval of the law for improving the protection for consumers and users. The new regulation prohibits the rounding up of call times.

The ACC organised the third edition of the Responsible Consumption Party "Consume at a family pace". The Party addresses the management of the family budget, understood as a principle of good economy to avoid over-borrowing by families.

April

The ACC gives an award for the best school projects of the "Responsible Consumption and Quality of life" contest. More than 800 Catalan students from primary and secondary education, together with more than 160 teachers, participated in the second edition of the contest.

The ACC issued recommendations to consumers and users when hiring an added value service via the sending of an SMS from a mobile telephone.

May

The ACC presented the balance of its action in 2006. It solved 60% of complaints in 2006 by means of mediation or arbitration.

The ACC studied the habits of the the elderly to improve protection for them as consumers. It presented the AVVIIS (Assessment, vector, old age and socioeconomic impact in the context of sustainability) study, which comprises two phases and is scheduled to end in 2008.

June

The ACC undertook a specific inspection campaign to detect misleading advertising in the sale of housing in the face of a foreseeable increase in the aggressiveness in techniques for capturing clients.

The ACC initiated proceedings against 58 companies engaged in debt consolidation that it inspected in the last few months in Catalonia, on detecting very aggressive advertising campaigns.

July

The ACC immobilised almost 19,000 tubes of tooth paste.

Action by the ACC and the French Government to detect potentially unsafe beach articles.

The Government of Catalonia signed agreements with 22 new-starts that joined the Pact for the celiac and diabetic patient to improve food product labelling.

The ACC renewed its website <www.consum.cat> to cater to citizens' needs better. The web brings them closer to its services and fosters interaction with the Catalan society. Complaints can now be submitted on line for the first time ever.

The ACC issues recommendations for those affected by the power cut on July 23 in Barcelona.

August

The Government of Catalonia met consumer associations to report on the new mechanisms of response to those affected by the power cut.

The Government of Catalonia met representatives of companies and shops to improve the procedure for submitting complaints for the damage caused by the power cut.

The ACC attended to more than 9,400 queries of the people affected by the power cut.

The ACC advised consumers that believe they have an article affected by the voluntary withdrawal of toys by the MATTEL company to contact the company to confirm it and request the refund of the amount of the toy or a free replacement.

September

Warning by the ACC to users of motor vehicle parking lots. As of September 1, all car parks that operate by rotation are obliged to invoice by the minute.

14. The Catalan Agency of Consumer Affairs month by month

October

The Autonomous Minister of Economy and Finance, Antoni Castells, opened the working day “Consumer affair policies in Catalonia. Closer to people”, the first working day organised by the Government of Catalonia to strengthen relations with local governments in matters of consumer affairs. During the opening conference, Castells underlined the fact that “A good consumer affairs policy is an essential trait of any advanced society, which is why it is a core element in the Government’s political action”.

The ACC, teaching people to consume at a family pace in the Festa dels Súpers.

November

The ACC monitored the voluntary withdrawal of Giochi Preziosi toys in Spain.

Setem, the ACC and the ACCD published a guide to promote fair trade in public institutions.

The ACC embarked upon an awareness-raising campaign for good Christmas Shopping.

The ACC imposed penalties on airline companies for an overall amount of 736,700 €. Delays, luggage loss and flight cancellation are some of the reasons that give rise to most complaints.

December

The Autonomous Minister of Economy and Finance, Antoni Castells, chaired the first-ever Plenary Session of the Consumers’ Council of Catalonia at a meeting to analyse the major issues in consumer affairs arising in 2007, such as the summer power cut or the local railway transport crisis.

The ACC commissioned the Centre d’Ensenyament Superior de Nutrició i Dietètica (CESNID) to perform an extensive study on the level of enforcement of the recent community regulations pertaining to labelling on the most sold food products in Catalonia. The findings suggest that 90% of the nutritional complaints that appear on food labelling comply with the current regulations.

The Autonomous Minister Castells called for an improvement in the information given to consumers on labelling and the advertising of food in declarations during the official opening of the working day “New challenges in food product communication. Functional foods: advertising and consumer affairs”, organised by the ACC.

The ACC and the City Council of Barcelona proposed different workshops to help the family to choose the most suitable videogames. These workshops complement the republishing of the guide “Who sets the rules of the game? A guide to choosing and using videogames”.

The ACC fostered responsible consumption in the Festival de la Infància [Childhood Festival] of the Barcelona Trade fair with the stand “consume at a family pace”.

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